



## A Beginner's Guide to Collecting Cartridges

by Mark Androvich

Many new collectors don't know where to find games for their Atari 2600. At the height of the Atari 2600's popularity, games could be found everywhere. Today, it is a lot harder. Atari Corporation no longer manufactures the games, but still has a remaining inventory for sale via mail order. Some mail-order companies sell games—sometimes new, sometimes used. Most major toy stores no longer carry 2600 games, but every now and then you may come across a dusty game or two. Swap meets and thrift stores are often gold mines for used cartridge collectors. Check the classified ads in your local newspaper. And, of course, you can buy, sell, and trade with fellow 2600 Connection readers listed in the back of the newsletter.

How much should you pay for games? That depends on how much the game is worth to you, of course. When first released, many games sold for \$30 to \$40 each. But remember, that was about 10 years ago! I have seen games selling anywhere from 50 cents to \$10 each. Expect to pay more if the game is new and boxed. Used games are cheaper, but sometimes lack instruction manuals. My advice is to buy for yourself. I also collect comic books, and I often see kids buying several titles, hoping to sell them back for a profit. Usually, these kids get stuck with the comics which they don't even like and nobody wants to buy. The same can happen regarding videogames. Don't buy a lot of games hoping to make a profit unless you are certain that you can resell them. Look at the want ads to see what games people are looking for. If a certain game is on everybody's want list, chances are it is rare and you should "snap it up" if you come across it. If you want the game and you think the price is fair, then go for it! You might want to shop around a little at first. Nothing is quite as irritating as

paying a high price for a game, only to find it selling for a dollar the next day at a thrift shop.

Which games are collectible? Again, collect for yourself. Unlike coins or stamps, 2600 games are collectibles that you can use and enjoy. Nobody frames their cartridges or puts them in a display case (well, maybe a few do).

If you come across a game you don't really like or won't play, then don't buy it. Unless you are collecting every game ever made, get the games which sound interesting to you. If the price is right, don't be afraid to try an unfamiliar game. If the game turns out to be a "dud," you can always resell it. There are a lot of duds out there, but what may be a lousy game to the general public might turn out to be your favorite. If you are beginner collector, see the 2600 Hall of Fame list in issue #10 for some ideas for a good starting point.

There are some other things to look out for. It is very difficult to determine if a game is defective. You really can't tell until you take it home and try it. However, there are a few things you can do to minimize your chances of buying a defective cartridge. Shake the cartridge lightly. Does it rattle? I have a few carts that work even though they rattle, but you might not want to risk it. Look at the end of the cartridge which you will be inserting into the machine. Is it dirty or dusty? Dust, sand, dirt, and other grime may cause the cartridge not to work. Also, you can't judge a cartridge by its cover. Just because the label is pristine, this doesn't guarantee that the game is. A torn or missing label on a cartridge has no effect on whether the game itself works or not.

Sometimes, the game cartridges often lack instruction manuals. Even if the game comes in a box, check to see if the instructions are present. While many games

such as **Combat** and **Pac-Man** (both by Atari) can be easily understood and played without instructions, other games such as **Riddle of the Sphinx** (by Imagic) and **Crypts of Chaos** (by Fox) aren't as easily understood. Some people really enjoy the challenge of figuring out how to play a game without instructions. If you are not one of these people, try contacting fellow 2600 collectors. Many of them will swap photocopied instructions or sell them for a small price. Even if you end up figuring a game out, instructions often provide tips, hints, strategies, and game variations of which you may be unaware.

Another trap to look out for is games that require special controllers. **Indy 500**, **Star Raiders**, and **Track & Field** (all by Atari) came packaged with their own special controllers. Without the special controller, the game cannot be played properly. Generally, it's a good idea to be aware of which type of controller is required for the game you are buying, even though the vast majority of games in the 2600 library require the standard joystick. The box, instructions, and sometimes even the cartridge itself provides the information on which type of controller to use.

One last thing to remember is that collecting videogames is a relatively new hobby. Hobbies are for your own entertainment and enjoyment, so most importantly, have fun!



### In This Issue

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**Dear Editor:** Having been shown your excellent newsletter, my older brother has started to get back his interest in the 2600 after many years of not playing. He has been having frequent sessions lately with **Galaxian**, **Missile Command**, **Phoenix**, and **Air-Sea Battle** (we have three and four-hour long contests on this classic title). He is also playing some of the games he had never played before, like **Midnight Magic, Jr. Pac-Man**, and **Winter Games** (by Epyx). He is a fan of the C-64 version of **Winter Games** and was surprised at the high quality of the version for the 2600. When he's not playing games on the C-64, my brother comes around for 2600 sessions with me! Thank you for bringing back the good old days!

I think my brother was embarrassed to be seen playing a 2600, but once he read your newsletter, and realized other people were still interested in the machine and I was not alone, he then let his barriers down. No matter what the cocky Sega and Nintendo magazines of today tell us, as long as there are caring owners like 2600 Connection readers, old machines will never die.

The game I like most in my collection is **Indy 500** (by Atari). Is this the only cartridge that uses the driving controllers, and is **Star Raiders** (by Atari) the only game that uses the video touch pad?

—Damon Shaw  
32 Port Soderick Ave.  
Salford, Lancashire  
M5 4HW, England

*I'm glad that the Atari 2600 has brought you many hours of enjoyment. It has also brought you and your brother together—ah, such a wonderful thing!*

*Yes, you are correct. No other games utilize those special controllers that came packaged with the game. It's fun to experiment and try the controllers with various games.*

Questions? Comments? Suggestions?  
Our address is: The 2600 Connection,  
P.O. Box 3993, Westport, MA 02790

**Dear Editor:** [In response to "PVV Disappears," Issue 13] I'm not out of business, nor have I disappeared! There you go, jumping to conclusions again. I was so angry, I wasn't even going to answer you, but I decided I would anyway.

About the phone numbers, it was taking too much time and costing too much to call people back all the time. I decided to spend the effort toward getting all outstanding back orders taken care of instead. Many companies do not list a phone number for business. Look through any magazine. Play It Again did not list a phone number for years. At least I have a street address, and not a P.O. Box! Pleasant Valley Video is in it for the long haul. All overdue orders will be filled.

All new orders on in-stock items are now filled within 48 hours and approximately 95 percent of the items listed in the catalog are in stock at all times. If any customer still has doubts about my service, I urge them to order C.O.D. This way, they do not pay until the merchandise is delivered to their door. And, if they say they read about it in *The 2600 Connection*, I will even waive the usual \$4 C.O.D. fee—so it costs them nothing extra.

I have never cheated anyone intentionally. If that were the case, I would be long gone, and there would be hundreds, maybe thousands, of complaints. I'll bet you don't even have a dozen! (And those will all be taken care of.) Don't forget, for every complaint, there are many, many more satisfied customers. The happy ones don't gripe—they have nothing to complain about so you rarely hear from them.

—Jim Redd  
Pleasant Valley Video  
8141 Pleasant Valley Rd.  
Camden, OH 45311

*Glad to see you're still around, Jim. I'm sending you the list of readers who have not yet received their orders and photocopies of their complaint letters. I hope that you will take care of these people and fill their orders or offer a refund.*

*Whether or not you choose to have a phone number for your business is your choice. I would have been happy to mention that you are removing it if you would have let me know the reason.*

*Many of us are aware that PVV has one of the best inventories of games. What we all want is good, reliable service. The C.O.D. waiver is a generous idea, Jim. Let's put the past behind us and get back to business. It looks like we're off to a good start for 1993.*

**Dear Editor:** I am the proud owner of an Atari 2800, a four-port 2600 that was sold by Sears as the Video Arcade II. The 2800 has four joystick ports. Was there ever a game that utilized all four?

—Tim R. Harper  
1017 Red Oak St.  
Azle, TX 76020

*The 2800 is an interesting model, although I have never actually seen one. To my knowledge, there are no games that utilize the four joystick ports on the 2800/Video Arcade II. Keep that machine, for it may be a valuable collector's item one of these days.*

## Other Stuff...

- "A Look to the Past: The Atari 5200" in issue 13 stated that the 5200 games Atari produced were identical to the 400/800 versions. According to Earl Halliwell, this is untrue. Atari's 5200 versions of *Dig Dug*, *Qix*, *Centipede*, and *Space Invaders* were programmed from scratch, and all of them were superior to their computer counterparts. Also, the 5200 *Pac-Man* had the intermissions restored. Jeff Cooper also wrote in to mention these notable improvements. He also mentioned that Atari's *Space Dungeon* is a not-to-be-missed classic that is available for no other system except the 5200.

- Russ Perry Jr. enjoyed last issue's paddle controller articles, but mentioned that it might be just as easy and efficient to solder new potentiometers into the old Atari paddle casings rather than building them from scratch.

- Two subscribers have begun working on price guides for 2600 games. They are working on two similar independent projects; perhaps they can merge their ideas. For more info, contact: Jeff Cooper, 6407 S. 28th West Pl., Tulsa, OK 74132 and Jeff Scott, 2670 Lehman Rd., Apt. D-805, Cincinnati, OH 45204. Best of luck, guys!

## A Look at the Past


### The Atari 7800

by Mark Androvich

After the lack of success with the 5200 Supersystem, Atari's next attempt at a videogame system came in 1984 when the Atari 7800 was introduced at the annual Consumer Electronics Show in June of that year. The 7800 seemed to be designed to correct the flaws of the 5200. First, it was compatible with the Atari 2600 without an adaptor. Second, the 7800 was packaged with new-style joysticks which were much better received than the 5200's. Finally, the games created for the 7800 were graphically superior to the 8-bit Atari home computer games.

Atari was then bought by Jack Tramiel and a number of changes took place within the corporation. The 7800 was not seen again until 1986. By this time, the third-party game companies who flooded the Atari 2600 market with games had been out of business for years. Now, Atari was faced with a new competitor in the market—Nintendo. While Nintendo released the very latest arcade hits and original games, the 7800's library consisted mostly of games, such as *Centipede*, *Pac-Man*, *Joust*, and others that everyone had seen before. Versions of popular computer games, such as *One-on-One* and *Karateka*, were made for the 7800. But, even the arcade translations which were unique to the 7800—*Xevious*, *Hat Trick*, and *Robotron*—were older games which had lost much of their popularity.

Many videogame players, well aware of the fate of the 5200, took a wait-and-see attitude toward the Atari 7800. Atari finally publicized the system, and three third-party companies—Activision, Absolute Entertainment, and Froggo Games—released some 7800 games, but it was too little and too late. Nintendo was in control of the videogame market.

Atari continued to release new games for the 7800 up until Christmas of 1991, when they gave up and officially discontinued the 7800 game system. 

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## Cartridge List Part 13: Data Age

DA1001 Encounter At L-5  
DA1002 Warlock  
DA1003 Sssnake  
DA1004 Airlock  
DA1005 Bugs  
116006 Journey Escape  
116007 Bermuda Triangle  
116008 Frankenstein's Monster

Data Age, another third party game manufacturer, only released eight games for the 2600. The first five releases sport primitive graphics and are rather bland.

The last two releases are definite improvements over the first five games. **Bermuda Triangle** is an underwater horizontal shoot 'em up that is very colorful and challenging. The player controls a mini-sub and must collect artifacts while shooting enemies. This game reminds me of **Seaquest** (by Activision) in some ways. **Frankenstein's Monster** is a favorite among many 2600 fans. The player must build a barrier around the monster before it comes to life. Ghosts, bats, and spiders must be avoided while exploring the castle. There are hints of gameplay that are similar to **Pitfall** (by Activision) in this excellent adventure game.

**Journey Escape** is another exception; it's based on the popular rock band of the 1980s, and isn't bad at all. In fact, a coin-op version based on the 2600 game was created. It is more common to hear of a 2600 game based on the coin-op version, but this was a reverse situation. Unfortunately, Journey's management sued Data Age. The game failed in earning the expected profits, and Data Age could not pay the royalties to the band. The company could not survive and filed Chapter 11 Bankruptcy in 1983.

Since the Data Age games are quite common, it is fairly easy to acquire all eight of the games for your collection. If you want to skip the duds, then forget about the first five. I highly recommend the last three Data Age games. 

—List by Russ Perry Jr. —story by Tim Duarte


## News & Notes

The National Association of Electronic Gaming Enthusiasts has been formed. Members will receive two bi-monthly newsletters, *NAEGE Journal* and *Gaming Forum*. Other information, such as membership rosters, fanzine indexes, collector's lists, and more, will also be available to members. A one-year charter membership is \$10. Send payment to: NAEGE Fan Club, P.O. Box 240523, Honolulu, HI 96824. Make checks payable to: Edward Karpp.

*Atari Classics* is a magazine devoted to the Atari 8-bit computer. A bi-monthly subscription is \$25. The mag features various columns, tips, articles, classifieds, and more. It's a 8-bit enthusiast's dream come true. Write: Ben Poehland, Managing Editor, Atari Classics, 179 Sproul Rd., Rt. 352, Frazer, PA 19355-1958

*The Videogame Trader* is an all-classified ad publication for owners of all videogame systems. Issues are published bi-weekly, on the first and third Friday of each month via First Class mail. The Videogame Trader will serve as a videogame enthusiast's source for obtaining or selling games, hardware, and other gaming-related items. Anyone interested can receive a free issue and 50-word ad by sending \$1 to The Videogame Trader, P.O. Box N664, Westport, MA 02790. This special offer is only for a limited time.

The Letters column in issue 9 mentioned hooking up the Atari 2600 to a color monitor. Classic game enthusiast Sean Kelly has added separate audio and video outputs to his Colecovision, and is considering starting similar projects on the Intellivision and Atari 2600. For more info, write to: Sean Kelly, 5789 N. Milwaukee, Chicago, IL 60646

"The Cartridge List: Part One: Titles made by Atari" in issue 2 has been updated. Anyone can receive an update sheet by sending a self-addressed, stamped envelope to: 2600 Connection, P.O. Box 3993, Westport, MA 02790-0298. 

# A Guided Tour of the Starpath Supercharger Games

by Russ Perry Jr.

*The key to game ratings:*

\* = *poor; pass on this one*

\*\* = *borderline good*

\*\*\* = *decent*

\*\*\*\* = *very good*

\*\*\*\*\* = *excellent*

## Phasor Patrol [\*\*\*]

The game included with the Supercharger, this is a basic sector-hopping type of combat space game similar to **Star Raiders** (by Atari). As such, the game is familiar, but decent. The easy version is easy. To score a higher rank, keep in mind your energy conservation. Don't use shields unless you are in combat, and try to search the map in a circular path to avoid long jumps. This cassette includes previews of other games, an interesting concept used on many of the Starpath tapes.

## Communist Mutants From Space [\*\*\*]

In this **Galaxian** (by Atari) -type game, there are nine levels of difficulty, two defensive (shield and time warp), and two offensive (guided fire and penetrating fire) options that increase or decrease difficulty. Level one, with all options, is a cakewalk. Level nine with none is suicide. Try to hit the mother creature as soon as possible, or hordes of Mutants keep coming. This is easy with guided, penetrating fire.

## Fireball [\*\*\*\*]

This **Breakout** (by Atari) variation is a favorite of mine. If daring enough, the player can have up to six fireballs bouncing around at the same time. The first thing to do is pump all six into play. Scores really soar, and screens disappear quickly. You can also catch up to two fireballs to aim. This is difficult with six fireballs, and also pretty unnecessary. There are five different types of playfields.

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## Suicide Mission [\*\*]

This clone of **Asteroids** (by Atari) has boring, vector-style graphics and the gameplay isn't very interesting. Practice maneuvering out of tight spots, or reaching for any of the better Starpath games.

## Escape from the Mindmaster [\*\*\*\*\*]

This was the first multi-load game, and a fine thinking game as well. Faced with five mazes, the player is set with the task of matching shaped pieces with their corresponding shaped holes, located in niches around the maze. Avoid an alien roaming about the maze, as well as lethal sliding forcefields. There are also tests of dexterity, reflexes, memory—the fifth is the basic lunar lander game.

As the game progresses, the pieces become more complex shapes, and the alien grows in tenacity. The sixth maze is simply an 8 x 8 matrix of rooms. The player must blindly search for an exit. Map this!

The fourth load—mazes are loaded in pairs—is a congratulating message for winners, where the Mindmaster declares you “quaint,” “amusing,” or “impressive.”

## Dragonstomper [\*\*\*\*\*]

Dragonstomper, the second multi-load game, is sort of a missing link between **Adventure** (by Atari) and newer Sega and Nintendo games such as *Phantasy Star*. In the first load, the player explores the Enchanted Countryside—stay a long time to build up all the strength, dexterity, and gold that you can. At some point, the player will gain a paper. This is the passage across the bridge to the Opressed Village, the second load. Do not fight the guard!

In the village, there is a magic shop, hospital, and trade shop, as well as three warriors the player can enlist for the quest. Buy as much as possible and head for the Dragon's Cube, the third load. Beware, the dragon is no piece of cake! Try going around it to the amulet instead of waiting until it has died.

## Killer Satellites [\*\*]

In this **Defender** (by Atari) -type game, fly your spaceship as the enemy rains down like in **Space Invaders** or **Missile Command** (both by Atari). This is way too slow and easy at lower levels, so you may want to start at level 10 or 20. Stay low and don't keep the fire button pressed—your guns can overheat. The ship can still move and fire for a short period of time as it disintegrates from a collision, interestingly enough.

## Rabbit Transit [\*\*\*\*]

A cute game consisting of three types of screens. The first is a jump-and-avoid contest, similar to **Frogger** (by Parker Brothers). The second is a jump-and-change-colors contest, similar to **Q\*Bert** (by Parker Brothers). The third is an intermission, and then the cycle repeats at a more difficult level.

Timing is important for the first screen—don't be afraid to jump backwards if needed. On the second screen, work the sides first and try to keep the “nasty man” throwing rocks down the middle, where the colors haven't been fixed yet, and work inward systematically.

## Frogger [\*\*\*\*]

A bit redundant after Rabbit Transit and Parker Brother's cartridge version of Frogger, this is nonetheless *the* version of a true classic. A lot of fun, and wonderful graphics and sound.

*continued on next page*

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HARDING, PA 18643**

## Tales of the 2600

by Russ Perry Jr.

### Party Mix [\*\*]

This game utilizes the paddle controllers and is for up to four players. There are five separate games on this multi-load tape. *Bop A Buggy* is a simple race game/obstacle course with an additional distraction of a "bopper" dropping bricks. *Tug of War* is incredibly simple, astoundingly torturous, and amazingly fun. The fastest button pressing side wins. *Wizard's Keep* allows the player to control the speed of rotation of a wizard's arm. Try to aim fireballs to hit various targets. In *Down on the Line*, the player has to catch cakes and pass them to the correctly colored belt opposite. *Handcar* utilizes the paddles to coordinate the up and down motion of a handcart lever to go faster—another race game.

### Sword of Saros [\*\*\*\*]

Explore seven mazes, avoid a wizard and several other creatures while collecting treasure and objects on a quest. Despite annoying movement in treasure rooms—the adventurer and guardian creature seem to take turns moving—this is an interesting game. A good memory is a big help at the unlit mazes.

### Survival Island [\*\*\*\*]

The final multi-load game, and the final game released by Starpath, for the Supercharger. The first load places the player in the ocean, swimming toward an island. Swim as fast as possible when sharks or sea creatures are in sight, and grab as much food and water as possible.

The second load is on the island. Search for survival items and the key to a secret temple. There are, of course, many hazards on the way. The final load is within the temple. Mapping comes in handy, but those transporters will make mapping a bit difficult.

### Sweat

This was planned to be a **Decathlon** (by Activision) -type game, and most likely another multi-load game. Some people claim that prototypes exist, but no proof exists.



Believe it or not, I was an Atari 2600 fan before I even owned one. I fell in love with videogames after playing *Breakout* at a restaurant, and a *Pong* unit my younger brother got one Christmas certainly helped me on the way to becoming a big Atari fan.

The 2600 eluded me for some time. I'd look longingly at the pictures in the Christmas catalogs, but Mom and Dad couldn't afford it. So I did the next best thing—I saved the pictures from the catalogs long after Christmas was over.

The following year's catalogs showed a new system called Intellivision, and it compared screen shots of Intellivision games to 2600 games. Although, at first, I had thought they were improved games for the 2600, it soon became clear that there was now competition for my desired 2600. Of course, I wanted the Intellivision too, but there was still something special about the 2600, even with its comparatively simplistic graphics. And the price difference! At least the 2600 might be attainable.

Another Christmas came and went, and no 2600. By this time, the stores had put up display models so I could at least play the games occasionally, and check out the new ones. I discovered that the Intellivision games were dazzling to the eye, but seemed lacking in some intangible way. They didn't play the way *Breakout* did, or the old *Pong*, and the way 2600 games did. Perhaps the Intellivision's pad controllers were too different to accept. Perhaps I just wasn't ready for the increasing complexity of gameplay yet. But it was clear that the Intellivision could not capture my attention the way the Atari 2600 could.

Then, a funny thing happened. I finally got my 2600 one fine Christmas, after such a long wait. My big 2600 list had been started to keep track of all the games so I wouldn't miss any. I'm still missing plenty of them. Since I am a true collector, I own almost every videogame system ever made, but it's still the 2600 that holds the soft spot in my heart. I guess you never forget your first.

*Do you have a tale to tell? If so, please send it in.  
If we publish it, you'll receive a prize.*



## Tips and Tricks

### Pac-Man (by Atari)

There's a trick to make a Pac-Man ghost appear in this game. First, score 100 points on any version. Then, move Pac-Man to the top of the screen. Move Pac-Man up and down quickly, in and out of the tunnel. Pac-Man should stop and seem to disappear. Move the joystick down, and Pac-Man will go straight down the screen through the dots, walls, and even the ghosts!

*(Courtesy of Scott Stilphen)*

### Adventure (by Atari)

Pressing SELECT after placing the chalice in the gold castle causes a different victory tune to be played.

*(Courtesy of Scott Stilphen)*

### Ms. Pac-Man (by Atari)

Pressing up and down at the same time causes Ms. Pac-Man to go left and get stuck in the middle of a wall.

*(Courtesy of Scott Stilphen)*



## CONTEST

The winner from last issue's contest is Jonathan Folkers of Princeton, NJ. Jonathan's name was randomly drawn from a hat of correct entries. **Journey Escape** is the only 2600 game based on a popular rock band of the 1980s (Journey). Jon's prize is a **Congo Bongo** (by Sega) cartridge.

Can you answer the following trivia question: *Which company manufactured the coin-op version of Frogger?*

Prize: **Keystone Kapers** (by Activision)

Mail your answer on a postcard to:

**The 2600 Connection**  
P.O. Box 3993  
Westport, MA 02790-0298

# An Interview with Stephen Landrum, Starpath Game Designer

by James Hague

Stephen H. Landrum will go down in 2600 history as the man responsible for **Communist Mutants from Space** for the Starpath Supercharger. He has also been involved in the design of several other 2600 games, including the excellent Supercharger version of **Frogger**. Since then he has left his mark on dozens of games, including *Blue Lightning* for the Atari Lynx. Stephen was kind enough to recall days gone by for *The 2600 Connection*.

Q: How did you come to work for Starpath?

SL: A friend of mine, Craig Nelson, was starting a company in 1981 called Acorn. He and Bob Brown had worked together at Atari, and then later at HMSI (Hitachi's American branch) and they wanted to make a device that could load games into the Atari 2600 from cassette tape. I had gone to school with Craig's younger brother Scott, and when Craig first started looking for programmers, he started with friends and acquaintances. At the time, I was working for Science Applications Inc., but I jumped at the chance to write computer games. After several name changes, the company was eventually called Starpath. Actually, some units of the Supercharger and the first three games went out while the company was called Arcadia.

Q: Had you programmed any commercial games prior to Communist Mutants from Space?

SL: Sort of. I had written a number of simple BASIC and assembler games on the Apple II. None of them were of any commercial value, but another friend wanted to start a software company, and asked if I would spruce up one of my games (it was originally done in lo-res graphics, and had no sound effects). The games was called Viper, and was similar to the UNIX game Snake or to the ancient coin-op games Surround or Dominos. Sirius Software was coming out with a nearly identical game called Snake Byte, and they bought the rights to my game to take it off the market. Communist Mutants from Space was my first real commercial title.

Q: Was Communist Mutants an original design or was it something you were assigned to write?

SL: It was my idea, but I doubt that you could call the design very original. It was based on coin-op games that I liked at the time: Space Invaders, Galaxian, Eagle, and others.

Q: How long did it take to write?

SL: I don't recall exactly how long it took to write the game, but I think that the total time spent was around six months. Of course, I also spent some of that time just working out how the 2600 worked. We had to reverse engineer the unit, and discovered that it had some capabilities that its designers didn't even know about.

The game was experimental in many ways. I was trying to push the limits of the 2600 to see what I could get it to do. The 2600 is very limited in its graphics capabilities. Little things in the game that don't mean anything to the consumers blew away people who knew how to program the 2600. The fact that I had six digits of score on one side of the screen, and another digit on the other side, or that the flags could show more than six on a row were both believed impossible until Communist Mutants did them.

Q: Did you work entirely by yourself?

SL: Yes. I did all of the programming, artwork and animation design, and sound effects. On computer or video games today, it is rare for any project to be done by fewer than three people, and it is not uncommon to have teams of a dozen or so.

Q: The obvious question I'm sure you've heard many times: about the name Communist Mutants from Space...

SL: I would like to take credit for the name, but I can't. It was developed by our advertising agency, and was the best thing that they did for Starpath. I must admit that I was really surprised when they suggested the name. I thought they were joking, but when I realized that they were serious, I couldn't believe it! It took me a little while to realize that the outrageousness of the name would actually help the program. We had a great poster made up from the artwork for the box cover, but unfortunately I only have one of them. We should have sold the poster, it would have made quite a bit of money.

Q: Were there any so-called "easter eggs" in any of your games?

SL: In Communist Mutants, you can get the word "HI" on the score screen to change to "SHL" by holding down the button on the joystick while the game loads. In **Dragonstomper**, enter

the "use shield" command while the image of the axe is on the screen and "SHL" appears on the bottom line of the command box. Frogger has no hidden messages or bonuses. I had intended to put one in, but never got around to it.

Q: Tell me about Frogger. Your version was a big improvement over the Parker Brothers cartridge. How was Starpath able to release the same title?

SL: Parker Brothers had licensed the ROM cartridge rights for Frogger for home computers and game systems. Sierra On-Line had licensed the magnetic media (cassette tape and floppy disk) rights for home computers and game systems. Starpath sub-licensed the rights from Sierra On-Line. Since our games were on cassette tape, we got a good arrangement on the license because there was no other way that Sierra was going to get a 2600 version of the game.

I remember seeing Frogger at a CES trade show, and people were saying that Parker Brothers had the best conversion that had ever been done for the 2600 of an arcade title. I looked at it, and their version was good, but I insisted that I could make one that was much better. When we discovered the loophole in the licensing arrangements, I got the opportunity to prove it.

When I did Frogger for Starpath, we got a coin-op machine and moved it into my office so that I could study the game. I got really good at it, and could wrap the score eventually. I tried to make the patterns and timing as similar as possible in the 2600 version, and did my best to copy the music as well. The whole conversion from start to finish took about three and a half months.

Q: What other 2600 games did you have a hand in?

SL: The titles that were all mine were Communist Mutants, Dragonstomper, and Frogger. I also did the final programming on **Suicide Mission** after Steve Hales left Starpath (Arcadia at that time).

Dragonstomper took about seven months to complete. I chose to do Dragonstomper because nobody had done a real Fantasy Role-Playing game on the 2600 up to that point. There was **Adventure** (by Atari) game, but at the time I didn't consider it a real FRP.

**Q:** Technical information about the Supercharger is hard to come by. Could you give an overview of the features it provided or any internal information about it?

*SL:* The Supercharger plugs into the cartridge slot of the 2600, and has a mono jack to plug into a portable tape cassette player. Internally, the Supercharger has 16Kbit ROM (2Kbyte), and 48Kbit RAM (6Kbyte), and a custom gate array chip that monitored the tape signal and controlled the bank switching and read/write control to the RAM. The tape loading code in the ROM of the Supercharger could load data at variable speeds, and in fact our tapes were recorded at different speeds on the two sides. The A side of the tape had an average bit frequency of 3KHz and the B side had an average bit frequency of 2KHz—the A side would load faster, but the B side was more reliable if the cassette player needed head cleaning or alignment. Having all of our game memory in RAM proved to be a big advantage for programming the 2600 at the time. The base unit only has 128 bytes of RAM. Loading games from tape also had another advantage—we could develop games that weren't all in memory at one time. *Dragonstomper* and *Escape from the Mindmaster* were the first games to use the multi-load capability of the system.

**Q:** What sort of computer system did you use for development of Supercharger games?

*SL:* All of our Supercharger games were developed on Apple II computers. We used an assembler derived from the SC Assembler for the Apple II, but heavily modified by us. All of our systems had Axlon 320K RAMdisks, which we used as RAM for our assembler, and some of the systems had accelerator cards.

**Q:** Did you leave Starpath when the market crashed? Those were hard times for game designers...

*SL:* I didn't exactly leave Starpath. Starpath, as with many other companies at the time, was in serious financial trouble. The programmers at Epyx had just left to form another company, and Epyx and Starpath shared some common investors, so the investors decided that it would be a good idea to merge the two companies together. Most of the management at Starpath was let go, but the programming staff was kept on during the merge.

**Q:** What have you done since then?

*SL:* From March 1981 through November 1983 I worked at StarPath. From November 1983 through February 1987 I worked at Epyx.

*At Epyx, I was the lead programmer on a number of games for the C-64, Apple II, and Atari 800. I also did a lot of firefighting—that is, join a project that was in trouble, and bring it to a close. From February 1987 through November 1988 I worked at Electronic Arts. At Electronic Arts, I was the lead programmer on Skate or Die! for the C-64. After Skate or Die!, I was technical director for the action games group. From November 1988 until October 1990 I returned to Epyx to join the Lynx development project (we called it Handy at that time). This time around, I wrote Blue Lightning for the Lynx, worked on the system software for the Lynx, and finished the programming on Gauntlet: The Third Encounter after Jon Leupp left.*

**Q:** What are you up to these days?

*SL:* I am working at a new company called New Technologies Group—nice and vague, isn't it—with RJ Mical and Dave Needle. RJ and Dave had headed up the Lynx division at Epyx. Unfortunately, I can't say what it is that we're working on.

**Q:** Did you have any unfinished 2600 games which were never released?

*SL:* Not really. I had several early screens and animations that I was playing around with, but nothing which was really approaching a game.

**Q:** Any ideas for games you would like to have done for the 2600?

*SL:* If you had asked me a few years ago, I could have answered. I've worked on too many things since then to really recall.

**Q:** It has been many years since the crash. Do you think video games have improved or taken a step back?

*SL:* Video games have definitely come a long way. I don't necessarily like every new trend I see in video games, but the industry is still really in its early stages.

**Q:** What do you see to be the biggest problems facing the industry today?

*SL:* Too little forward-thinking. Most people and companies are out there trying to make a buck today, and are not planning for anything for the future. Of course, it is not easy to plan for the future given the rate of change that everything is going through today.

**Q:** On a lighter note, what are your all-time favorite games?

*SL:* I like so many games, it's so hard to choose. I'll give it a stab, though. One of my all time favorite coin-op games was *Tempest*. I also played *Q\*Bert* and *Dig Dug* a lot.

As for home computer games, *The Bard's Tale* held my interest for quite a while, and I was absolutely addicted to *Tetris*. *Populous* was fun, too, but it had too many levels that were too similar. Oh, yeah, *Super Breakout* on the Atari 800 was definitely a winner. *Zork*—on the mainframes, I didn't really like the home versions—has to be one of the all time classics. Of course, when I was playing it, the programmers were still changing and expanding the dungeon, so it was very exciting to enter familiar territory and find something new. For the Nintendo system, I thought that *The Legend of Zelda* was very well done, and *Super Mario Brothers 3* and *Super Mario World* were a lot of fun. To be honest, though, I prefer pinball games to video games. One of my favorite pins of all time is *Middle Earth* by Atari. *Flash* was fun. *Terminator II* and *Fun House* get my quarters these days when I drop by the arcades. I also play board games with friends on the weekends. Can you guess why I might have gotten into this industry?



## Stephen Landrum's Softwareology

**For Atari 2600:**  
**(requires Starpath Supercharger)**  
 Communist Mutants From Space  
 Dragonstomper  
 Frogger  
 Suicide Mission\*

**For Commodore 64:**  
 Summer Games (Epyx)  
 PitStop II (Epyx)  
 Super Cycle (Epyx)  
 Temple of Apshai Trilogy\*\* (Epyx)  
 Ballblazer\* (Epyx)  
 Barbie\* (Epyx)  
 Movie Monster Game\* (Epyx)  
 Summer Games II\* (Epyx)  
 Skate or Die! (Electronic Arts)

**For Atari Lynx:**  
 Blue Lightning (Epyx)  
 Gauntlet: The Third Encounter\* (Epyx)

\* = finished the programming

\*\* = converted to C-64, Apple II, Atari 8-bit

## The 2600 Connection Classified Ads

Wanted: 2600 Space Age joystick, Gyruus, Tunnel Runner, Omega Race, River Raid II, Q\*Bert's Qubes, Nexar, Final Approach, Montezuma's Revenge, Burgertime, Super Cobra, Time Pilot, Front Line, Shootin' Gallery, Spy Hunter. Earl Halliwell, P.O. Box 24054, Luke AFB, AZ 85309-4054

Wanted: Atari 2600/7800 car, motorcycle, spaceship carts. Need instructions for Super Breakout, Desert Falcon, Missile Command, Galaxian, Pole Position II, Solaris, Winter Games, Defender, Taz, Grand Prix, California Games, Asteroids (2600 & 7800), Galaga, Basketball, Choplifter, Centipede, Xevious, Skateboardin', Popeye. Mike c/o Dave Moore, 8350 Young Ave., Rockford, MI 49341

Wanted for 2600: Crazy Climber, Confrontation, Gauntlet, Malagai, Final Approach, Wabbit, Death Trap, Out of Control, Sky Blazer, Mr. Do's Castle, Burgertime, Q\*Bert's Qubes, Spy Hunter, Up 'n Down, River Patrol, Springer, Picnic. Wanted for Colecovision: Up 'n Down, Fall Guy, MASH, Yolk's on You, Dance Fantasy, Video Hustler, Sector Alpha, It's Only Rock and Roll, Slurpy, Tomarc the Barbarian, Word Feud, Music Box Demo Player, Tunnels and Trolls. Write: Werner Bleys, Jagerstraat 9, 2140 Antwerpen, Borgerhout, Belgium

Help! I am trying to create a Classic Video Game Cartridge Price Guide. I need your help. What I would like is for each person to send me a list of the carts they have and how much they would sell these carts for and how much they would buy them for. I will then take all of the responses and average them together to create the price guide. I want to start with the 2600, then when I get them done I will start on other systems. For each person that sends me a list pf their carts, I will send them a copy of the completed list. Send your lists for any or all of the systems that you collect to: Jeff Scott, 2670 Lehman Rd., Apt. D-805, Cincinnati, OH 45204

Wanted: (7800) Mat Mania Challenge, Scrapyard Dog, Meltdown, Pyromania. (2600) F-14 Tomcat, Chase the Chuckwagon. Colecovision, Intellivision, XEGS, Channel F, Arcadia 2001 carts. For sale/trade: (7800-New) Motor Psycho, Alien Brigade, Planet Smashers, Xenophobe, Basketbrawl, many others. (2600-New) Xenophobe, Double Dunk, Midnight Magic, many others. Many used carts, hardware. Send me your list and I'll send you mine. Jeff Scott, 2670 Lehman Rd., Apt. D-805, Cincinnati, OH 45204. Internet: bs066@cleveland.freenet.edu. Phone: (513) 244-6392.

New games for sale. Atari 2600/400/800, Intellivision, & VIC20 game cartridges. Send S.A.S.E. for list. 10,022 carts, cost per unit: \$2.50 per unit, price includes S & H. Please make checks payable to: Fred Davis. Write: Fred Davis, 710 N. Pennsylvania, Shawnee, OK 74801. (405) 275-3021 please call between 4pm-10pm CST. Sorry, no phone orders.

Wanted: Spike's Peak, Double Dragon, Ghost Manor, He-Man, Ikari Warriors, Jawbreaker, Marauder, Marine Wars, Motorodeo, Motocross Racer, Polaris, Raft Rider, Ram It, Rescue Terra I, River Patrol, Robin Hood, Room of Doom, Sir Lancelot, Snoopy & Red Baron, Springer, Star Wars Arcade Game, Strategy X, Submarine Commander, Subterranea, Threshold, Tomarc, Underworld, X-Man, Z-Tack. Emerson Arcadia games for sale or trade. Russ Perry Jr., 5970 Scott St., Omro, WI 54963, (414) 685-6187

Wanted: 2600: Halloween, Quadrun, Exocet, Earth Dies Screaming, Tanks but No Tanks, Gremlins, Chase the Chuckwagon, Submarine Commander, Texas Chainsaw Massacre, Bachelor Party, others. Instruction booklets needed (original or photocopied): Mash, Robin Hood, Survival Run, Atari Video Cube, Fantastic Votage, others. Colecovision carts needed: Gust Buster, Sammy Lightfoot, Evolution, Mr. Do's Castle, Pitfall II, Nova Blast, Up N Down. Ron Milford, 64 B St., Avenel, NJ 07001, (908) 636-6809

For Sale: 2600 systems, accessories, and over 100 different carts. Also Colecovision systems, accessories, and carts. INTV, Vectrex, 7800, and Odyssey 2 carts. Willing to sell or trade. Ron Milford, 64 B St., Avenel, NJ 07001, (908) 636-6809

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