



2600 Connection

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Issue Number 15

Other 2600 Newsletters

by Tim Duarte

If you enjoy reading about the Atari 2600, there are several other newsletters which feature columns about the 2600. Here are two of them:

Classic Systems and Games Monthly
c/o Jeff Adkins
11 Windsor
Attica, NY 14011

Jeff's a big fan of the 2600 and he offers solutions and an ongoing, multi-part "20 Years of Atari" article. Best of all is the *Topic 2600* column. The reviews of 2600 games are also top-notch. Sample issue: \$1.75

Digital Press
c/o Joe Santulli
44 Hunter Place
Pompton Lakes, NJ 07442-2037

Digital Press was nominated as a candidate for *Electronic Games* magazine's "Fanzine of the Year." The results have not been published yet. This one covers today's systems, but covers the older systems as well. Staff writer Kevin Oleniacz is a serious 2600 fan, and his knowledge of the subject is excellent. Sample issue: \$1.25



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Collectors' Guide will boost interest

by Tim Duarte

It seems as though more and more people are gaining an interest in the Atari 2600. Letters are coming in day after day. Many readers have told me that this newsletter has helped spark an interest in the Atari 2600 and other classic systems. Most special interest groups, whatever the subject may be, have a newsletter or magazine which interested individuals can turn to as a reference. I am glad that the *2600 Connection* can serve as a reference to the videogame community.

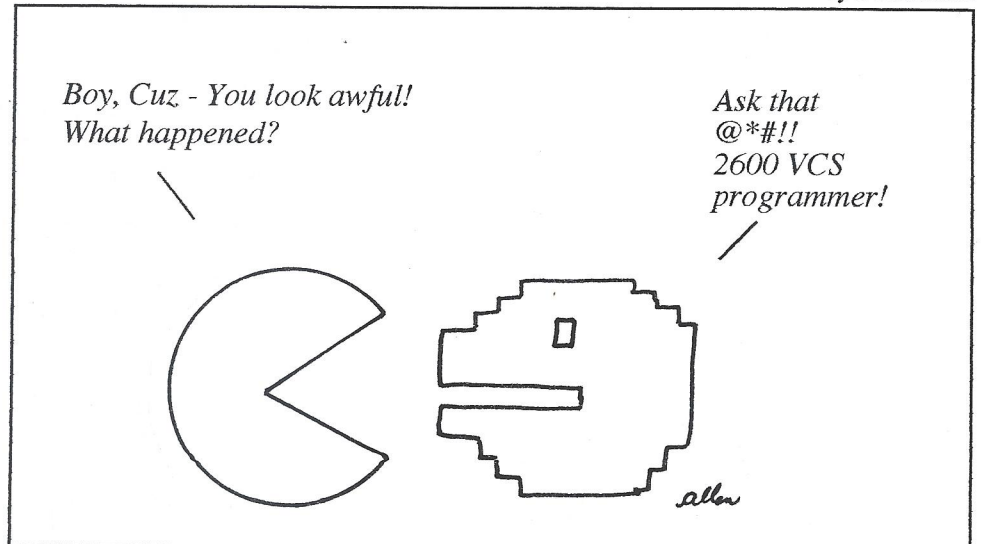
As mentioned in previous issues, I have noticed there are two types of "2600 fans"—game players and collectors. Some people are even a little of both. Jeff Cooper, a serious collector, has been researching and collecting games for a number of years. He is now offering *The Collectors' Guide to 2600 Games*, an ideal reference for trading and cartridge hunting. This first edition rates every 2600 cartridge on a scale of collectability and offers the expertise of ten "big-name" 2600 collectors from around the United States. Judges include Jeff Cooper, Jeff Adkins, Al Backiel, John Marcin, Russ Perry Jr., Jeff Scott, myself, and others. The "experts" rated each cartridge's scarcity on a scale of one to five, with special categories for prototypes and common games. Mr. Cooper averaged the judges' figures to produce a collectability rating for each game. The guide also features an informative introduction to collecting 2600 cartridges as well. You can obtain a guide by sending \$2.50 (price includes postage) to: Jeff Cooper, 6407 S. 28th West Pl., Tulsa, OK 74132.

I enjoyed participating in the guide and hope that it will increase the awareness of this great hobby. Keep in mind that this is not a price guide. There are some fans working on a price guides for videogames, but none of them are completed. Look here for details in future issues. I would like to thank Jeff for his effort in producing the Collectors' Guide. I hope that he publishes one each year. Remember, the value and scarcity of these cartridges will change from year to year.



ARCADE ARTIST

by David Allen





Dear Editor: I have **Tax Avoiders** (by American Video Game). It's a very unique game. I would like to know if A.V.G. made any other games for the 2600. Also, where can I buy a spare power supply for the 2600?

—Brad Weber
P.O. Box 871216
Wasilla, AK 99687

Tax Avoiders is American Video Game's sole release. You can order a power supply from Atari at (408) 745-2000, or there's a Radio Shack replacement (part# 273-1651) which works just fine.

Dear Editor: There are two games that I am uncertain were or were not released for the 2600—*Mr. Do!'s Wild Ride* and *Q*Bert's Qubes*. Any information you may have would be greatly appreciated.

—Tony Bueno
13814 Norland
San Antonio, TX 78232

*Q*Bert's Qubes was released, but in very limited quantities. Mr. Do!'s Wild Ride was never released as a 2600 cartridge. However, Mr. Do! (by Coleco) and Mr. Do!'s Castle (by Parker Brothers) exist. Both of these 2600 games are hard to find.*

Dear Editor: What's the difference, if any, between 2600 games made for play in the U.S. and games made for play in Europe. I know the TV signals are different. If I get European games, can I play them on my 2600 in the U.S.A.? I'm going to Europe this summer and will check around for 2600 games.

—Fred Horvat
13054 Marilyn Rd.
Chesterland, OH 44026

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

The difference lies in the format. Games made for play here are in NTSC—a format that is a standard here in the states. European games in PAL format can be played in the U.S. The screen will roll horizontally, but this can be fixed by adjusting the horizontal hold on your television set. Unfortunately, many new television sets do not have a horizontal hold control. Use an older TV set if possible. You will also notice that the colors in PAL games are off, too. Have a safe trip and let us know if you come back home with any great finds!

Dear Editor: Were any Dungeons & Dragons games ever made for the 2600? I have heard that two were made, but I have yet to confirm this.

—Matt Lewandowski
2918 Union St.
East Troy, WI 53120


There were two "rumored" games by M-Network—AD&D: Treasure of Tarmin and AD&D: Tower of Mystery. To my knowledge, these games were never released and are just rumors.

Dear Editor: I can't find places to buy Atari 2600 cartridges. Can you send me a list of dealers who sell 2600 cartridges?

—Billy Munroe
20829 Moreland Dr.
Spring Hill, FL 34610

Issue 12 (Sep/Oct 1992) featured a directory of mail-order companies that sell games for the 2600. I will be happy to send anyone this article if they send me a S.A.S.E. (self-addressed, stamped envelope). I am currently researching and hunting for companies for this year's directory, which will be published in issue 18 (Sep/Oct 1993).

- Subscription: \$6 for six bi-monthly issues.
- Back Issues are \$1.50 each. Cash, check, or money order payable to: Tim Duarte

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Dear Editor: The local Big Lots/Odd Lots discount/closeout dealer is selling Atari 2600 games—**Defender II**, **Millipede**, **Realsports Boxing**, **Radar Lock**, etc.—for \$1 each. Each store has its own "special" stock that other stores do not have. For example, one store 30 miles away has **Q*Bert** and another store does not. Unfortunately, none of the stores sell any of the machines to play the games—no 2600 JRs or 7800s! I feel bad for the kids and adults who would buy these games but don't because they cannot find a machine to play them on. So Big Lots is going to be stuck with these games, and no people to buy them!

I think Atari slit its own throat as far as having credibility here at home by disregarding the domestic market. To this day, Atari is selling the 2600 in the biggest market in the world—China, Taiwan, and other Eastern countries—and has shut itself out of the United States, where there is obviously *some* demand. I just don't understand how these products can be discontinued in the states because it is not profitable, and yet the same product is sold overseas.

If my 2600 console should break, there is no local place where I could have it repaired, or even get the electronic parts to fix it myself if I had the know-how. For most people, if their 2600 system dies, the cartridges get thrown away or wind up in a garage sale pile or a second-hand store. As far as they know, if K-mart or Wal-mart doesn't have the product, then it must not exist. We all know this is untrue. In Europe and China, all a person has to do is return their 2600 to the store where they bought it. People in the U.S. have nowhere to turn. Is it too much to ask Atari—a company that raked in so much money in the 1980s, a company that America made so financially strong—to maintain in the U.S.A. what they are also doing abroad?

—Richard E. Toy
217 S. Pennsylvania Ave.
Fremont, OH 43420-4616

Trying to figure out Atari and their reasons behind business decisions is very difficult. I suggest that you stay away from doing so, unless you would like a headache. You have made some very good points, however.

News & Notes

Once again, Arnie Katz gave *The 2600 Connection* a favorable review in the "Fandom Central" column in *Electronic Games* magazine (pg. 26, March 1993). Thanks for the positive plug, Arnie!

Russ Perry Jr. has a project in mind which involves the Starpath Supercharger and the 2600. Before the project begins, Russ needs to know how many people own Superchargers. If you do, please mail a postcard to: 2600 Connection, P.O. Box 3993, Westport, MA 02790. Your name will be added to the Supercharger list and you will receive details about the project from Russ.

Clay Halliwell has found a Sears Arcade II, or "2800." He states: "Since the controllers combine a paddle and joystick, games which use four paddles, such as **Breakout** and **Warlords** (both by Atari), require a separate "joypaddle" for each player, hence the four ports."

Sean Kelly has agreed to perform surgery on the 2600 so that it may have separate audio and video outputs. The "how-to" article will appear in a future issue of *The 2600 Connection*. Look for it soon. Thanks, Sean. Many of us want to hook up the 2600 to a stereo and/or a color monitor.

W. Jayson and Laura Hill of Knoxville, TN are planning their 9th annual Videogame Invitational tournament. This year's tournament is on April 3 at 7:30 and the featured game is **Space Invaders** (by Atari) on the Atari 2600! Anyone over 21 is invited. Contact them at: 401 Gallaher View Rd., #260, Knoxville, TN 37919. Look here next issue for details on the results and the name of the 1993 tournament champion.

On USEnet, Andrew K. Heller mentioned that there is a Computer Science course at Penn State which focuses on designing educational software. Part of the course entails learning how to design user manuals. The instructor uses Atari 2600 game manuals to teach the course. The manuals are easy to understand and serve as a model for the students in the class.



Cartridge List Part 14: Telesys

Since I am now discussing a fourteenth game company which produced games for the 2600, the task becomes harder and harder to write introductions for these profiles. Why? Well, little is known about these small companies which only produced a few games and then went out of business.

It was clear that many companies thought

that becoming a videogame developer meant easy cash and high profits. It wasn't that easy. Telesys, a Fremont, CA-based company, is another that came and went very quickly circa 1982.

Coconuts and **Fast Food** are my personal favorites in the bunch. Both have very simple objectives, but are very fun to play. In **Coconuts**, you simply try to avoid coconuts thrown from a monkey in a tree at the top of the screen. It's sort of a reversal of **Kaboom!** (by Activision). **Fast Food** pits the player as a pair of lips. The player must eat hamburgers, french fries, pizza, and other treats which scroll horizontally from left to right. The trick is to eat as much food as possible, while avoiding the "deadly" purple pickles. Both games are easy at beginning level, but the fun begins when the game progresses at a quick pace in higher levels. These two carts are examples of games that don't require fancy graphics to make it a good, fun game.

Cosmic Creeps and **Stargunner** are Telesys' space games. **Cosmic Creeps** involves the player's precise maneuvering of his/her spaceship and a rescue of the Cosmic kids. If the player fails, the planet falls out of orbit and the game ends. **Stargunner** is another horizontal shoot 'em up, very similar to the **Defender** (by Atari)-style of game.

Ram It is reminiscent of **Squeeze Box** (by US Games). The player controls a ramroid (android) in the center of the screen. Bars of color advance toward the center on the right and left. The ramroid must shoot the color bars before they reach the center. At the end of each level, the bars must be shot and removed from the screen before the timer runs out.

In **Demolition Herby**, the player drives a small green car on a grid-like course. As the car moves along, the driven path changes color. Once the squares in the grid have been travelled over and the color changes, the squares in the course get blacked out. The object is to black out the entire course. It's not as easy as it sounds because you have to worry about running out of gas and avoiding the enemy chase cars which also change the color of your path back to the original color.

A reader once mentioned to me that he noticed that there were two different styles of Telesys cartridge casings. This is true. All of my Telesys games have a regular square-shaped casing which has sort of a plastic rectangular latch or handle at the end of the front spine label. A fellow collector has a Telesys game in an Activision-style or Mystique-style casing. I can only assume that the latch-style casing was more expensive to produce, or Telesys executives acquired a large number of cartridge casings at a great price.

All in all, the six games in the Telesys collection are entertaining. There were rumors of two other Telesys games—*Bouncing Baby Monkeys* and *The Impossible Game*—but neither of them were released.

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



- 1001 Coconuts
- 1002 Cosmic Creeps
- 1003 Fast Food
- 1004 Ram It
- 1005 Stargunner
- 1006 Demolition Herby

CONTEST

The winner from last issue's contest is Jess Sosnoski of Mount Carmel, PA. Jess' name was randomly drawn from a hat of correct entries. Sega was the manufacturer of the **Frogger** coin-op. Jess' prize is a **Keystone Kapers** (by Activision) cartridge.

This issue's contest doesn't involve a trivia question: *Imagine you are stranded on a deserted island, but you have your Atari 2600 and a TV set. If you could only have five games, which ones would they be?*

Send your choices to: 2600 Connection, P.O. Box 3993, Westport, MA 02790

Atari and the Law: Multiple Lawsuits

by Mark Androvich

In the early days of videogaming, the industry was relatively free of lawsuits. When one company produced a hit coin-op game, such as Pong, it was common practice for competitors to immediately release several “knock-off” versions. In fact, *Fortune* magazine reported that only a tenth of all the Pong-type machines made in 1974 were manufactured by Atari—the company that invented the game. By the time Atari received a patent and a trademark, Pong was already obsolete.

Without going deep into the subject, there are three primary methods of legally protecting intellectual property such as videogames: patent, trade secret, and copyright. Most computer programs are not subject to patent protection. Also, since cartridges are sold over the counter to the general public, it is difficult to argue that the program inside should be protected as a trade secret. Therefore, most videogame-related litigation involves copyright protection claims.

In its heyday, Atari so actively protected its copyrighted videogames that one competitor was prompted to remark: “You’re nobody in this business if Atari hasn’t sued you.” Most lawsuits were settled out of court, leaving no public record. In some cases, I am speculating as to what actually happened. Here are some highlights from the most notable 2600-related lawsuits.

Atari vs. Activision

The facts: Initially, Atari did not take too kindly to the idea of a third-party software company made up of ex-Atari game designers and reportedly tried to stop Activision from producing Atari 2600 games.

The outcome: No lawsuit was ever filed. Perhaps Atari realized that players needed a 2600 system in order to play Activision games. If Activision had success, it would lead to increased sales in 2600 systems and other 2600 game cartridges. In any event, Activision went forward with producing 2600 games and became one of the top game cartridge producers.

Notes: In retrospect, perhaps Atari should have tried to reach some sort of licensing agreement with Activision. Once Activision went forward, the path was clear for other companies to enter the market—contributing to the market crash a few years later.

Years later, Nintendo used licensing agreements in order to try preventing the same thing from happening. Atari, through the Tengen subsidiary, sued Nintendo for preventing Tengen from producing unlicensed NES games.

Atari vs. North American Phillips

The facts: This is the lawsuit that most of us know about. Atari sued N.A.P. (Magnavox), alleging that *K.C. Munchkin*, the Odyssey² game, infringed the copyright Atari had in its *Pac-Man* game, which was licensed from Bally-Midway.

The outcome: The court found in favor of Atari, and N.A.P. was no longer allowed to produce *K.C. Munchkin*. N.A.P. petitioned the U.S. Supreme Court to hear the case, but were denied.

Notes: Incidentally, Pac-Man is the subject of the majority of videogame related lawsuits. This is no surprise because it is one of the highest grossing videogames ever. Bally-Midway won suits against manufacturers of dozens of “rip-off” versions, and even against companies which produced special unauthorized speed-up modification kits for the machines. Bally-Midway later decided this was a good enough idea to use themselves.

Atari vs. Imagic

The facts: In the fall of 1982, Atari sued Imagic, claiming that Imagic’s *Demon Attack* infringed Atari’s copyright in its *Phoenix* game.

The outcome: Unknown. This suit was filed shortly before the videogame market crashed, and Imagic went under shortly thereafter. I don’t think the court would have held for Atari because, in my opinion, the games are not substantially similar enough to warrant a finding of infringement. I also doubt that Imagic would have settled out-of-court, but probably would have

fought this one to the finish. After all, *Demon Attack* was Imagic’s biggest-selling game. My guess is that Atari dropped its suit during the shake-up in management, or Imagic had gone out of business before Atari could pursue it.

Atari vs. Coleco

The facts: Also in the fall of 1982, Atari brought a \$350 million patent-infringement suit against Coleco for their Colecovision adaptor designed to play 2600 games. Coleco countered with a \$500 million antitrust claim.

The outcome: Unknown. Coleco did produce the adaptor, as well as the Gemini—a “2600 clone” system which only played 2600 VCS games. Coleco dropped out of the videogame business shortly thereafter and abandoned the Colecovision.

Atari vs. JS & A Group Inc.

The facts: JS & A Group released a product called the PROM Blaster. The product used blank 8K 2600 cartridges. The court doesn’t mention whether the blanks were used to copy existing games or to allow players to program their own games. Atari filed a patent infringement and copyright infringement suit.

The outcome: The court held that the blank 8K cartridges did infringe Atari’s patent, and stopped JS & A from selling the blanks. Too bad—I would have liked to have seen the PROM Blaster.

Other 2600-related lawsuits

- Arcadia, creator of the Supercharger, was forced to change its name to Starpath to avoid confusion with a company that already used the name.

- Apollo changed the name of *Lochjaw* to *Shark Attack*, supposedly under threat from MCA/Universal, the owners of the Jaws trademark.

- Data Age was sued by the rock music group Journey. Data Age owed the band royalties from the *Journey Escape* game. Data Age failed to earn the profits the company was counting on to survive and went out of business.



Make your games have strange effects!

Frying the 2600

Demon Attack (by Imagic)

Frying the game causes the score to disappear and the game begins in two-player mode.

(Courtesy of David Allen)

Cosmic Ark (by Imagic)

Frying the game causes all meteors to come from the left. The score, small ship, and "critters" are scrambled.

(Courtesy of David Allen)

Atlantis (by Imagic)

Fry the game until the Imagic logo disappears and the game starts automatically. All the ships will be the same type and will always fly from right to left.

(Courtesy of Scott Stilphen)

Galaxian (by Atari)

Fry this game until you only see your ship and press RESET. The game will start at wave 0. Only two or three galaxians will attack you in this wave. However, the game usually crashes in the next two waves.

(Courtesy of Scott Stilphen)

Fatal Run (by Atari)

Frying this PAL game sometimes causes the game to play the victory ending music—as if you beat the game.

(Courtesy of Scott Stilphen)

Sorcerer's Apprentice (by Atari)

There's a super expert level in this game. Keep frying until you see the mountain screen. Mickey Mouse is off to the left of the screen. Good luck!

(Courtesy of Scott Stilphen)

Moon Patrol (by Atari)

You can start with anywhere from 10,000 to over 900,000 points by frying this game.

(Courtesy of Scott Stilphen)

Joust (by Atari)

Fry the game until it begins automatically. An indestructible pink Pterodactyl appears on the screen, and the game begins at level 0. Be careful—you only have one life.

(Courtesy of David Allen)



Frying is accomplished by rapidly switching your ON/OFF switch back and forth.

The 2600 Connection cannot be responsible for any damages to your system.

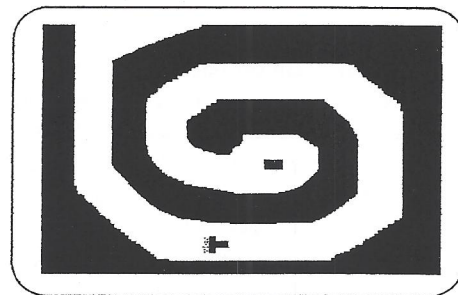
The Atari 2600 Treasure Chest

GRAVITAR

Gravitar is another treasure of a game from Atari. It was originally released in 1983 on an exclusive basis through the *Atari Age* club magazine. In 1988, Atari re-released it in the familiar red label.

Gravitar is a space game, but it is unique in many ways. The goal behind the game is to fly your spaceship and destroy twelve solar systems which are under the control of the evil Gravitar. Doing so breaks the power of Gravitar, but it's not so easy. The player must also contend with the forces of gravity. Gravity has a strong effect on the spaceship; it takes some accurate flying and maneuvering skills to keep the spaceship from being "pulled in" and crashing. Game variation number five offers a game without the force of gravity. Thinking this variation would be easy, I found that I was wrong because this game is challenging even without the gravity option.

The game has a number of different variations. A diverse selection of number of ships is quite nice. Choose from a game with 6, 15, 25, or 100 reserve spaceships. Surprised to see a game with that many extra lives? Don't be—you'll need all the backup ships you can get because it is very easy to lose control and destroy your ship.



Once the options are set, hitting RESET brings you to the first solar system. Be careful of the force of gravity from the sun at this point. If your ship flies close to an enemy saucer, there will be a fight to the end between the two of you. Once you pick a planet, carefully fly your Asteroids-type spaceship towards it. Destroy all of the firing bunkers and pick up the fuel capsules on each planet. Again, you have to be careful of the forces of gravity and avoid a collision with any object. Then, it's on to the next planet in the solar system. Each planet is different. Another way to solve the mission is to head straight for the reactor base of the solar system. Pictured above in the screen shot, this takes some extra-precise flying skills to reach and activate the reactor in the center of the screen. Then, the player must move quickly and get out of the reactor base before the reactor explodes. A successful reactor activation and escape warps the player to the next solar system.

Another interesting feature is that a reverse gravity is present in the second and fourth "galaxies," or levels. Instead of drawing your ship inwards, your ship is effected by a repelling force of gravity. There is darkness in galaxies three and four, making the game even more difficult. Firing bunkers, enemy ships, and fuel are visible.

Gravitar is definitely challenging. This game requires practice. Although gravity is an additional challenge factor, the player becomes accustomed to it. Mastery of controlling the spaceship eases gameplay. Gravitar combines elements of **Asteroids** and **Space War** (both by Atari) and is a fine game that I recommend to all.



— reviewed by Tim Duarte

Nolan Bushnell: A Man and his Empire

by Scott Stilphen

When one speaks about the history of videogames, such prominent names come to mind. Willy Higinbotham, Steve Russell (and the *Spacewar* group), and Ralph Baer. But none are as synonymous with the creation of the videogame industry as Nolan Bushnell. Although Higinbotham actually invented the world's first videogame back in 1958, Nolan perfected it, packaged it, and gave it to the masses. The ideas and initial groundwork were there for years, but nobody saw its potential, except Nolan Bushnell.

Nolan K. Bushnell was born a Mormon in Ogden, Utah on February 5, 1943, and raised by his mother (a teacher) and father (a cement contractor) in nearby Clearfield. While earning his B.S. in Electrical Engineering from the University of Utah, he worked at the Lagoon Amusement Park in Salt Lake. It was here Nolan learned the economics of coin-op games—from the carnival-type to the penny arcade machines—and conceived his concept for a new type of midway game. Bushnell and some fellow classmates began evolving his idea with the help of the school's huge \$8 million dollar mainframe computer. With it, they created and constantly played a version of the now-legendary *Spacewar*.

Nolan thought the general public would find it just as appealing. At the time, it was impossible in both cost and size to develop a commercial version.

In 1968, he started working as a Research Engineer at the Advanced Technology Division of Ampex, a recording tape company. With the rapid advances and falling prices of computers and electronic parts, Nolan saw his chance to fabricate his idea. Working with another Ampex engineer by the name of Ted Dabney, Nolan finally finished work on *Computer Space*. The game was modeled after *Spacewar*, which was designed to play on a \$100,000 PDP-1 computer. They took the key elements and put them into a simplified coin-op version. The game was sold to Nutting Associates, a Santa Clara company known for its *Computer Quiz* coin-op games. *Computer Space* was a big hit at the 1971 Amusement and Music Operator's Association (AMOA) and Nolan was offered a position as Chief Engineer at Nutting. The company made 1500 machines, which were packaged in a curved, black fiberglass cabinet, and marketed them in November 1971. Due to the game's relative complexity, it was never widely successful. Consequently, another classmate of Bushnell's, Bill Pitts, was also

working on his own *Spacewar* variant at the time. Pitt's *Galaxy Game* was less successful; the prototype was the only version ever made.

In a dispute over royalties from *Computer Space*, Bushnell left Nutting. After Midway turned him down, both he and Dabney put up \$500 to form their own company, *Syzygy*. They hired Al Alcorn, another electrical engineer and Ampex co-worker. Finding out that the name *Syzygy* was already used by another company, they turned to *Go*, a favorite Japanese board game, and made a list of the game's terminology for a possible new name. *Sente* was their first choice, but it was also unavailable. Atari, their second choice for a name, was free and clear. Atari was "born" on June 27, 1972, in Los Gatos, CA.

Using \$50,000 in borrowed money, Bushnell set forth on creating a simple game that would appeal to everyone. The result was *Pong*. George Opperman was a freelance artist hired to design Atari's famous logo and who later became the head of the company's coin-op graphics department. The "Fuji" symbol mainly stands for a stylized "A" for Atari. *Pong* was also an added inspiration. The two sides represent the opponents and the center line is the *Pong* court in the middle.

This time out, Bushnell decided to test-market his new game first. He installed the prototype in Andy Capp's Tavern, in Sunnyvale, CA. Two days later, the owner called, demanding Bushnell to come over quick because the machine had broken down. After opening the machine, he immediately saw the problem. The coin box—a sawed-off plastic milk container—was so jammed with quarters, it was shorting out the mechanism. Atari's first game was drowning (literally) in money!

Pong was put on sale in November 1972. Companies soon sprang up left and right, trying to cash in with their own *Pong*-counterfeits. Unfortunately, out of all the *Pong*-type machines created between 1972-1974 (about 100,000), only 10 percent were genuine *Pong* machines manufactured by



Nolan Bushnell, founder of Atari, photographed at the Winter Consumer Electronics Show, January 1991.

Atari. Pong became the first successful videogame, and it paved the way for the fledging industry while simultaneously spelling the end of pinball's reign as the "king" of electronic coin-op entertainment.

Bushnell bought out Dabney's small interest in 1973, leaving him the sole original shareholder. In 1974, the next game, *Gran Trak 10*, was held up in production and inflicted a heavy loss. Failed expansion efforts in Hawaii and Japan quickly drained Atari's resources and forced Bushnell into seeking success elsewhere. Following the pioneering effort of Raph Baer of Magnavox, he pushed into the home market with the financial and marketing help of Sears. The home version of Pong debuted in 1975 and eventually over 13 million systems were sold over the next three years. *Breakout*, created by Steve Jobs, followed in 1976 in both the arcades and at home, reprising the Pong idea along with its prosperity.

By 1976, there was such an insatiable demand for home systems that General Instrument Corporation—the only semiconductor manufacturer with a major commitment to game circuits—had to ration its production. Although Magnavox's *Odyssey* led the way, Coleco's *Telstar Arcade* and Atari's TV Pong systems spawned more than 75 companies that churned out dedicated chip video games. As a result of the intense competition and the inherent lack of interest which soon followed the games, systems had a short lifespan. Earlier consoles selling for \$120 were down to \$40 a year later. Programmable systems were logically the next step in the home system evolution, the first being Fairchild Electronic's *Channel F* in 1976. It was clear to Bushnell that in order to effectively control this new market, a lot of cash would be needed. That meant either assuming huge loans, going public, or selling out to a large company. Bushnell chose the last option. After MCA and Disney passed him up, Warner Communications jumped at the chance. Within four months, Warner bought Atari for between \$28-34 million dollars. The deal ensured Atari's survival with a positive financial foundation, and also made Bushnell a millionaire many times over, at the age of 33.

Atari's engineers now sought to take the same path as Fairchild with their home electronics division. With Warner's considerable investments behind them, the Video Computer System was created in 1977. RCA's *Studio II* and Bally's *Professional Arcade/Astrocade* also entered the programmable market, but no systems were selling. The collapsing home market led to the "crash of '78." After the shakedown, only Magnavox and Atari were left. Atari underwent a vast restructuring, and in conflict with Bushnell's advice toward the slow-selling VCS, the new executive committee ousted Bushnell in 1979. Things were to get worse for Atari before they improved. *Space Invaders*, a Japanese import coin-op, sold over 350,000 units worldwide and threatened to take the arcade market from Atari. Atari released *Starship* and *Super Breakout* in response, but they were no match.

The resurgence of Atari came in 1980. The popular *Asteroids* coin-op took back the arcade market and the profits were used to secure the rights to a home version of *Space Invaders*. The VCS version became a multi-million seller. The combination of an aggressive marketing campaign and the continued support of Sears—which sold the VCS and related products under the *Tele-Games* label—enabled the VCS to capture half of the home market over Magnavox's *Odyssey*² and Mattel Electronic's delayed entry, the *Intellivision*. The creation of a third division allowed Atari to begin its push into the home computer market with the 400 and 800 model computers. Ironically, former Atari engineer Steve Jobs had previously approached Bushnell with the idea of producing inexpensive, general purpose computers, but Bushnell had laughed off the idea. Jobs later started *Apple Computer*, and after becoming successful, was similarly ousted by his company.

With all of his accolades and good fortune up to now, Bushnell wasn't ready to rest on his laurels just yet. After Atari, he rounded up three new companies—*Pizza Time Theatre*, *Corporate Air Transport*, and *Magnum Microwave Corporation*—all in which he is the chairman and principal owner. *Pizza Time Theatre*, the most

notable, was and still is a popular chain of family restaurants, complete with an arcade (roughly 100 machines), and electronic robot entertainment led by an M.C. named Chuck E. Cheese. The idea originated in 1974 and was actually part of Atari, but when Chuck E. Cheese was ready for his debut, Atari had already been sold. Warner wasn't enthusiastic about it and Bushnell bought back the concept for \$500,000 in 1979. Two years later, he turned it into a chain of 44 restaurants in 12 states. By 1982, there were 100 combined in the U.S., Canada, and Australia.

While managing *Pizza Time*, Bushnell was able to start his own robotics firm. In 1982, he also drew up plans to re-enter the videogame market. The result was *Sente*, owned by *Pizza Time Theatre*. *Sente* produced arcade video games. It began on October 1, 1983 and an agreement was signed with Atari for the home version rights to future *Sente* games (such as *Hat Trick*). The next year, he formed *Axlon*, which designed and developed games and toys. While chairman of *Axlon*, he signed an agreement with Atari in 1989 for *Axlon* to make games on an exclusive basis for Atari's 2600 and 7800 systems. The first new game by Bushnell (*Axlon*) was **Secret Quest** for the 2600.

Part 2 of this biography will focus on the accomplishments of *Axlon* and Bushnell's other companies, up to his work with *Commodore* and *CDTV*, and his efforts in virtual reality systems.



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"From Atari to Nintendo to Neo-Geo"

Tales of the 2600

by Mark Androvich

A few weeks ago, I received a telephone call at work. It was my fiancée, sounding rather frantic. "Someone has broken into our house," she cried. "They took everything!" Not exactly what I wanted to hear on an already hectic day.

I rushed home to discover my front door in pieces. Someone had taken a crowbar to it and kicked it in, breaking the apparently ineffective deadbolt. I entered, taking a deep breath, expecting the worst. Fortunately, my fiancée was a little bit off when she said the thieves took "everything." What she meant to say was, "They took everything that they could carry and plan to pawn in Los Angeles by the weekend." They took cameras, jewelry, stereo equipment, VCRs, and all the remote controls—even remotes for units they didn't even take. Whoever hit our house was obviously a professional. They searched through every cupboard, closet, and drawer in every room and used our suitcases to cart our belongings away. They struck in broad daylight, in a normal neighborhood where most of the residents are retired—and nobody saw the crooks! As I stood in the living room surveying the damage, it suddenly hit me—my Atari cartridge collection!

It wasn't stolen, although there was evidence that the burglar had at least looked through my collection. It obviously wasn't worth anything to them. I thought about my renter's insurance policy, which provided for replacement cost of stolen items. This means, for example, that we were able to replace the VCR we had bought as a discounted floor sample with a brand new model since no floor samples were available. How would this have applied to my Atari cartridge collection? I can picture the following taking place:

Claims Adjuster: OK, Let's start with the A's. They took **Asteroids**. How much did you purchase it for?

Me: Well, it was a Christmas gift. When it first came out, it was near \$50 or \$60, but I think my parents got it for \$40 or so.

Claims Adjuster: And how much will it cost to replace?

Me: Fifty cents. It's a common cartridge, you see. Everybody has it.

And so on. Unlike my comic books or baseball cards, which are now worth some four or five times the original price, not a single cartridge I owned had appreciated in value. New cartridges sold for over \$40. The value of the cartridge itself—the plastic casing and the chips inside—was probably a couple of dollars, if that. Today, you can find the majority at thrift stores selling for 50 cents each. Even the rarest games sell for less than \$20. What kind of hobby is this, anyway?


I imagined having to justify to my insurance company why **Chase the Chuckwagon** and **Texas Chainsaw Massacre** would cost more than 50 cents to replace. "They're rare," I would explain. "Says who?" would be the adjuster's answer. "Ask anyone," I would reply. "Talk to Tim, Russ, Scott, Al, Jeff, Werner, and the others," I would say, before promptly giving him your addresses. Maybe creating a price guide isn't such a bad idea after all.

Had the thieves stolen my collection, I'm sure that I would never find most of those games again. I thought about which ones I would miss the most—**Adventure**, **Pitfall**, **Yar's Revenge**, **Maze Craze**, **Casino**, and **Robot Tank** came to mind. Irreplaceable? Not really. I realized my favorite games were all very common, and that I could probably replace them all from fellow collectors for a few bucks apiece.

My fiancée and I are OK, which is the most important thing. I wouldn't have wanted either of us to surprise a thief armed with a crowbar and who knows what else. Now that our initial anger and fear have subsided, thanks partially to a newly-installed alarm system, we have put things back together again. Our house once again feels like a home. As it turns out, the thieves took nothing that cannot be replaced. The irreplaceable items, like my family photo albums and journals, were left behind by the thieves. My most valued possessions were not worth anything to them. Although I love to collect rare and unusual cartridges, it turns out that the real value of my collection is really sentimental.

Or course, the thieves did steal my Atari Lynx game system, but that's another story...

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