SYZYGY
MAGAZINE
(Pronounced sĭz' ə-jē)

Spring 2001

FREEFALL 3050 A.D.
THE MOST ORIGINAL
GAME IN YEARS!

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
WITH CREATOR
TONY TAKOUSHI

TEMPEST 3000
PHANTASY STAR ONLINE

THE TOP 12
APPLE][GAMES
OF ALL TIME

STILL THE
ONLY
HARDCORE,
ECLECTIC
VIDEO GAME
MAGAZINE

INTERVIEWING:
MIDWAY'S ED LOGG,
NAMCO'S DAVE AKERS,
THE UFC'S JEREMY HORN!

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(Pronounced sĭz' ə-jē)

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SYZYGY MAGAZINE
(Pronounced siz' ə-jē)

SqUeal likE a sTuCk PiG

Squeal like a Stuck Mike

Syzygy: The title of your letters section really sucks.

Michael Tosner

<sigh> Then suggest a better one! Like I advised everyone last issue, foo.

Bret is Pleased

I've received two issues of Syzygy, and I'm very pleased. Thanks, and I look forward to reading these and future issues.

Bret Pehrson

That's interesting, because coincidentally enough, we aim to please!

Addicted to UT

JWC, I totally blame you for addicting me to to Unreal Tournament! I play it when I should be working and studying, now! I tried to play on your server, but my PING was no good. Why do you only play Capture the Flag?

Jeff Sumner

Because CTF gives you a goal, requires teamwork and is much more satisfying. Also, I am addicted to the teleporter! Once this happens you can't play DM, because you will constantly try and teleport to no avail.

Capture the Server

JWC, I looked up your Unreal ID and checked out your server you play on (unreal.cfl.rr.com). You were owning. I noticed many of the {MI} people playing on that server. I've seen them on the OGL. Also, I noticed you are usually ranked high in the CTF weekly rankings. Is that your goal? To be the best? Also, is |sZ| registered in the OGL? I couldn't find you in there. Sorry for all the questions!

James Preston

It's now: unrealctf.cfl.rr.com (aka. CFL). Yes, it has become quite a popular server. |sZ| may be registered soon. I've been too busy to recruit people and practice and register. I just like to

play! No, I don't pay attention to the ratings. Actually, there are no Capture the Flag ratings. They rate you like you are playing DeathMatch, not CTF. For instance, your team can win the game, you can personally get all the flag captures for your team, and **lose** *rating points. It's a joke. However, it is cool to check out all the stats, especially after a really bloody game! {MI} is a decent clan, but nothing special. Really, the only people in {MI} that give me any trouble at all are Hisma and WildP. Also, you'll notice that lots of well-known players like mECHsLAVE, F}{Spitfire}{F, and members of the [DHI] and {318} clans have started popping in CFL and the GameSpy servers. Oh yeah, and I'm still wondering who those pranksters |sZ|JWD and |sZ|JWE were. They joined the CFL server a month or so ago. I don't know if they were Syzygy readers or not, but they sure sucked.*

Wanted: Robotron

The interview with Jarvis was a very engaging read. I really want to get back into playing Robotron the way I did years ago. The only problem is, like you said, I can't play the true game on an emulator, because of the joystick problem. I've seen them listed for auction on eBay, and I can't afford to pay that much. Could you suggest something else?

Mark Bueno

Mark, yes there is one alternative that is cheap and tolerable. The PSX has an arcade joystick accessory. If you get the original Williams Arcade Classics cd and two of the joystick accessories, then turn the second one upside down and configure it to respond backwards, then you have Robotron controls! Nothing can substitute shaking the machine around and getting out of hand, but that's the next best thing. And I can assure you it beats the pants off any keyboard or gamepad. Also, check your local newspaper and arcades. Sometimes you can find and old Robotron cabinet converted to some other game, and then get just the parts off eBay at a reasonable price. As an added bonus, you get 10 bonus points towards arcade collector heaven whenever you re-covert a classic and save it's soul from an eternity in JAMMA hell.
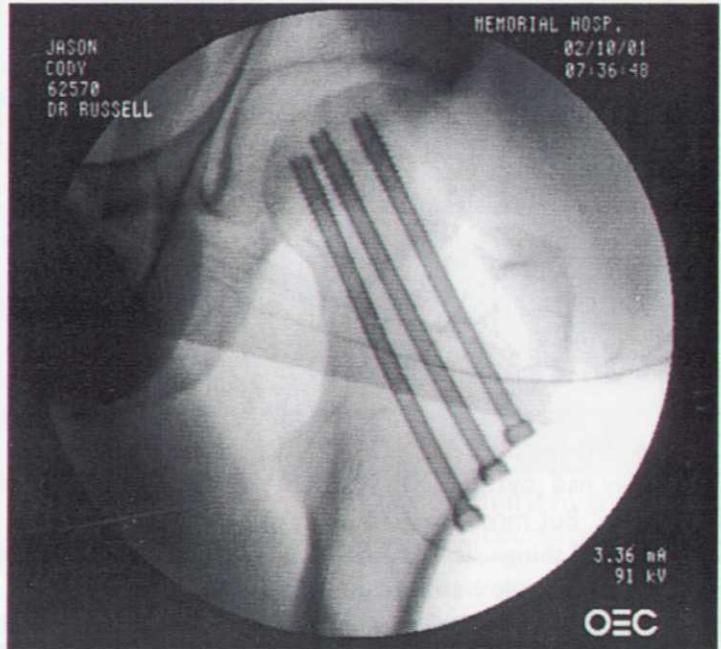
—REMAIN SILENT: *JayDubyaWounded*—

OK, let's get the gruesome stuff out of the way. On the evening of Feb. 8th, the lovable, huggable JayDoubleYouSea quickly became **JayDoubleYou Wounded** (which led to the slight production delays with this issue...agh!). While riding a skateboard downhill, rapidly, I lost my balance and connected with the pavement at a pace, and bizarre angle, sufficient to fracture both the radial bone in my left arm and, more seriously, the femur bone in my leg, just at the point where it attaches to the hip, causing JWC extreme discomfort. The picture is the result of my hip surgery and shows how the doctor bolted me back together like Frankenstein, so that I might re-calcify and once again terrorize the streets in *your* neighborhood! I could go into a whole monologue on hospital food, incompetent nurses, health insurance scams, and the wonder-drug morphine, but I just wanted to quickly let everyone know why I was MIA in the month of February. Of course, it takes a lot more than broken hips and doctor's orders to keep *Syzygy* from the presses! Now, onto games!

Yes, the inevitable happened: **R.I.P Dreamcast**. There's not much to say that wouldn't be an understatement or hasn't already been said. I'll just quickly say it's sad and very disappointing that a system like the Dreamcast and a company like Sega, who has continuously pushed the proverbial envelope of video game ideas and technology, loses out to Sony, a company that fell backwards into a huge portion of the market and, now that it's theirs, they haven't a clue what to do with it. Sega is now going to develop for the other systems. That's all well and good, but Sega hasn't been out of the Console Wars since I was in 7th grade. JWC must shed a tear and move on, with hope, that we haven't seen the last Sega hardware.

E³ is coming up. JWC and Exidy will be *all over those shuffleboard courts*.... err...I mean, we're going to be romping through those booths and talking more trash than pimps in a tiger-striped Caddy, standing out like roaches on a coconut cake. We're going to... (*you get the idea*). It's gonna rock! We will be there! Watch out! Bring on the game babes!

Before I run out of room, let me quickly call for an end to a couple of witticisms which have run completely amok and gotten out of the hands of the elite and are currently constantly being overused by lamers. **"All your base are belong to us,"** "All your base belongs to us," "All your <insert object here> belongs to us", and all derivatives are officially *over*! *It's over, Johnny*. Also, please refrain from the use of "l33t," "l33+," and any similar alphanumeric combinations, which symbolize something that JWC is and what the rest of you will endlessly strive to be with a certain futility. Thanks.

In *Remain Silent* last issue, I said I would tear up certain software developers that I saw as doing nothing but taking advantage of licenses and continuously releasing garbage. Well, that theme is continued in the cover story later in this issue. Tony Takoushi is now an honorary Syzygyte. His new game **FreeFall 3050 A.D.** (a game which I've mentioned in our first and second issues) is so out-there and innovative that you won't love it immediately. But you will love the fact that you are playing something new. Something which is the passion of its creator. You know someone sweated for the game. Someone stayed awake for days on end making the game. You just know they did. And that, more than anything, is what we as gamers want. We want designers to use their noggin. To thumb their noses at marketing. To live for *the game*. To die for *the game*. To *crush* their enemies. To...*win* the tournament.

*um...yes, I am still on pain killers... I just popped a few Lortabs.

Dave Akers interview

There's no need to preface this interview with a capsule history of Mr. Akers—we're about to cover it all! Sit back and let us take you back to the days of the early-80's console debacles, through the ups and downs of Atari Games, Inc., all the way to present day at Namco. A classic Syzygy interview! Just like you would expect! Carpe digamesem!

JWC: *What was your first job in video games?*

Dave Akers: My first job was at Mattel Electronics in 1982.

JWC: *How did you find your way there?*

DA: Well, I was working at Hughes Aircraft, about a mile away. We were doing laser weapon systems. We occasionally had joysticks, and we were shooting at things there. But mostly we did paperwork and documentation and things. It was a sort of a working government contract. It wasn't that much fun. But I picked up an issue of Electronic Games Magazine, and I realized people were actually getting paid to write video games. And then the people at Mattel Electronics were advertising for jobs.

I went over and gave them my resume and talked to some people. And a week later I got a rejection letter saying, "Thanks for coming, but some really talented people came along and we had to hire them instead."

And then a week after that, they called and asked me for my resume.

JWC: *[laughter]*

DA: I should have realized right then how disorganized they were, but I sent them another copy, interviewed again, and I got the job.

JWC: *So what did you start off doing there?*

DA: Well, what they did at that time...they had a simple little game called "Killer Tomatoes." And essentially it had a 'running man' on the screen and a 'blinking square.' And if he touched the square then he would change colors. So it had enough code so that you could see how to animate a character and how to move it, how to read the controls and collide with things. So everyone's first assignment when they came to Mattel was to modify this and try to make it into something interesting.

So I played with that and came up with a game called "Time Bombs," where these little bombs were bouncing around the screen and you would have to touch them all to stop them from ticking before time ran out or else you would blow up. And they liked what they saw and said to keep working and develop it

Dave (pictured below, *courtesy Dave Akers*) helped create the infamous Atari KLAX!

further. But then they announced they were getting into 2600 games, and so I got interested in that and went over to the 2600 group. And they were doing ports of Intellivision games, so I worked on Star Strike.

JWC: *The Intellivision was more powerful than the 2600... what was the process like in console-to-weaker-console porting?*

DA: Well they'd give us a list of games, and we would say "We can do this. We can't do this, though." And the game I picked was Star Strike, because I thought we could do that on the 2600...the trench effect. So we got the trench done and looked at what resources we had left, and with that we got the essence of the gameplay in. It was really good looking for the time, for a 2600 game.

JWC: *We've all heard about the 2600 guys making lots of money from royalties, because of the huge 2600 market share. What was the salary set-up at Mattel? Did you guys make royalties off the 2600 releases?*

DA: Eventually we did. When we first started, we had no royalties and they wouldn't let you put your name in the game anywhere...

JWC: *No credits anywhere...*

DA: No credit. Even when TV Guide came in and interviewed us, they made them change our names to conceal the identity of the designers.

JWC: *What was the purpose of that?*

DA: They were afraid companies would hire us away or something.

JWC: *They couldn't they just sign you to a contract, rather than trying to hide you guys away and change names and conceal everything?*

DA: Guess not *[laughter]*.

JWC: *Yeah, I've never understood all that secrecy...just sign you to a no-compete and then give you credit...*

DA: Yes, but I guess it was easier just to say, "You must not say who you are!" It was at the end of the 2 years I was there where we complained enough so that they

DA(cont.): eventually gave us credit and came up with an optional royalty thing that was only like a couple cents per cartridge. But no, no one ever got rich working at Mattel Electronics [*laughter*].

JWC: *The first coin-op to give credit was Skelly's Reactor in 1982. So they were a little behind there at Mattel...*

DA: Yeah, there were independent people that got credit, right. The people that left Atari to form Activision immediately said, "Look we wrote all these games."

JWC: *[laughter] Made a point to put it on the front of the cartridge itself!*

DA: Right. And then the people from Mattel that left and started Imagic, and that was the same kind of thing.

JWC: *You've mentioned starting the reverse engineering of the ColecoVision. What was involved with that?*

DA: Well, at Mattel, the hardware guys got a ColecoVision in right after it came out, and they were figuring out how it worked. And they dumped out the contents of the ROM, like 4K for library routines. So they said, "What do we do with this? We don't want to read code."

And so I told them to let me look at it, and I figured out the routines and wrote the old "Killer Tomatoes" thing for the ColecoVision and burnt it into a ROM and put it into the ColecVision and it worked! Eventually they purchased more complete reverse engineering, but I got it all started.

JWC: *So around that time I guess the crash happened, right?*

DA: Yeah, in 1984, they laid everybody off. They had had a series of layoffs before, but eventually they laid everyone off, closed Mattel Electronics and sold the rights to the Intellivision to some marketing guy.

And there wasn't much going on in video games at that time. So I went to Oregon, to a company called Graphics Software Systems. They were doing graphics for the PC. They wanted to become the Microsoft of PC graphics, you know, because this was before Windows. Eventually, of course, it turned out Microsoft wanted to become the Microsoft of PC graphics, and then this company kind of mutated into other things. But I got to play around with PC graphics there, so it was a good experience.

JWC: *So the next games you did were at Atari Games, right?*

DA: Yeah, and it was great to go there. Because they still had all these industry greats there. Dave Theurer had done Missile Command and Tempest, and he was there. John Salwitz and Dave Ralston were there doing Cyberball, and they had just done Paperboy. Ed Rotberg was there. Bob Flanagan, who had done Marble Madness, was there. So it was like hanging out with the greats!

JWC: *We've heard about the way-out atmosphere of the late 70's Atari coin-op. What was the breakdown of work and brainstorming like at a typical day in the late 80's?*

DA: Well, you would do a lot of brainstorming and come up with different ideas, and talk to marketing and see what the market would take. And then eventually turn that into a

Dave running with 80,000 others in the "Bay to Breakers" race in California. *Courtesy Dave Akers.*

proposal on paper, work on it for a month and try to come up with a prototype of gameplay. And if it got approved, they would set deadlines to look at what you had every 2 or 3 months, and you were on your own in the meantime to do whatever you needed to do to make a game. They actually gave you a lot of rope, so it was a comfortable atmosphere.

JWC: *What was your first game there?*

DA: My first game was Escape From the Planet of the Robot Monsters, which had been going on for about a year with Bonnie Smithson and Mark Pierce. They were developing it already.

JWC: *So they came up with that sick, underground comic book name?*

DA: Yeah, you'd have to ask Mark how he came up with the name. He did Dark Castle for the Mac, and then they hired him. Then he and Bonnie made Roadblasters, which was really successful, so I guess they went with whatever he wanted. A kind of 50's science fiction theme.

JWC: *With a Gauntlet influence...*

DA: Right, essentially a Gauntlet-type gameplay with a 50's sci-fi theme.

JWC: *Actually many of those late-80's Jamma side-scrollers used that same 'Robot Monsters' perspective...*

DA: Yeah, and when they finally did Gauntlet Legends we looked at it and said, "Yeah, this is what we were trying to do!" [*laughter*]

JWC: *[laughter] What was next? Klax?*

DA: Next was...Klax. Yes.

JWC: *I envision Klax going through a million different perspective and shape changes before you guys nailed what you wanted....*

DA: No, actually it was surprising. Robot Monsters took 2 years. And it was modestly successful. And meanwhile there was another team that did the arcade version of Tetris. And they only spent 6 or 9 months on it. And it sold 10,000 machines, at least. It was really successful. So Mark and I said, "Hey, let's do a puzzle game!" [laughter]

JWC: [laughter] Right.

DA: So, we played all the puzzle games we could find. Mark just started drawing pictures of all these primary shapes. He pasted those up around his office. We put those all on the screen with no idea about what gameplay would be. And one day, the idea hit for Klax. Then he was getting ready to go on vacation for 3 weeks. So over the weekend I sat down with Amiga BASIC and made a simple prototype for Klax. I brought it in on Monday, and we played it a little. And he drew a set of graphics. And then he went on vacation for 3 weeks. While he was gone, I got the thing working on old Robot Monsters hardware, and by the time he got back, people were lining up in the lab to play the game! We had to immediately rig up another machine for people to play, so we could get work done! It was a lot of fun, because whenever we had a new idea, we could throw it on the other machine and we would have instant feedback from the guys playing it.

JWC: Ready-made beta testers...

DA: Yeah, and it helped us, because originally the game went on forever. And we didn't know how to set up goals. Should it be 'How many Klax's'? Should it be timed? This or that? And we put them all on the test machine to see which one people liked, and it turns out what they liked was having all the different goals!

JWC: So you guys threw all that stuff on for them to pick and they picked them all... and you just left it as it was?

DA: Yeah, they said, "Don't change it."

JWC: How did you get the name?

DA: We wanted to pieces to tumble down and make a "click-clack" sound, so we turned that into Klax.

JWC: It's ported on everything in the late 80's, early 90's. In general, what did you think of them?

DA: Actually, I did the Sega Genesis version of Klax. And we didn't know they had already sold Namco the rights to the Genesis version in Japan. They did a version for release on the Japanese Genesis.

JWC: The Megadrive?

DA: Yeah.

JWC: So that's a completely different version?

DA: Yeah, they wrote their version and sold it in Japan, and we sold our version in the U.S.

JWC: I've never seen it. Were there any major differences?

DA: Yeah, they had some nice things. They had a head-to-head thing. In our version, we just took the arcade and ported it over. Actually the 68000 was the same processor in the Genesis as in our arcade board.

JWC: The Genesis was probably more powerful than your board, too!

DA: It was! It was more powerful than our arcade board. Atari would custom make a board for almost every arcade game, and leave out parts if you didn't need them. Things like that.

JWC: OK, and I know what game you did next, because I see at least a couple at every arcade auction it seems. Road Riot! So I know it was big for awhile. Talk about that game, because it had some interesting features...with the head-to-head stuff...

DA: It did really well. I did that with Dennis Harper. He had done Hydra. He had the code for the "growth motion" for driving through a river. So I told him if you can get a system for doing hills, we can do a driving game like that. So he came up with the hills. Because, you know, it's all fake. There's no 3D at all in the game. Essentially you have a drawing of a triangle on the screen that represents "the road". And you can independently scroll each horizontal line in the triangle to make it look like the road is curving to the left or right. And you can skip lines in the triangle to make it look like you're going uphill or downhill. It was really weird. He came up with the code for that. So he, Mark Pierce and I did Road Riot. And we actually got a patent on what we called "Rump Thump."

JWC: The solenoid in the seat when you got shot!

DA: Yeah, we patented that!

JWC: What were the actual terms of the patent, because Afterburner came out after that with that feedback when your plane was hit...?

DA: No, it was "Physical feedback over a network." So this was the other person. You're shaking the other person.

JWC: I see, a two-player thing only.

DA: Right. And actually we prototyped a sequel for Road Riot, called Road Riot's Revenge. Before that we were looking into doing games with MPEG and streaming real video and that stuff. At the time MPEG compression cost like $100 a minute. So we weren't ready for that yet. Meanwhile, Ed Logg and Bob Flanagan did Space Lords around this time. Same type of hardware as Road Riot, only more powerful. They put Space Lords out on test in San Jose and it did really, really well. So they made a whole bunch of these machines, put it all over the country and some places it did great and other places it did lousy. So they had overproduced it, basically, had a bunch of boards left over and were set to lose alot of money. So, Mark Pierce and I said "We can make a new version of Road Riot with more features, really fast, and convert all of those unsold Space Lords boards into Road Riot II boards." We worked really hard and got it done, but it was at the time where Ridge Racer was coming out, and they were showing previews of Daytona USA, all these *real* 3D games were coming out.

JWC: *So it came a little too late...*

DA: Yeah, a little too late.

JWC: *What was your next game?*

DA: Beavis and Butthead.

JWC: *Oh yeah. How many of those were made?*

DA: A dozen, maybe? [*laughter*] I don't know. Not many.

JWC: *Tell me about that game and how it happened, because I haven't played it. I was a mild fan of the cartoon, though. Before it got way too popular and stupid.*

DA: Right, Beavis and Butthead were really hot when they first came out and they said, "Let's make a game!" Unfortunately they didn't ask the arcade owners, who as it turns out weren't too crazy about it. But we wanted to try it, so we got the license with MTV and licensed the 3DO hardware, because it was supposed to be 3D. And we wanted these 2D cartoon characters in a 3D world. It eventually got very elaborate and very 3D, wandering though this world, fighting various characters, and in the background, making their comments and everything. The old Ball and Paddle thing was one of your weapons. And all kinds of really freaky bad guys.

JWC: *Hmm, why do you think the arcades rejected it?*

DA: Parents would complain about it. And the arcade owners didn't want it. I think all the kids that played it liked it, though.

JWC: *After that first wave of popularity they started to get negative media....*

DA: Yeah, they were trying to push the limits and they went a little too far [*laughter*]. Beavis and Butthead pushed a bowling ball off a building and so some kids did that. They started a fire and then some kids did that and said, "Beavis and Butthead made me do it!"

JWC: *[laughter]*

DA: And then they put restrictions on what we could do with the arcade game. They told us to make it edgy and then they would say, "No, but you can't do that." It took a long time to do because of licensing.

JWC: *They had to approve every use of the character at every stage, right?*

DA: Yeah, exactly.

JWC: *Every generation gets a little more tolerant of that stuff, because South Park is all over arcades...*

DA: Yeah, they do. It seems that way, anyway.

JWC: *Oh yeah, I almost forgot. Tell me about the California Speed project. Because I was a huge fan of San Francisco Rush at the time, and I was very excited when I saw that new, blue cabinet sitting beside Rush one day.*

DA: Well, we got Steve Ritchie involved—

JWC: *The pinball dude?*

DA: Yep. See, Midway bought Atari Games at that time. We had a bunch of games that didn't do well, and they were doing very well. You know, they had done Mortal Kombat and Cruis'n... all those, so they were doing well. So they bought us, and Steve Ritchie came out and headed up our team. We first experimented with doing a

One of only a few Beavis and Butthead prototypes known to exist. *Courtesy Scott Evans.*

game on the PSX hardware I think because Ridge Racer looked so good, but when you put it on a big screen, you could see all the flaws in the PSX. They did it for Tekken, but it didn't work for a racing game. So Ritchie came out and we got the 3Dfx hardware. He was good friends with Eugene Jarvis who had done Cruis'n. So Ritchie wanted to do something that was as easy to drive as Cruis'n, as fun as Cruis'n, and use the 3Dfx hardware so it could look better.

JWC: *I was too big of a Rush fan to jump right into it, actually. I probably would have loved it, if I wasn't used to the Rush handling and feedback and all.*

DA: Rush was fun, but it was more serious and hardcore. At that time, the Rush model was very touchy and hard to handle. We wanted to do something that would look as good as Rush but be easier and more accessible for younger, more casual players.

JWC: *How long did it take? I remember all the detail in the game, like when you were driving through the shopping malls and everything...*

DA: I think like a year and a half. But we spent almost a year before that trying the Playstation stuff. So we had learned a lot about doing 3D driving games from there. So that gave us a head start.

JWC: *Did you leave Atari Games after that?*

DA: Yeah, the arcade market got kind of soft around that time. And so I went to Namco in February of last year, and I have been there every since.

JWC: *So what are you working on?*

DA: Playstation 2 games.

JWC: *Let me guess, you can't tell me which games...*

DA: [laughter] I can't tell anyone. They're still unannounced!

JWC: [laughter] *I hear ya... so did you save any of your old prototypes or games or anything?*

DA: No, I just haven't had the room. I did have a prototype of a Atari 2600 keyboard for awhile, but I eventually threw it out.

JWC: [laughter] *You're killing me...*

DA: You only have so much room for things!

JWC: *OK, what were some of your favorites in the classic era?*

DA: All the Eugene Jarvis games: Stargate, Defender and Robotron. Those are the ones I got really enthusiastic about. Even Blaster, although it didn't do so well. And also, I loved Gorf! One of the few games at the time where you were doing a different thing every level. So, if you were good, you could play five different games for a quarter. Hmm... also, a game called Targ. I don't know if you remember that one...

JWC: [laughter] *I remember Targ.*

DA: It was really simple, but it was fun. Also, a really ugly game called Kaos.

JWC: *Hmm...not sure I know that one. Who released it?*

DA: Gameplan. It looked bad even then, in 1981. It looked like an Odyssey² game.

JWC: *I don't remember it. I'll look on MAME.*

DA: That reminds me, around that time, I came up with an idea for a game called "Sparkz." It was a Tetris-type game. One side was positive and the other negative, and you would try and make a connection from the left side of the screen to the right. And another team actually programmed the game and it got as far as test. And you can get that on MAME, too.

JWC: *That was at Atari Games?*

DA: Yeah.

JWC: *So, what about now? What do you play nowadays?*

DA: I play Banjo, and those type of games.

JWC: *3D platformers?*

DA: Yeah, 3D platforming games and real-time strategy games. Age of Empires and all that.

JWC: *Alright Dave, I'll let you get back to secretly programming the mysterious Playstation 2 games.*

DA: Thank you! I enjoyed it.

We would like to thank Dave for taking the time to talk to us. He remains connected to the classic gaming scene, appearing as a keynote speaker at last year's Classic Gaming Expo in Las Vegas. Hopefully we will see him there this year, too!

Atari Games sell sheets for Dave's driving games: Road Riot and California Speed.

The top twelve Apple][games

BY EVIL EXIDY

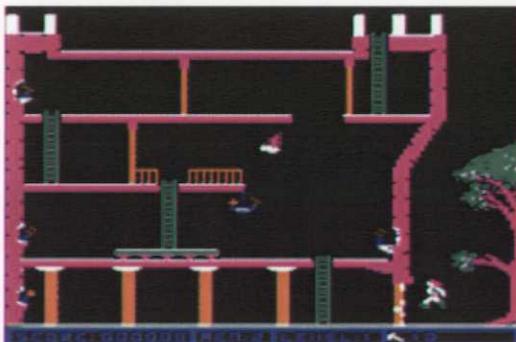## 12. Crypt of Media

Crypt of Medea by Sir-Tech (1983)

This was a horror graphics adventure game, with shock value galore. It was recommended for mature players only, because of the extreme graphics and violence. The goal was simple: escape from the crypt without being killed! Sound easy? Hell no! There were tons of puzzles, traps, monsters, diseases and other disgusting ways to die. I would compare this to todays games like Resident Evil, Nightmare Creatures, Evil Dead, etc. Basically, it was the same type of game as Destiny and Transylvania, however, the violence was so extreme and the graphics so gory that it really freaked me out. This was one of the few games at the time which supported the Mockingboard (which was a sound card for the Apple][).
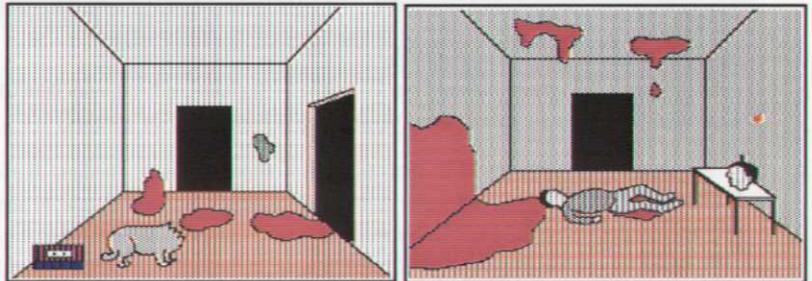
11. Conan

Conan by Datasoft (1984)

Action adventure game starring the famous Conan the barbarian. In this game, he jumps, back flips and throws boomerang swords thru many treacherous maps. Believe it or not, this game actually had a plot! You must enter the castle and defeat the evil Volta. Along the way, you can pick up magic gems, keys and a Avian Ally who can help you through the levels of the castle. You will fight many monsters, bats, and evil naughty creatures. One interesting thing for a game with so much happening on the screen is that when you progressed to the next level, you usually saw the whole thing at once. These types of games were great. Sometimes it's neat to be so small and maneuverable.

10. Destiny

Destiny (1984)

This was yet another graphics adventure game on the Apple II. This was easily one of the most innovative games of its time. It actually created random monsters on the screen which would actually get wounded, lose limbs and eventually die of blood loss, decapitation or wounds. Destiny was controlled not only by typing in text, but by a joystick also! You basically travel through a dark, medieval world where you fight creatures, steal items, build your character and ultimately kill destroy all evil and become the hero.
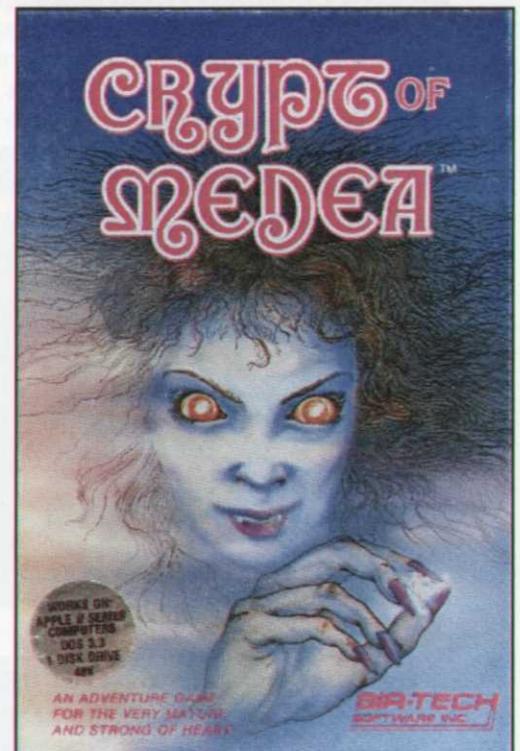
9. Transylvania

Transylvania by Pengiun (1982)
High-res adventure similar to Zork with nice graphics and some great sounds! YES! This is probably a game that influenced MYST. Basically it's the same as Zork, in that you have to figure out puzzles, riddles and find your way through mazes, etc. The best part of this game was the detailed graphics and beautifully detailed creatures. This game was created on a program called The Graphics Magician, which was basically a 'construction set', where you can create your own adventures or games.
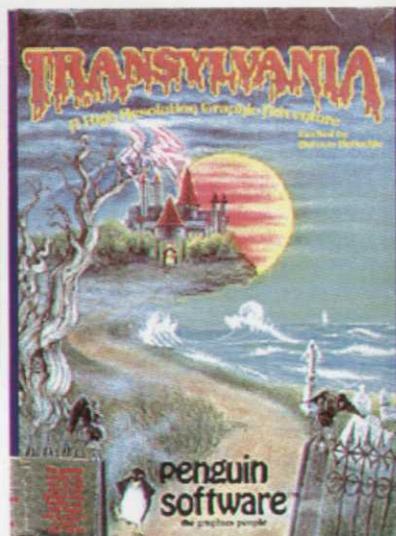
8. Boulderdash

Boulderdash by Firststar (1984)
Fun, fun, fun!!!!! I love this freakin' game! This is an action/puzzle game based on an Ant called Rockford. He basically finds himself stuck in a maze and has to find his way out of it. He has to collect a certain amount of jewels that are scattered all over the maze and smash the enemies by dropping boulders on them. This sometimes creates more jewels for Rockford to pick up. Game had excellent sounds, graphics, and the reply value was really high. I know this game was eventually released on the C64, Sprectum, IBM, Atari, Amiga, Nintendo and the arcade.

7. Zork

Zork (series) Infocom (1981)
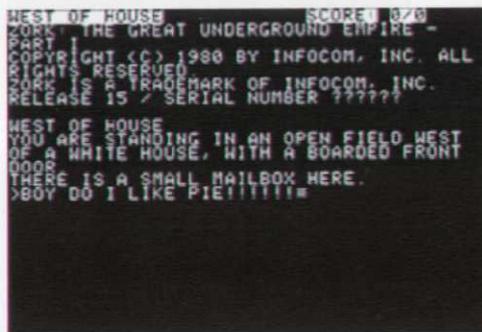Ahhh!! Good old Apple II text adventure! And easily one of the best of all time. Its language was based on the Infocom Z-interpreter which allowed Infocom to release many games in this format (others games included Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy, Witness, Suspended, Planetfall and others). This series of adventure games did not have any graphics, sounds or speech - JUST PURE TEXT. In Zork, you were basically placed in a mythological world of magic, monsters and pure adventure. The maps were very intricate and difficult to figure out, I actually never beat any of their games, but I played the hell out of them! Fighting Trolls, Goblins and other creatures was amusing and fun. I know that the Zork series never finished, they still continue to release them now and then; however, they are no longer text adventure games.
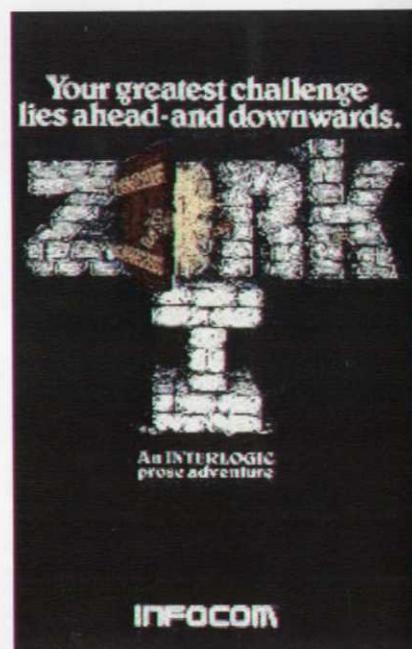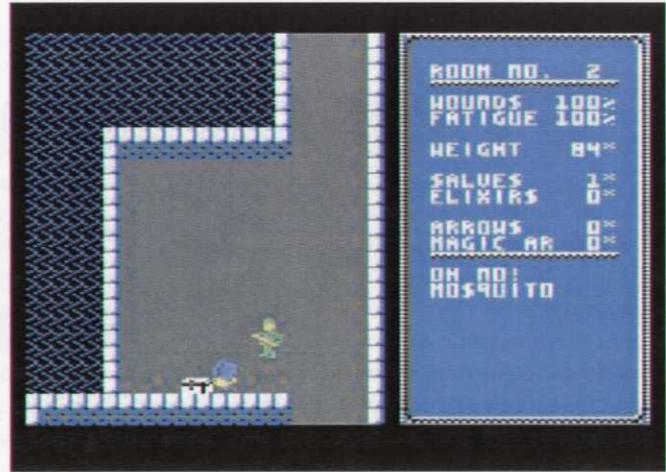
6. Temple of Apshai

Temple of Apshai (trilogy) by Epyx (1979/1980)

This is one of the oldest role-playing games on the Apple II system. It was true to its definition of being role-playing game. This game had pretty rough graphics (originally), however, it was later released (1985) using the HGR2 graphics (double high res). There are several other games released under the Apshai series: Morloc's Tower, Sword of Fargoal, The Datestones of Ryn, Hellfire Warrior, Gateway to Apshai, Curse of Ra, Upper Reaches of Apshai, and the Temple of Apshai Trilogy. The controls on the game were tough and very confusing. Basically, each letter on the keyboard stood for something, so playing without the manual was a complete pain the ass. The interesting part of the game was the map detail, dozens of monsters and items and an in-depth storyline.

5. Archon

Archon by Electronic Arts (1983)

This game looks like a board game (ie: checkers), however, it is completely different. In Archon, the light side and dark side fight over the control of the board. Each side has 18 vicious mythological creators which have their powers and weaknesses. Both sides have different characters, however, the powers are equal. Basically, when two creatures of opposing teams land on the same block, all hell breaks loose. The game zooms in on the block, and a battlefield is created. This is real-time fighting one-on-one. Whoever wins the battle, takes the block. It's battle chess on steroids. I know there is a new version of this available on the PC, please check this link: http://xarchon.seul.org.

4. Rescue Rangers

Rescue Raiders by Sir-Tech (1984)

A combination real-time strategy game and 2D shooter. The game is very fun and interesting to play. Basically you have to build an army that has be powerful enough to travel to the from the right side of the battlefield to the left side without being destroyed. Sounds very simple, however, you cannot control the army! Only the helicopter. The actual battlefield has many hazards and a very deadly and suicidal army.

3. Wizardry

Wizardry I - IV by Sir-Tech (1981 - 1988)

A definite MUST for any RPG veterans; Sir-Tech released probably the most in depth D&D style role-playing game of its time! This game was so in depth, it actually took me over 9 months to beat it, and that was playing it several hours a day! I was truly hooked on this game. The graphics were excellent at the time, and the game play was very addictive. Wizardry is a 3d graphical adventure based on a magical world, a place where the weak perish and the strong only get stronger. In this game, you must enter a dungeon (with your party) and kill your way down to the deepest/darkest levels in search of experience, gold, magic spells, weapons and armor. Building your characters to fight phenomenal odds (sometimes 100-300 skeleton men, etc). Diversifying your party was crucial and building strong fighters, mages and wizards was a must to beat the game. Wizardry is a true role-playing masterpiece.
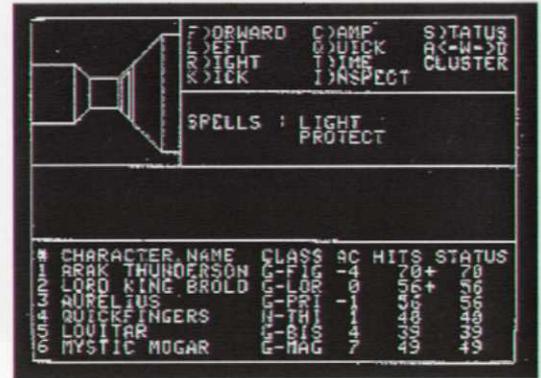
2. Ultima

Ultima I - IV by Sierra / Origin (1980-1985)

Easily one of the best D&D role-playing games of the 80's. At the time there were a ton of Dungeons and Dragons-type games on the computer, however, they were very lame or lacked in graphics, sounds or game play. Not Ultima! It was one of the best looking, sounding and user-friendly games of its time. This game let you choose your characters, pick their attributes, race and gender then slammed you in the middle of a large, beautiful yet dangerous world filled with dungeons, castles and monsters. This was really 2 games in 1- each game came with several quests and each quest would take you to different regions of the well-designed world. One part of the game was a 'top' view while the dungeons were in 3D (ie: Wizardry). This game was true to the term role-playing and made it fun and exciting at the same time.

1. Wolfenstein

Castle Wolfenstein by Muse (1981)

Yes, before Wolfenstein 3d, there was Castle Wolfenstein! This is one the most innovative games of its time, it contained digitized voices which gave the game realism and an edge above and beyond any other game of its time. In this game you are an American soldier placed in a Nazi castle, where you have to find the secret plans and escape without being spotted or killed. You had to search from room to oom, opening chests and picking up items such as grenades, bullets, bulletproof vests, uniforms, etc. Watch out for the SS, they can spot you wearing a uniform and hunt you down like a dirty dog.

Beyond Wolfenstein by Muse (1982)

Although this wasn't as great as the original, Beyond Wolfenstein added a lot of new excellent features to the game. You were now capable of being wounded, changing weapons, and you were required to learn pass codes so you can travel safely from room to room. Each level had a secret pass code, if you failed to show the correct pass the guards they would sound the alarm - informing the base of your presence. The object of Beyond Wolfenstein was to locate the bomb and place it in Hitlers Bunker, killing him and all his officers - then escaping from the castle. The speech was heavily improved in this sequel.
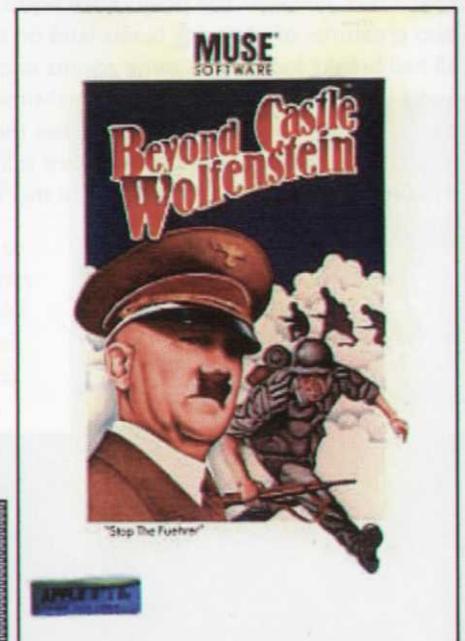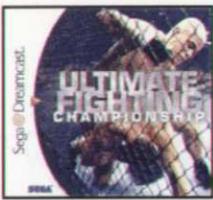
The UFC's JEREMY HORN on the UFC's video game

The CGI version of Jeremy from the UFC game!

We would like to thank Syzygy friend Josh Hedges of UFighting.com for conducting the interview. Visit their website for more fighter interviews!

Jeremy battling in the Octagon, getting both Eugene Jackson (*above*) and Jason Godsey (*below*) to tap-out from armbars.

UFighting.com(Josh Hedges): *I understand you like video games...*

Jeremy Horn: [*laughing*] Yes, I do.

UF: *What are some of your favorites that you're playing right now?*

JH: I play a lot of the computer games. A lot of the role-playing games, stuff like that.

UF: *Have you bought a Playstation 2 yet?*

JH: No. I bought a Dreamcast when it first came out and I only have two games on it. I'm really picky about the games that I play, so I want to wait on getting a Playstation 2 because I don't know if there's going to be any games that I like. I don't see paying $400 for a system and then get one game that I like.

UF: *That's exactly how I am. I bought the Dreamcast when it first came out and have only found a few games that I enjoy.*

JH: Yep, I've got Ready to Rumble Boxing and the UFC game. Those are the only two I've found that were worth playing.

UF: *What do you think about the UFC game as far as what they did with your character? Do you like it? Do you think they did a good job representing you?*

JH: No, not really. It doesn't really fight anything like me. If they had made it like me, they would've made it cower in fear every time standing up. But, you know, they did the best they could. They tried to make all the characters unique. And if they tried to make the characters too realistic, then nobody would want to play certain characters. You know, there are some guys out there that are great wrestlers, but can't throw punches and can't use submissions, so who wants to be them? So, they tried to make the characters somewhat even; give all of them some punching, and all of them some submissions. So, they did away with the realism in the game. You see the Kevin Randleman character kicking people in the head, and that kind of takes a little bit away from it. But, they had to do it to keep it relative to the game and make all the characters fun to play. Overall, I think they did a good job with it.
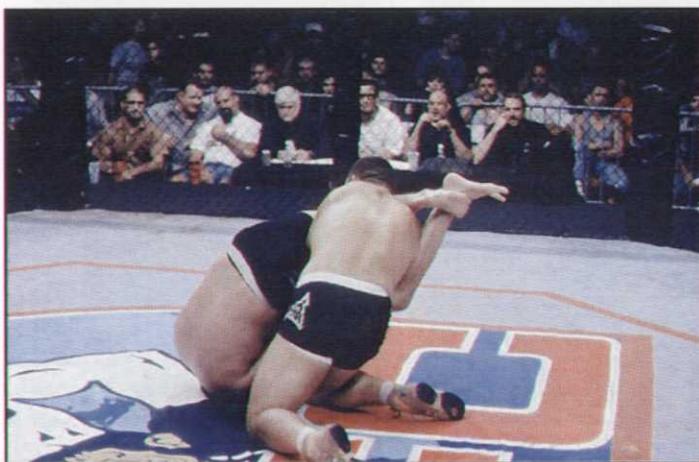
PHANTASY STAR™ ONLINE

ファンタシースターオンライン

Amidst all the turmoil in Sega's camp these days, a game is released which softens even the hardened heart of JWC when it comes to RPGs. Phantasy Star Online. And oh what a game it is.

When I like a game, I like to get the bad stuff out of the way right away. So, let's get to it. The bad part of this game is that it's an RPG. Plain and simple. It takes steps to stray from the straight RPG format, which is what makes this game enjoyable and not a Final Fantasy disaster. But the real-time combat in this game, while nice and about a million times better than any Final Fantasy combat, is still flawed with RPGness. I would like to know why when I swing my sword through a bear's heard I am told that it was a MISS. For God's sake, people, make the bear's head move around my sword. Make the bear dodge. Give it some AI and require me to time an attack. But don't let me watch the sword swing through its head and tell me it was a MISS. Please, Sonic Team. Go sit in the corner.

The other problem, but one which you get used to quickly, is the awkward camera. You can control the camera with the trigger buttons, so it's not a huge problem. But often you will find yourself caught in a tight spot, struggling to control an awkward camera, instead of changing your weapon or working into a better striking position. It adversely affects gameplay. Something a camera should never do in a game. So, it loses a few points for that. But the good news is...well, onto the good news.

The graphics in this game are basically unrivaled on the DC. As a matter of fact, I can't think of any PS2 game which has more lush, detailed backgrounds and landscapes. Your character moves through this fantasy world fluidly and at times you will find yourself just turning around gazing at the environment. Also, you can create your character from a number of different molds, modeled to look however you would like. Customization is always nice in this type of game. You can customize the buttons on your controller to which ever formula suits you, as well. This is necessary because of the online play. The game keeps going while you switch weapons and the like. So you had better get the button situation tight as soon as possible.

Gigobooma
Attribute:Native
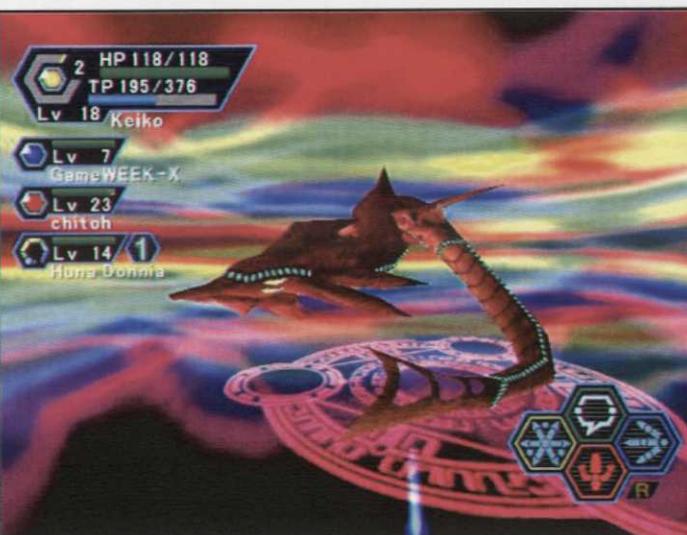
"Online" did I say? You betcha. Notice the last word in the title. You can play this game online like a champ. In fact, the offline mode seems like just a warm-up after you've played online. Once you log onto the network, you are ready to blast away in a game you started, or one that you chose to join in-progress. Once in the game mode, you can chat with other players in the game with ease, coming up with a strategy and coordinating the team.

With the new broadband hacks for your DC, you can be assured that playing this game online will be virtually lag-free. Get online, move your player's level up progressively. There isn't much more to it than that, actually. But even with the lack of a story (upon which RPG's usually lean far too heavily), the game is very enjoyable. If you're like JWC, and normally fall asleep dead when someone mentions an RPG, give this one a try. It isn't your deadbeat uncle's RPG.

Dontcha just hate...?

Brilliant flag campers...

Brilliant teleport campers...
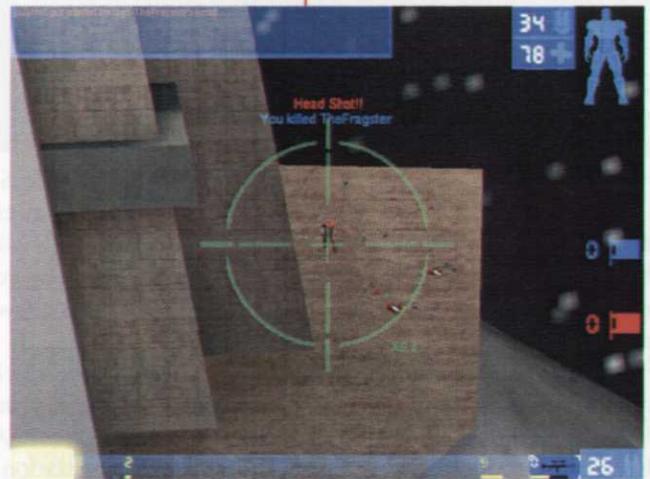
Door/slime campers...

Spawn killers...

Are you listening, Epic? Don't let the spawn killing happen in the next Unreal. Yes, yes...I know about the SE's and CE's, but most servers never adopt them. Thanks! Now get back to coding! We will not accept delays!

Warehouse Raid. Location: Unknown. The culprits: JWC and Evil Exidy.

These pictures were taken at a warehouse found by Exidy and JWC awhile ago. Some of you may have seen a few of these posted on the web. It's one of the best warehouses found in recent years. Notice JWC pulling a mint Blaster. Notice Exidy dragging out a mint Atari Black Widow. Notice the line of Star Wars machines JWC is posing out with. Notice the dust covered Tron cocktail, not to mention the Tron uprights! For crying out loud, fool, notice the Missile Command cockpit! So rare it bleeds! Less than 100 were ever made. If you like these warehouse stories and pics, let us know, and we'll print more. JWC and Exidy are the Raiders of the Lost Warehouse, you nutmeg sniffer.

TEMPEST 3000

Many of you know all about JWC and his old Tempest website: Superzapper.com. Yes, I am a lifetime Tempest fan and grew up loving the game. Tempest is how I was coereced into buying a Jaguar back in 1995, when the Yak gave us the updated version called Tempest 2000, which was the best update of a classic video game *ever*. And Tempest 3000 is the best update of a classic update ever. Of course, that isn't saying quite as much.

Let me get the bad part out of the way first. The part that will make the Nuon community squirm, people which never utter a breath of criticism directed towards anything Nuon related. They're busy yelling: "T3K is a killer app!" "T3K is a retina overlaod!" Indeed. And I do like the game. Actually, I enjoy it immensly. It's certainly one of the top ten console games you can currently buy. And it's *more than* worth the purchase price of $20.99. However, it has a certain visual distraction which just couldn't be overlooked, no matter how much I wanted to love this game. So let's get that out of the way quickly. It's called "The Blur."

There's a time and place for trippiness and blurriness. However, that time is most certainly *not* when I am trying to warp between webs and avoid spikers! To make a game more challenging by increasing the A.I. is one thing. To require an uncanny feat of timing and coordination to be executed by the player is also perfectly acceptable. But to have a blurred center of the screen during warp, so much so that seeing which section of the web a spiker is inhabiting is impossible, just plain sucks! It doesn't work. It's lame. One of the greatest thrills in the old game is the warping, hecticly switching back and forth between web sections to find a way through the spikers. Of course, in both the original and T2K, the spikers were crisp, clear and visible. You could see each

It is 100% impossible to determine how much of the spikers you are shooting away. *Uncool!*

The trippiness is wild, out of hand and bizarre, but somtimes the game never knows when to turn the trippiness down a notch and give you vision.

section of the spike as it was being blasted away. If it looked like you weren't going to get it completely blasted away, then you had to find another section to go through. The center in T3K has turned into a soupy, blurry mess that I just don't care for. You can't even see how much of the spike is being shot away! I also find it amazing that the same fans that criticized the N64 when it first came out, for its use of blurring to anti-alias, are the same ones that now seem to embellish and crave "The Blur." And I digress. Let's talk positives.

Ladies and gentleposers, the new option of "hovering" is superb. It replaces the "jump" of T2K and is a little harder and has more elements to consider, as your hovering "fuel" is limited. The player is required to ration his or her hovering "fuel" to maximize its use. You can't just blindly use the "hover" as you could the "jump" in T2K. Nice!

Another interesting feature is the bonus multiplier you get for not using your Superzapper. Each web that you don't use the Superzapper adds to the factor your bonus points are multiplied by. When you use the Superzapper, it resets to zero. The main use of this feature is racking up your bonus points for extra lives. This is much different than T2K or the original, in either of which not using your Superzapper meant you were a chump, because they didn't accumulate. If you didn't use them, they were lost. So, the conflict created in T3K is trying to stay alive without the Superzapper, in order to earn extra lives, versus using the Superzapper to *save* your life. Utterly brilliant.

The new enemies are also brilliant. There's something called a Rotor that can spin the web. There are the Super Spikers which can build spikes that extend beyond the top of the web. There's the Multi Spiker which can build a spike up to the rim of every single section of the web *at once*! There's the Frank Zapper which is similar to a normal Flipper enemy, except when you shoot this one it reflects your shot back at you, electrifying that web section. There's a Unmaker-Spider that can break apart the web and remake it into a different shape. *What?* Yes, the game is just full of this ridiculous mayhem. And there are many more wacky enemies, but I will let you find them for yourself, even if that means waiting (hoping) for the port of this game on a more mainstream console. Such was the case with many who drooled over T2K in 1995. However, those that never got a Jaguar system never got the true T2K. Tempest X for the PSX had many problems. And the PC version of T2K just looked nasty and not right to me. So, if all that I am writing makes you drool, and you could use a new DVD player, then by all means get a Nuon.

I don't believe there is a game on the market with more trippiness and wild, colorful fireworks. Sheep are bleating in the background as you warp between webs. Swirling galaxies fill the background. And of course, the soundtrack is phenomenal, just like T2K. In fact, many of the tunes are the same or similar to the T2K soundtrack.

You're probably sick of me mentioning T2K at this point. Believe me, I am as well. But one thing about this game is it proves what a masterpiece T2K was and that, in the video game world, improving on a masterpiece is a rare and difficult accomplishment. So, stop what you are doing and give the YaK a round of applause.
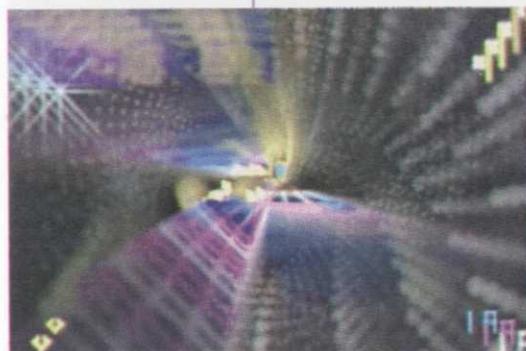
FreeFall 3050 A.D.

Freefall 3050 A.D., as you would expect from the title, is set in the future, and you play the game as a member of the "Drop Police." The theme of the game is that we have polluted and destroyed the Earth in such a manner that humans must take to the skies to survive. Like it so far? You should. It's the first game released by TAKS software, and a more interesting, original game hasn't been released in years.

The first thing that strikes you when you start the game is that you are actually falling. You aren't flying. You can't veer over and rest on a mountaintop. You can't stop and regroup and check out what's going on. You are *falling*...and unless you use your air-brakes, your drop speed will increase at a relasistic, exponential rate. Until you get used to this, it can be quite exhausting. There is no break, no rest , and no lull in the action. And the only thing which slows your descent, your air-brakes, have finite energy and must be used wisely. Don't start playing this game to mellow-out. Don't pop a top on a can of brewskie and snuggle your bum into your couch for a little relaxation. Don't expect to play this game half-arse and succeed. You need all available adrenalin glands and audio-visual receptors to be working overtime if you're to have any hope of mastering this game.

So, wait a second, JWC? This is sounding like the greatest video game in existence from your boasts!

Well, let's not get the egg ahead of the rooster. There are a couple minor problems, like the slight choppiness with the animation. The graphics are also not as smooth and refined as you might expect. But then you have to tell yourself, this isn't your 1.3 Ghz PC running a Hercules 64 MB video card. So, forget the 80000x 50000 resolution you have been playing Unreal Tournament at. This is after all, on the Nuon. So, it does extremely well with the media processor it has, but you aren't going to drop your jaw and stare. But really, none of that detracts from the gameplay, which is the most important. Only posers stop and stare at a game's graphics anyway! I'm bracing for these poser-starers who will most certainly be at every turn at E3. I will have to lay the smack-down a few times, I'm sure.

The one pseudo-problem that I encountered is the depth perception. It is a little tough when you start. But you quickly adjust to it. It remains fairly constant, so once you have the angles and depth figured out, then everything starts to click. And of course, in many of the missions, depth perception is everything. So make sure and get it figured out first.

Undoubtedly, the most fun in the game is navigating the small shafts and corridors (shown in the bottom-right screenshot). There's the feeling of having nowhere to go but down, and sometimes just having nowhere to go. This is where you are forced to master the use of the air brakes and the game's unique depth perception. It's extremely challenging and alot of fun. It's in some of these frustrating positions that your brain gets mean and cyncial and you curse at the TV screen, remarking about all the futuristic technology in 3050 and how strange it is that they can't give their law enforcement flying backpacks! Why must we fall?! Then you realize you are whining because you are getting your little rump whacked. So, you suck it up and keep falling. One thing this game confirms for me is the idiocy of skydiving. I can now cross it off my list of nutty, extreme things to try.

Unfortunately, I know most of you reading these two reviews don't own Nuon players, which is unfortunate, yet understandable. But as you will read in the next few pages, you won't need a Nuon player to enjoy the next TAKS game, and FreeFall itself may be making an appearance, in a more advanced form, on a mainstream system soon. Flip ahead and see for yourself, as I interview FreeFall's designer, Tony Takoushi, a gamer who will, single-handedly, instill in you a new hope for the future of gaming.

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TONY TAKOUSHI INTERVIEW

You havne't heard much about TAKS Sotware or the man behind their games, Tony Takoushi, but you will...and you read about him here, first!

JWC: *First of all, Tony, tell us what led you into game design...*

Tony Takoushi: Well, I've worked in almost all facets of the industry since 1979. Actually, I bought my first computer back then, an 8K RAM Commodore PET for £632. Then, after a long stint on magazines, I got jaded and felt there just had to be more...

JWC: *Do you program your games? Or just design them?*

TT: Yes, I learned machine code in 1985, with help from Jeff Minter, Paul Woakes, Richard Leinfellner and Tony Crowther, and did 3 games across 5 formats in two and a half years in assembler.

JWC: *What kind of games were these?*

TT: I did 3 games: One was very budgeted and two were full price. The games were Hyperforce, Starburst and Frenesis. All were all *very* weird and offbeat abstract games.

JWC: *For what system? Commodore?*

TT: Commodore 16 and 64. Atari 800, ST and Amiga. It was a real eye opener. I did the games to satisfy my need to do something offbeat and earn a living. But then I left coding to get more of a social life.

JWC: *What did you do for work then?*

TT: I went to work for Sega in 1988 in-house and rose to European product manager for almost 3 years. My department handled around 300 products across 5 formats and I evaluated hundreds of design documents from first and third parties(UK/US and Japanese) and realized most were very poor and just did not give me the information I needed! Then, after a long trek through publishing and then development, I basically realized that many developers are run shambolically, with half-baked design processes and strong individuals running projects that had little to no idea of what an original or commercial game was. Many games were getting into production and teams formed based on who was 'best mates' with who in the studio! So, on March 16th 1999, I decided to do it myself, and I set up TAKS.

JWC: *Not that long ago! So, how long did FreeFall take?*

TT: The design doc was around 150 pages and took 3 weeks to write full-time. The game itself was produced in 10 months with a team of 4 and 1 part-timer.

JWC: *What was the breakdown of teamwork? Who did what?*

TT: I wrote the design and produced it. I had a lead programmer and an AI programmer. One full-time artist and one part-time.

JWC: *Insane. It's hard to believe this is your first effort...*

TT: Yes, but I had done other designs. The first major design was in 1995 and was called Morphin' Machines. The other was Pinball Toons. Both of these are complete designs. There are 2 other designs at drawing board stage which I am looking forward to developing. One is a game with no graphics... [*laughter*] and the other is a 3-D platformer with gameplay not seen in any other platformer.

JWC: *[laughter] Wild... about FreeFall again, I don't think anyone has really tried a game quite like it... no ground in site! The premise of man having to leave the surface and take to the clouds for survival! How did the theme develop?*

TT: Yes, Freefall is unique, I have not played a game like it in 20 years. The actual inspiration for Freefall came from playing the PilotWings sim on the N64. While playing PilotWings, I thought it would be a great premise to take the 360 degree mechanic and take it to the next level.

JWC: *I'm glad something good could come from PilotWings!*

TT: [*laughter*] Yeah, there were some major issues for gameplay, as to cameras and objectives, but Freefall came out very well with plenty of variety and a total rush feeling as you fall and spin thru 360 degrees, blasting and achieving distinct and varied goals.

JWC: *I actually love the game, although it made me curse quite a few times when I first started playing it. Do you think the learning curve of the air brakes and aiming for the firepower and what-not is appropriate for "casual" gamers like Nuon is supposedly targeting?*

TT: Well, first of all, thanks. And, yes, as with anything new it can take time to learn the mechanic, but when you do, it is so satisfying to spin and shoot. And I think the variety in gameplay keeps it fresh and challenging. One of the key things I do in all designs is ensure that level to level there are new elements not seen in previous levels and that they can be ramped up to increase difficulty. And, as far as NUON is concerned, it is geared more towards casual gamers as it is a free gamesystem when you buy a DVD player, but there will be core gamers, too. And actually the mix is good, with games like Merlin Karting and Myst coming. Hype aside, VM Labs has done a hell of a job getting games like Tempest 3000 and Freefall 3050AD to market. They both offer adrenaline rushes you simply do not get on PS2 or Dreamcast, especially when they were launched.

JWC: *What do you think of it? The "casual gamer' philosphy of Nuon? It seems weird to me, because they say they are targeting a casual audience and yet the 2 best games on the system are easily FreeFall and T3K....which I would have to say lend themselves to a hardcore gamer....not a casual one...*

TT: On balance, I would agree with you...and perhaps it's a bigger irony that the gaming press has worked hard to ignore NUON generally, because it's not pitched as a next-gen gaming machine. Those are 2 games that are a blast to play and offer very fresh gameplay but the press have missed the boat because of the obsession with technology above content.

JWC: *I'm going to have to disagree with you on this a little. They do throw a barb at Nuon any chance they get, but many in the game press have complained, and I have experienced it myself, about VM Labs completely ignoring the game media. I understand GameFan got no cooperation from them and basically bent over backwards to cover the Nuon games because they wanted to....not because they got any help from VML at all! Myself, I try to mention NUON whenever I can, but VML has never cooperated with me....unlike other, much larger and more successful, companies. Makes no sense to me. It seems they make no effort to get good press, or any press for that matter.*

TT: Yeah, I disagree with alot of the PR decisions of VML but that's a whole nother can of worms. [laughter] They are the publisher, and it's their bag to promote their titles. And I have heard similar concerns as to support, but it's out of my hands...

JWC: *OK, back to Freefall, were there any ideas you played with and scrapped?*

TT: Well, we wanted to add many more features but we ran out of time and had finite resources. The actual design doc for FF has 20 missions and we only implemented 4 of those 20. I would love to do FF on next-gen tochnology, as this would give all missions and all the extras I could not add to the NUON version.

JWC: *Well, what about that? Are you going to continue doing your games for the NUON?*

TT: Well, we are looking to PC, X-Box, and PS2 for Morphin' Machines, but we may do another NUON title towards the end of this year. I showed VM Labs the Pinball Toons design doc and concept video and they loved it, but they seem to be focusing on licenced product from Hasbro and others for the moment.

JWC: *OK, I'll give you a quick softball question. Tell us some of your favorite games....*

TT: Well, I still have my Tempest coin-op from 1981...

JWC: *No way! My old website is Superzapper.com. I'm a Tempest nut...*

TT: [laughter] I did not know that. Actually, my Tempest is currently on the fritz, and I would love to get it fixed.

JWC: [laughter] *What a surprise! What's the problem with it?*

TT: Basically the game plays fine, as I can hear all the sounds as I move and fire, but the display is not working so I can't see it! Where can I get a new motherboard or monitor?

JWC: *It's the monitor, not the motherboard. First thing you need to do is turn the brightness up and hope that you get a line or dot on the screen, so you know whether you have high-voltage or not.. Pray you see something...you don't want to have to find a flyback.!*

TT: [laughter] I will plug it in and get back to you...

TAKS will definitely make waves over the next couple of years. *Opposite:* Design sketch of the police station in FreeFall. *Courtesy TAKS.*

JWC: *That's awesome you own a Tempest! Anyway, you were telling me your favorites...*

TT: OK, well, I love all things Nintendo, as they understand the gameplay mechanic and have inspired me to design myself. I love all my PC-Engine games and usually take my PC-Engine laptop on long flights. Another fave is Wonderboy 3 in Monsterland on PC -Engine CD-ROM...it's so cute as the music bounces along.

JWC: *PC Engine rocks! What about Dracula-X ?*

TT: I love this! I was playing it on my PC-Engine 2 weeks ago. I also loved and completed the orginal on the NES years ago. Konami are up there with Nintendo when it comes to game mechanic and making addictive games. It really hurts not being able to play and complete games the way I used to. The only upside- and it is one I am not happy about- is that I can see most games for a minute or two and *know* what they are about and what they generally offer, mainly because the bulk of the marketplace is derived and contrived with licences and sequels.

JWC: *Wow, people are going to think you ghost wrote for Syzygy! You are on the same page as the rest of us. I went off in last issue's editorial about the genre saturation... what do you predict being the biggest saturated genre in 2001?*

TT: I don't see a lot of change with first-person shooters and carting, but there will be more platformers with prettier and prettier graphics yet near zero content.

JWC: *Are you mourning the -inevitable but sooner than we would have liked- death of the Dreamcast? Seaman, Jet Grind Radio (even though I hated it), and Shenemue were really pushing the envelope.... PS2 software so far seems to be just rehashing the same old song and dance...*

TT: Yeah, the Dreamcast had some fine games come through for it. The Dreamcast is much fresher because Sega took a chance, but they plain ran out of money...

JWC: *OK, you mentioned it before, but tell me more about Moprphin' Machines before you go....*

TT: As I mentioned before, Morphin' Machines is a driving game, and it has gameplay and cameras not seen in *any* driving game for the last 21 years. It takes a hell of a lot to excite me when it comes to games, and Morphin' has me *climbing the walls*. There's just *nothing* to touch this game. Basically, I'm creating a driving game that goes way beyond my wildest dreams. It has taken a long time to set up the tools and engine and editors, but it's been well worth it. You've seen Freefall, so you know that I really do mean what I say about Morphin' being unlike any other driving game that has gone before.

JWC: *I was very surprised by FreeFall. I wasn't sure what to expect, but one thing you have to give it is originality.*

TT: Yes, Freefall is very original, and I don't like hype. I did not announce that the TAKS studio existed for a year after it opened, and FreeFall was finished.

JWC: *Well, dare I say, you're creating some hype now, with the boasts about Morphin' Machines!*

TT: People will look at Morphin' when it is realized and say 'how did you do that?' I will not settle for mediocrity. It takes balls to do original product. If you want to clone other peoples work, and do it badly, then switch off the lights and go home. You're wasting your time and that of the whole team.

JWC: *[laughter] OK, that's a great note to go out on. Thanks for taking the time out, Tony. I enjoyed chatting.*

TT: Me, too. It was my pleasure!

Tony Takoushi is now, officially, an honorary Syzygyte!

TAKS
TOTAL ARKADE SOFTWARE

IS THIS GUY GREAT OR WHAT?

The Future of Entertainment Software

with

A Few Basic Reasons Why Videogames Are Devouring Mainstream Media

and

Why You Should Be Happy About It

By Alex Hutchinson

In 1999, sales of home consoles and software broke 20 billion dollars, surpassing the Hollywood box office for the first time in history. What does this mean? It means more people are playing more games more often than ever before. It means that more people are playing games than going to the movies or reading books. It means that games are now quite probably the single most popular form of entertainment on the planet. Most alarming of all, it means that people will soon be forced to acknowledge (at least the possibility) that digital entertainment has finally crossed the line from "spotty boy's wasted time" to viable art form.

If you need something to blame it on, blame Space Invaders. In 1978, it caused a yen shortage in Japan. It was the first video game to break out of seedy arcades and into general stores and pizza parlors, kick-starting the 80's arcade game craze and fathering the now multi-billion dollar video game industry.

If that's not enough, blame the recent phenomenal success of Sony's PlayStation and (to a lesser extent) Nintendo's unimaginatively titled Nintendo 64. These machines succeeded where their predecessors had largely failed: they attracted a huge, general audience to games, selling over 70 million systems worldwide along the way.

If at this point you're feeling a little panicked and need people to identify with, you've got a choice: if you want to get retro, stick with the residents of Mesquite, Texas who in 1978 went to the Supreme Court in their efforts to ban Space Invaders from their community. Or if you're in the mood to stay current, how about the residents of Littleton, Colorado who blamed an entire high school massacre on

the contaminating influence of id Software's seminal first-person shooter 'Doom'. And to be honest, it's not surprising. Very little has changed between Space Invaders and its modern cousin, which might make them more palatable to the general, litigious public. A small case study: Space Invaders allowed players to manipulate a monochromatic spaceship left and right across the bottom of a single screen in an attempt to destroy endlessly descending rows of tiny, alien ships. Doom allowed players to manipulate a human character around a 3D maze in an attempt to destroy an endless series of variously deformed aliens. One is no more than a heightened version of the other. Third-person alien bashing versus first. The actual gameplay mechanics are virtually identical.

For almost two decades games have provided the same primary thrills, manipulating players in the same basic ways. Games could get you excited, they could surprise you, they could even get a laugh occasionally, and most of the time they could make you pretty damn pissed off, but that was about all. Now developers are trying to figure out how to evoke subtle reactions from their audience. Where is the seething resentment? Where is the pathos? And, wait for it, where is the *love*?

Already launched are Sega's 128-bit Dreamcast and Sony's PlayStation2. Not to be outdone, Nintendo and new console player Microsoft have both announced new systems, pitched (as they always are) as more powerful than their predecessors, capable of dragging twice as much eye candy around your TV screen at twice the speed in half the time. It is doubtful whether this alone will entice reluctant gamers into the fold or convince anybody that games are a serious artistic rival to books or cinema.

The potentially revolutionary aspect of these new systems is hidden in the way their manufacturers (especially Sony) are describing them. If the hype is to be believed, we are on the threshold of a new entertainment age. Sony is calling the processor at the heart of its new system an 'Emotion Engine'. That might be a ridiculous moniker for an inanimate hunk of metal and plastic,

but it marks a fundamental shift in the way games are approached by developers and the way consumers are willing to accept them.

The basic premise of this little article is that games are moving toward a new horizon, a golden artistic Mecca, which has the potential to uproot the traditional arts or at least shake them about a bit. The follow up query is whether one will end up devouring the other or whether they can all exist alongside each other in a kind of friendly roommate scenario. The basic conclusion leans more to the latter, although there's a thinly veiled hope running through the whole thing that the mindless dross so often pumped out by Hollywood and mainstream publishers might collide with the empty headed video game fringe and that everyone might come out healthier, smarter and generally better dressed.

But comparisons between video games and other arts are nothing new. In video game circles the term 'interactive movie' has been an oxymoron for years. The usual outcome is an unplayable series of set pieces interrupted by simplistic choices leading to fragmented (and badly acted) sequences involving B-grade actors and ex-porn stars. Games developers would benefit from dropping the movie tag altogether and following industry leaders like Square, whose Final Fantasy series have long been pushing the boundaries in digital storytelling.

Progressive games developers are beginning to look for ways to tell better stories and communicate ideas in a non-linear fashion. Game levels are being replaced by game environments, single task orientated goals are being fleshed out with multiple side quests which (in the best examples) actually affect the main storyline depending on what angle the player chooses. New software titles coming soon for the discerning player include Vampire: The Masquerade from Nihilistic Software which allows one player to change the game on the fly, throwing enemies, puzzles and situations into the path of other players at will. Or the recently announced Republic from Elixir which boasts a million unique characters and an infinite polygon engine in its simulation of (wait for it) an entire Eastern European country. If that doesn't impress you, remember that the game's detail level is rock solid right down to individual flower petals and autumn leaves. Whether either game turns out to be any good doesn't matter right now. What is worth focusing on is how markedly different

their approach to software development is to the practices of the past. These games exhibit traits more often associated with movies than entertainment software. Vampire for instance, aims to allow players to basically script their own adventure movie as its being enjoyed, wresting control away from formulaic computer AI and handing it back to the user. These are software tools more than games as they are traditionally understood, more like a movie camera than a finished movie.

And you can already smell the fear at the box office. Marketing guru George Lucas openly modeled the lengthy and generally tedious speeder-bike chase scene from the resurrected Star Wars franchise The Phantom Menace on video game racers. Whether this was to tie the subsequent game license more closely to the film or an attempt to attract an audience of teenagers raised on games is unclear. Perhaps George has invented his own oxymoron: the non-interactive game.

The major draw card for games is interactivity. The blockbusters of the new millennium offer all the visceral thrills of film and schlock novels and then some. If more developers follow the lead of companies like Nihilistic and Elixir (which seems likely) then the gaming community ten years from now will be a very different place. Imagine being able to create scenarios instead of linear plot threads, world environments instead of single scenes. Imagine taking your friends through a custom designed adventure, which you could manipulate to their tastes every time someone seemed bored. The possibilities are immense and their exploitation may eventually make games a serious artistic player.

But first things first. The second crucial ingredient in the equation following the types of games made, are how these software toys are delivered and used. Multiplayer games are the catch cry of the late nineties and Sega has recognized this by including a modem as standard with its new Dreamcast and allowing owners of its console access not only to other players around the world, but to e-mail and net access through their TVs without an expensive PC.

On a very basic level this means more human contact. The PC on-line world is (at present) a frag fest of Quake death matches and Half-Life mods. Players run around a maze, players shoot each other,

players start again. Not exactly advanced characterization or emotional interaction. But other sites like Ultima On-Line offer at least a small step forward, allowing a reasonably detailed world for dedicated role-players to muck about in, filled with literally thousands of other human players and overseen by a simulated economy.

The combination of the two, providing realistic and detailed environments with the ability to link to other human players in scenarios which offer more than the usual kill-or-be-killed mentality is where the potential to revolutionize entertainment lies. True virtual reality doesn't need to strap a black plastic box to the top half of your head, it just has to allow you to interact with real people in an world which allows you to make different and realistic decisions.

Primary conclusion: Will this new depth devour the arts as we know it? Of course not. If you need proof, notice that film did not kill books and TV did not kill film despite various doomsday prophecies. However, it does mark the emergence of a new form, which is in direct competition with mainstream media. Secondary conclusion: But is it the death of the Hollywood blockbuster and the schlock novel? You never know. How many times can your average fourteen year old kid get excited at a larger, more realistically executed explosion? And how many times must Bruce Willis save the world before we can all sleep at night? Because personally, I'm doing okay already.

-AH

This is Alex's first article for us. Hopefully we will see more of him. That is, if Alex can tear himself away from watching Die Hard with a Vengence!

Syzygy's Moneyline Report.

Just for kicks, we thought you might like to see how the leading video game stocks are doing. My advice: bury your money under your matress! Much safer!

Eidos (EIDSY)   52wk Hi 12 $^1/_2$ (3/10/2000) 52wk Lo 2 $^1/_2$ (11/29/2000)

As of March 6, 2001: 3 $^3/_{32}$
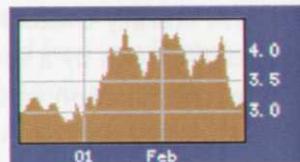
Infogrames (IFGM)   52wk Hi 20 $^5/_{16}$ (3/13/2000) 52wk Lo 4 $^5/_{16}$ (9/22/2000)

As of March 6, 2001: 7 $^3/_8$
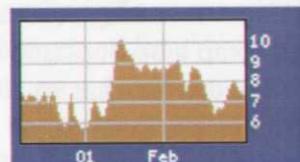
Midway (MWY)   52wk Hi 20.19 (3/10/2000) 52wk Lo 6.06 (5/30/2000)

As of March 6, 2001: 7.72
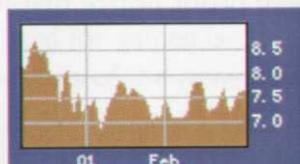
Microsoft (MSFT)   52wk Hi 115 (3/24/2000) 52wk Lo 40 $^1/_4$ (12/21/2000)

As of March 6, 2001: 59 $^7/_{16}$

Nintendo (NTDOY)   52wk Hi 27 $^5/_8$ (3/3/2000) 52wk Lo 16 $^1/_2$ (11/28/2000)

As of March 6, 2001: 19 $^3/_4$

Sony (SNE)   52wk Hi 149.72 (3/3/2000) 52wk Lo 67.00 (12/21/2000)

As of March 6, 2001: 72.18
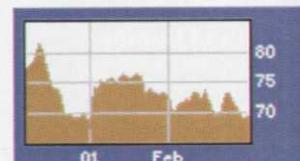
XBOX

Some interesting games have been announced for X-Box, and as you can see, some extremely great looking games have been previewed. But will their gameplay be hollow? Will they rely on amazing graphics and forget about what happens when the player picks up the controller? I hope not. But I'm growing suspicious.

MS hasn't released an official price, nor have they given us an exact release date. They hint at a Fall 2001 release, but nothing is set in stone. One thing that does seem certain, however, is that Japan will have to wait longer than us to get their sweaty hands on one. *Muwhahahaha!* Yes! Finally, we get a console first. Finally, the Japanese have to sit idly by and watch us living it up, playing brand spanking new games that they can only see screenshots of, unless of course they order an expensive import that may soon become obsolete and incompatible with their own country's release.

Some interesting news has been popping up about Sony's threatening retailers who plan to advertise and take pre-orders for the X-Box with decreased shipments of PS2's. This is a bold move considering how soon the X-Box and Gamecube will arrive. Sony is the hardware giant and Microsoft is the software giant. Sony is clearly worried about MS getting into the hardware market. But will they burn bridges? Will Sony count of leverage they don't, or soon won't, have? Who knows....but it's clear that Sony knows there isn't room for 3 major consoles. It's bound to get even uglier.

I will say that none of the games announced so far have me drooling. **Halo** looks to be a good-looking FPS. **Warzone Online** will obviously take advantage of the instant ethernet connectivity of the X-Box. But I would like to see Warcraft X. Unreal X. Tribes X. Instead of **Crash Bandicoot X** and **Jurassic Park X**. More analysis after E3...

Robin Hood: Defender of the Crown

Dragon's Lair 3D

Warzone Online

Malice

Oddworld

Halo

This issue's **Hardcore Gamer**:
Peter Freeman of **New York City**!

Evil Exidy exposes yet another of our sick brethren. Straight from the Big Apple, listen to the owner of Sinistar.com tell it like it is!

Peter in his apartment with a Sinistar shirt over his head.

Evil Exidy: *Peter, you have been into collecting for a long time, can you tell us what were some of your favorite games in the arcade?*

Peter Freeman: Definitely the classics by Williams, Atari and Gottlieb- Robotron, Joust, Q*Bert, Mad Planets, Reactor…also the Midway stuff like Tron and Discs of Tron. There are so many…I also loved Marble Madness, Major Havoc and the Donky Kong series back then. The Sega XY's were big for me as well, Tac/Scan in particular.

Ex: *When did you purchase your first arcade game and what was it?*

PF: I don't remember what gave me the idea to actually start buying games, but somehow I heard about the r.g.v.a.c newsgroup back in around '94, and in '95, I saw a post advertising a Q*bert upright for sale up in Rhode Island. I grabbed a friend of mine with a his truck and we hit the road. The Q*Bert worked (though I ended up fixing the power supply), and it was about $250.

Ex: *How many games do you have now and what are some of your trophy pieces?*

PF: I have roughly 35 games, including some duplicates (Crystal Castles CT and UR, and Sinistar CP and UR.) My faves are the Williams stuff, especially Turkey Shoot, Sinistar and Star Rider, which is visually awesome. I also dearly love my Marble Madness, Major Havoc and all the Cinematronics stuff, though most of it doesn't work (predictably) at the moment.

Ex: *Since you started collecting, have you already purchased every game you are looking for? Or is there still something out there you want?*

PF: I have most of my wants at this point, except for DOT and possibly some of the Sega XY's. However, I know my technical limitations and have enough projects currently, so I've stayed away from those for now.

Ex: *How hard is it to collect in the middle of a metropolis? is there a lot of collectors?*

PF: It's exceedingly difficult in NY because of the unfeasibly high cost of real estate. This means that one is forever cramming games into a tiny apartment, and a workshop space is out of the question unless you have a loft. This is why I have 11 games in my one-room apartment, and no furniture except for my bed!

Ex: *NY was really well known for its huge arcades, were there any specific ones you used to hang out in? Can you tell us about this?*

PF: Oh yeah, there were three big important ones during the Golden Age: The Broadway Arcade in midtown, and Station Break and Space Station, which were in Penn Station. Those last two were really important for me- I would get off the train from school in Penn Station every day and play for hours. It was amazing- Space Station was the classic dark, black-rubber-floored palace filled with the best vids. I had an amazing time there. This was around '82 through about '84. The Broadway Arcade (which had survived in an abbreviated form up until a couple of years ago) was huge- They had a giant floor filled with classic vids back then, and a whole billiards floor downstairs from that. That's where I first played Sinistar and became addicted.

Ex: *I noticed that you collect a lot of Williams stuff, werent you ever into any Atari, Gottlieb, Exidy, or Stern?*

PF: As I said earlier, the Ataris and Gottliebs are also very important to me, but I have no Exidy or Stern stuff except for Bagman. I had a Venture for a bit, but it worked for exactly one day, and I gave up. I had a talented friend troubleshooting it but we ultimately got nowhere.

Ex: *Rumor has it that you started the IRC channel #rgvac.. what gave you the idea? You're no longer there, what's up with that?*

PF: Back in '95, I started #rgvac on EFNET because I thought it would be cool to make a live collecting forum to discuss classic gaming, technical issues and so forth. For the first year, it was basically me and one or two others, like my fabulous friend Tim (nick: *smashtv*) from Oklahoma.

Peter's apartment with the lights out. Doesn't this pic do your heart good? It looks like the backroom in your local 1983 arcade. A moment of silence, please.

PF (cont.):...Eventually, it started taking off a bit more. For a few years after that, it was quite good. The demographic of #rgvac types at that point was still pretty much late-20's/early 30's collectors who shared a common experience and nostalgia for the real classic stuff. After that, however, it began drifting away from classics and the JAMMA/late-80's kids started showing up. From my perspective, the overall tone of the place kinda went downhill-The signal-to-noise ratio plummeted. So I left and started #ccvac for the remaining small group of classics-oriented collectors. Anyone who's focused on the Golden Age vids is welcome to stop by.

Ex: *How do you see collecting now compared to how it was when you first started?*

PF: It's definitely been adversely affected by the influx of more people into the hobby that happened after the '95/'96 "retro gaming" trend. This may be a bit of a cliché for any hobby that becomes more popular, but I did like it better 5 years ago when it was a bit more esoteric. The quality of the people on the newsgroup in particular seemed a little better. However, there are still plenty of games out there to be had, and auctions to go to, and if I didn't have all the stuff I do now (and a huge space crisis!) I'd probably still be actively buying games all the time.

Ex: *What are some of the worst games in your opinion?*

PF: Well, that's a very broad question; There are so many from

over the past two decades! Generally, I'd say everything pretty much went to shit after the Crash- Once it became a landscape dominated by fighting, driving and sports games, it was no longer about seeing an occasional bad game among the great ones, but the reverse. Overall, I haven't ever seen a post-Crash game that I'd consider to be on the same level as the classics.

Ex: *Conversions are a common site, can you tell us what some of the ugliest conversions you've seen?*

PF: I've seen really heinous Warrior-to-Capcom and Crystal Castles-to-Capcom conversions that were really upsetting. People who did those should be killed. I also saw a Joust Cocktail converted to some sort of gambling game, and that wasn't pretty either.

Ex: *Just out of curiousity, what is the rarest game you own? and what makes it rare?*

PF: I have a Vectorbeam Warrior, which is a rare animal indeed. It's just so old and it wasn't a huge successful in its time, so they're near impossible to find these days. It's one of the absolute best games ever created. A true Skelly classic.

Ex: *You have the domain Sinistar.com? What sort of information can we find on your site?*

PF: I don't update it much, but it's a reasonably in-depth site about the game that still generates a tiny trickle of email from people who loved it in the early 80's and seem happy to redis-cover it....   -EE

Ed Logg Interview

by Brian Deuel

Ever heard of Asteroids? How about Gauntlet? What about Centipede? Well, then you've experienced the work of a video game creator who has worked in the industry, virtually non-stop, longer than anyone else. Brian tracked down the legend himself. Enjoy!

Brian Deuel: *What is your earliest gaming experience by your recollection, playing or programming?*

Ed Logg: Around 1964 or 1965 I was a member of the College Park High School computer club. We had some time at the junior college next door on Tuesday nights. So I remember learning to program the IBM 1400 series computers. By then I knew Fortran and IBM assembly language. It was an interesting machine in that the word size was determined by the setting a bit in the last character. So it was possible to add arbitrary sized numbers together. The games were written on punch cards. Each turn had to be a separate batch job. So we would program up chess problems or slot machine runs or similar stuff.

BD: *What is your educational background, and were there any gaming experiences in school?*

EL: Games in school. Surely you must be joking! I played all sorts of board games as well as card games. But isn't that what kids do? I went to college at Berkeley from 1966 to 1970. I majored in math and computer science. This was the first year for computer science at Berkeley, so it was interesting times. There were several of us who knew more about assembly coding than the professor teaching the course. I went on to Stanford graduate school majoring in math but after two years I wanted to do something other than go to school.

BD: *What are some of the earliest games you programmed in those days?*

EL: I remember doing a checker playing program, based on a trick my roommate Robert Narron suggested, to represent the checkerboard and minimize array referencing. Again, this was turn based because terminals were just beginning to arrive. Of course at 110 Baud (and noisy too), there was little bandwidth for anything but a few characters.

BD: *You worked for Control Data for a time before joining Atari. What was your job there? How did you get to Atari from there?*

EL: I worked on three different projects at Control Data. But I was always doing extra "stuff." For example, I had a library of pictures which could be printed out on the printers. These pictures used over-striking to create the contrast needed for black and white pictures. I also had Star Trek and Adventure running on both IBM and Control Data mainframes. At one time, the company requested people not play these during business hours because it put such a load on the systems.

BD: *Dirt Bike was your first project at Atari. What was the gameplay like? Did you come up with the game concept or was it assigned to you?*

EL: It was assigned to me. It was started by Dennis Koble who had moved into the consumer division. The game play was very much like Sprint except a handle bar was used as the controller and the throttle was on the handle bar instead of a foot pedal.

BD: *Why was the game killed before production?*

EL: We field test our games to see how much they earn. I had done Super Breakout at the same time, and Super Breakout earned more money, so they decided to build Super Breakout instead.

BD: *Moving forward a bit, you programmed the 2600 version of Othello. Any interesting stories behind that project?*

EL: Yes, it was done without my boss' knowledge! I would work on it at home most of the time. However, near the end when I was fixing bugs, my boss asked what I was doing and I had to explain. He asked me not to do that again. Othello was a 2K cart, and most of the cart was taken up with the kernel which drew the video. The VCS only had vertical retrace to do any thinking. You had to make sure your code did not exceed the blanking time, otherwise the video would get screwed up. Also there was only 128 bytes of RAM, so it was not possible to do any look-ahead. It was an interesting challenge, but that was the reason I was doing this project anyway. At one time the test department found a problem, so I patched the ROM image and told them to burn another cart. The consumer manager looking over my shoulder asked me, rather incredulously, whether I going to make sure it worked first. I had programmed the 6502 for many years and it was such a small change that I replied something to the effect of, "Nope, it will work."

BD: *Asteroids was the first of a string of hits that you orked on. What were your goals with regards to the balance of the gameplay, i.e. anxiety level, control factor, etc.?*

EL: The original concept was to allow the player to shoot rocks and break them into pieces. I chose two pieces to start with and this proved satisfactory. So, it stayed. Medium sized pieces were created from large rocks and small pieces from medium rocks. The idea was to give the players a strategy to limit the number of rocks on the screen and discourage random shooting. The saucer was created to keep the player from doing nothing.

BD: *Was there anything left out of the game in its final stages? Any additions or subtractions that aren't outwardly noticeable within the game?*

EL: Of course there were several tuning changes that

occurred over the project. For example, the saucer was originally programmed to shoot when it entered the screen. However, it would sometimes be off screen and invisible to the player, so it was felt that we should provide a short period before firing the first shot. This allowed the lurking strategy to work. I actually tried lurking but was not good enough. So I assumed it would not work. Boy, was I wrong! There is something that may be noticable on some Asteroid games. The circuitry has a spot killer to prevent holes from being burned into the screen. So the game must make sure the beam draws from one end to the other each frame. That is why the copyright is on the bottom of the screen. However, the engineer never gave me the exact amount required for the spot killer, and it turns out I did not do enough. So on some monitors the screen will dim when there is only one or two rocks on the screen.

BD: *How did it feel to be working with the new vector graphics technology on the game?*

EL: I liked working on them because I could use high resolution (1024x768) instead of the 320x240 of raster monitors. I was also not limited to 8x8 pixels for my objects. The current technology at the time allowed 16 objects which was too few as far as I was concerned. All games at that time were in black and white because color monitors were too expensive. So vector technology was the best choice. By the way Paul Mancuso was the tech, and Howie Delman was the engineer on Asteroids.

BD: *In Next-Gen magazine, and even on some web sites, it is said that Asteroids is the first game with a high score table in which players can enter their initials. According to Dave Rolfe (programmer of Star Fire), his game was the first to have the table, and the release dates seem to back his claim up. Were you aware of this when you put the table in Asteroids?*

EL: Asteroids was not the first game to use a high score table. There was another game released just before Asteroids. I used the game idea for Asteroids after seeing it used elsewhere. So please feel free to correct those sites and tell them I said so. [*Oh, we did! See "Current Rags" last issue. -JWC.*]

BD: *I know you have an interesting story of Asteroids and how you met your wife. Could you tell our readers about it?*

EL: Yes, when I met my wife she already owned her own Asteroids coin-operated game. She liked the game so much that she bought one used. When we first met, she was dating a friend of mine, and he introduced me to her by saying "Here, meet the best..." We now have her Asteroids in our house, and mine is out in the garage.

BD: *Some internal documents from Atari's management meetings have recently been uncovered from the Tipperary office of Atari in Ireland. Within some of these documents are mentions of your unreleased game Maze Invaders. What was the gameplay like in this game? How did it test, and what finally happened to the game?*

EL: The main character was a cute Pac-Man like character who walked through a set of ever-changing mazes trying to grab all the objects which opened doors to connected mazes. A map of the mazes was drawn on the bezel around the monitor. The joystick was unique for it's time because it was an analog joystick. It did not test well enough to make it into production. Yes, I actually have one of the two Maze Invaders field test units. My son liked it so much I bought it. Another one was purchased by an operator in Texas, I believe, who loved this game so much he had to have it too.

BD: *Centipede was touted as the "first game designed by a woman, although it is a known fact that you had a major role in its design. How did you and Dona Bailey divide up the work on the game?*

EL: A game called "Bug Shooter" was described in one of our brainstorming session notes. I do not know who made this game suggestion. From what I remember it was a game to shoot bugs. I do not remember all the details of how the game started as it did. I do remember that the mushrooms were in a fixed positions and were at first non-destructible. I also remember drawing the mushrooms and centipede and detailing the motion of the legs.

Dona Bailey was a new programmer and I was her supervisor. Her task was to do the basic game play. About halfway through the project I quit being a supervisor and went back to programming. I remembered doing the self test too.

BD: *Given the rise of "cute games" of the time, was there a specific goal to give Centipede that "feminine touch" from the beginning?*

EL: I did not make this the goal of the game. However, it became clear later that the game play definitely appealed to female as well as male players.
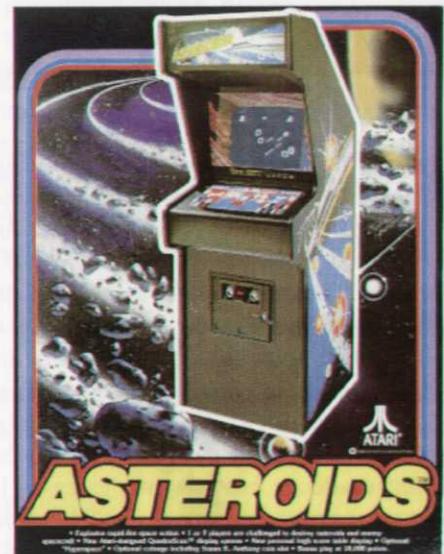
Asteroids was the most successful Atari coin-operated game of all time. In honor of this, a gold Asteroids was made. Here is Ed standing beside it in it's first picture in print that we know of. Where else but Syzygy, folks? (Courtesy Ed Logg).

Top: the standard Asteroids, seen here in the Atari sell sheet.

BD: *Touching briefly on the unreleased vector racing game Malibu, how long did you and Owen Rubin work on the game before killing it? What technological hurdles made it impossible for the game to ever work?*

EL: Actually, there were two different Mailbu games as I remember. His was a raster driving game with the monitor above and a mirror below. His game was killed but I do not remember why. Mine was a vector based driving game where the goal was to make it around the track in the best time possible. Very much like the Mailbu Grand Prix racetracks near where we are. I do not remember all the reasons Malibu died, but I can tell you this was around the time that color monitors were becoming the norm in video games and a vector driving game just would not cut it.

BD: *Was Owen's "Malibu" project called Sebring? Jed Margolin posted a description of this game in rec.games.video.arcade.collecting? (Attached text file of the post).*

EL: It is not unusual for a game to change names while in development. It is very likely Sebring was the game I mentioned above. I just remembered it was called Malibu at some point. In any case, I could easily have been mistaken. (I read the attched description and everything sounds accurate.) I can't vouch for the reason it was killed. But I do remember it was killed for some reason other than poor collections.

BD: *What systems did you use to develop games at Atari and how did they evolve over the years?*

EL: We used our own development systems and methods. When I first arrived, the development system was a black box which would load our paper tape. The paper tape came from DEC PDP machine which had a cross compiler for the 6502. We would write our code and hand it over to one of several typists who would enter the data and return a listing and paper tape to us. We often used a HP analyzer to trace and set breakpoints. We got very good at patching code to test

fixes. Later we had a blue box with a Forth based development system. By the mid 1980's we had moved over to Motorola 68000 processors. This was used, for example, in Gauntlet and subsequent games. Things change so fast that I cannot even begin to name all the different systems I have used. In Steel talons I had two development systems. An IBM PC was used for the coprocessor to do the flight model and another system for the main 68010 processor. On my last project, Rush 2049, we had a PC running NT for the Dreamcast development and an SGI Indy running IRIX for the N64 development and as our main server. We used a Mac for our font tool. We used the N64 for creating our drone paths, resurrection paths, checkpoints and short cuts. The audio is done on completely different systems. The art was created on PCs using MultiGen. Today we have a Linux box as our server and PCs running NT and Win2K for GameCube, Xbox, and PS2. We use Maya now. Our revision control has changed from RCS to CVS or VSS. We are using Metrowerks, Visual C++ and GCC compilers for tools and development. Almost nothing is the same as the last project.

BD: *How conscious was the effort to simplify the task of game programming? Was a specific person assigned to this task or was there a sort of "group effort" to do so?*

EL: In the beginning there was just one programmer. It was felt that it was better to have typists entering our data while we were debugging or writing new code than it was for us to maintain the code ourselves. This changed by 1980 when we would enter the data ourselves. I guess the main effort was put into determining whether the game was fun or not. In other words, the programmer was not the key but whether the game proposed was going to be fun. In my opinion, this is still true. If we knew beforehand what to do to make a successful game, we could do our games much quicker. However, I must say games have gone from several months in development to two years. So we are now more concerned with making or buying tools to make our job easier.
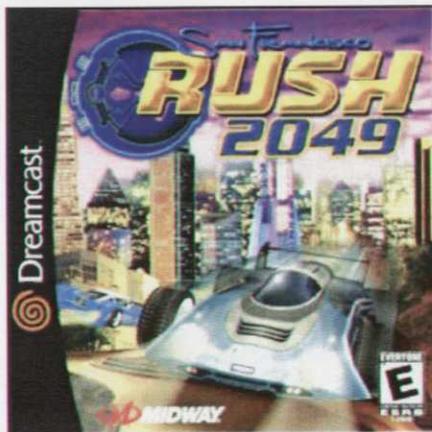
BD: *Gauntlet was loosely based on the computer game Dandy. You patented some of the audio-visual aspects of the game. Did any problems arise from the similarities between the two games as a result of this?*

EL: When you file a patent you must disclose all prior art that would be relevant. Dandy was mentioned in these papers. Only one patent used Dandy as prior art. The other four had to do with unique hardware and software methods used in Gauntlet.

BD: *Was there any kind of royalty or bonus package program at Atari? I know that when the consumer division started losing game designers, they came up with a bonus program for them. Was there anything similar to this in coin-op?*

EL: We always had a bonus program at Atari Coin-op. I believe this was a great incentive for keeping many of the programmers, artists, and engineers. The plan has changed over the years. Especially around 1980 when large sums were being offered to game programmers. When Atari Games started to do consumer games under Tengen and later under Time Warner, the bonus plan was changed to include the consumer business. I believe the consumer division did not have a bonus program in 1979. I seem to remember there was some friction between consumer and coin-op over this issue. Yes, when Atari lost many programmers, a bonus plan was started for consumer programmers. Unfortunately, I do not believe the plan was done correctly. If a programmer had done a unique title from scratch then I felt it was probably fair. A license game, such as Pac Man in which the game play was already defined, should not merit the same bonus.

BD: *You worked on a few more coin-ops in more recent years, then pretty much switched over to console ports of existing arcade games. Have you taken on a different role as part of a larger team, or are you very much still involved with programming?*

EL: I want to do programming. It is what I enjoy the most. I am good at leading a team and great at scheduling a project, but I do not enjoy it as much. I have done game design, but for platform games or RPGs, I do not believe I could do a great job. Being successful for so many years makes me useful in other ways to the company. So what usually happens is I end up spending a majority of my time helping others, playing politics, leading a team, and doing some programming. I am definitely part of a large team and have been for many years. The teams just seem to get bigger each project. I seem to be in a similar role, but I have less impact as a programmer. I have been doing console ports for the past five years because this was Midway's business planActually, I make a point of not just doing a port but adding something to it. For example, my last project (San Francisco Rush 2049 for the Dreamcast), we added a battle mode, an obstacle, four stunt levels and new tracks and cars over the coin-op game. In addition, we added Dreamcast.com and controller pack support for ghost races. If I had a unique idea of my own, I would certainly have pursued that. But the best ideas I had were to improve on the game play of existing coin-op games.
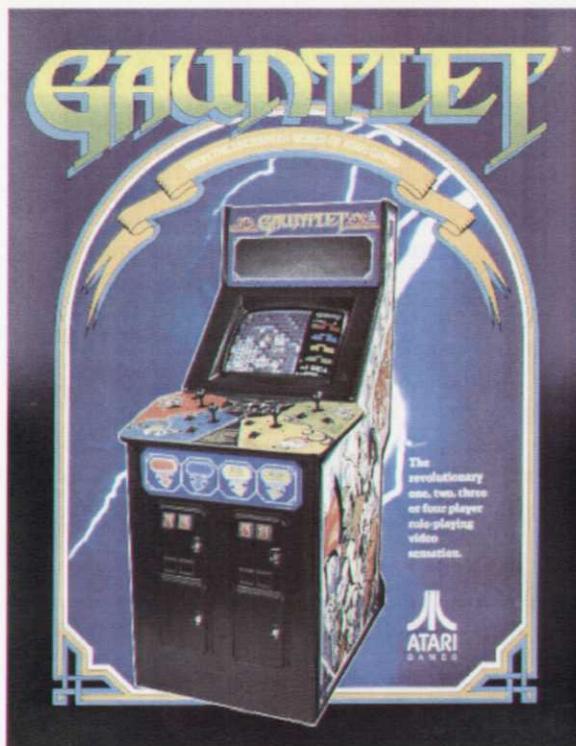
BD: *Have you considered doing another coin-op project at all in the past few years?*

EL: I have not seriously considered doing another coin-op product because the coin-op market is so poor.

BD: *What is your current status at the former AtariGames (now known as Midway West)? Are you still on their payroll or have you moved on to more of a freelance role?*

EL: I am technically a contract employee of Midway Games West former know as Atari Games Corporation. I *was* a freelance contractor, but I did not believe working out of my home with a large team at Atari would work, so I spend all my time here. So for IRS and FTB requirements, they made me an employee. I am a contractor in another sense because they pay me on a game basis. So when one project ends, I need to find another project.

BD: *Do you ever get nostalgic for the games of the past that you worked on and played? And what were your favorites from the classics era?*

EL: Yes I get nostalgic. I liked programming when I could understand the whole system and get something seemingly impossible from some small piece of hardware. I guess I like puzzles. I occasionally play the older games. I am often surprised how much fun they were. Robotron was one of my favorite games. I haven't fired my game up in a long while. There was a time I would play until my arms hurt.

BD: *Do you have any of your games at home?*

EL: Yes, I have several of the original prototypes at home including Asteroids, Centipede (cabaret), Millipede, Gauntlet II, Maze Invaders and Super Breakout. I also have a cabaret Tempest and a Robotron.

BD: *Where do you see the game industry heading?*

EL: In general, I see it leading to more and more complicated games. Technology advances and the game hardware will too, which means we will just add more and more stuff to use this hardware bandwidth. I also see the games costing more to develop. This means bigger companies and bigger budgets. This also means there will be a lot of franchises and sequels (i.e. read this as sure fire winners). As far as expanding the face of gaming, that is a matter of personal opinion. I see changes coming but almost every game I see today, I could point out other games with similar concepts that preceded it.

-BD
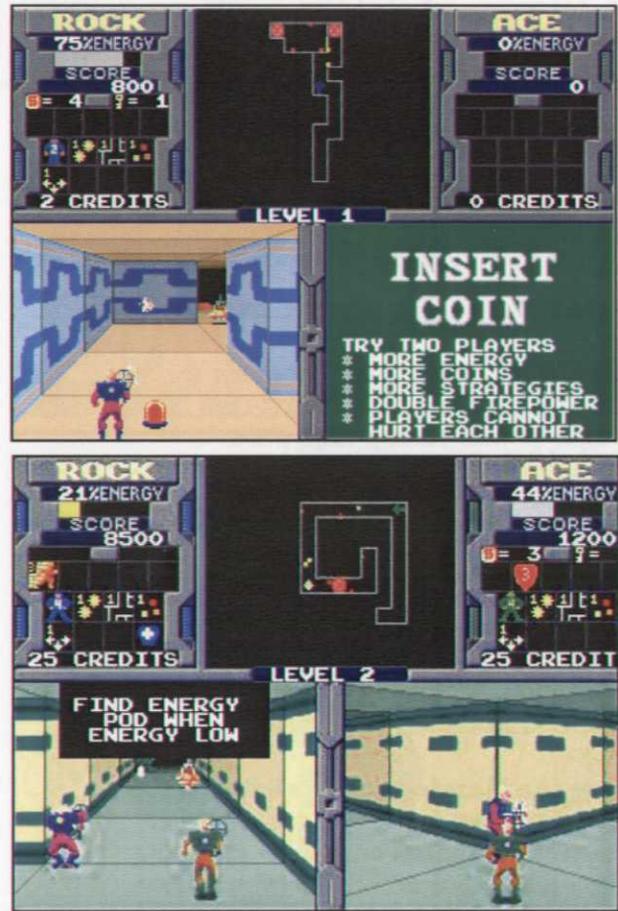
Ed also designed and programmed Xybots, the great grandfather of Doom. The game was digustingly innovative, but it didn't offer head-to-head deathmatch. Your shots didn't hurt your teamamte, so you were forced to play cooperatively. Far ahead of its time, nevertheless. Notice the credits on the title screen! It wasn't 1982 anymore!
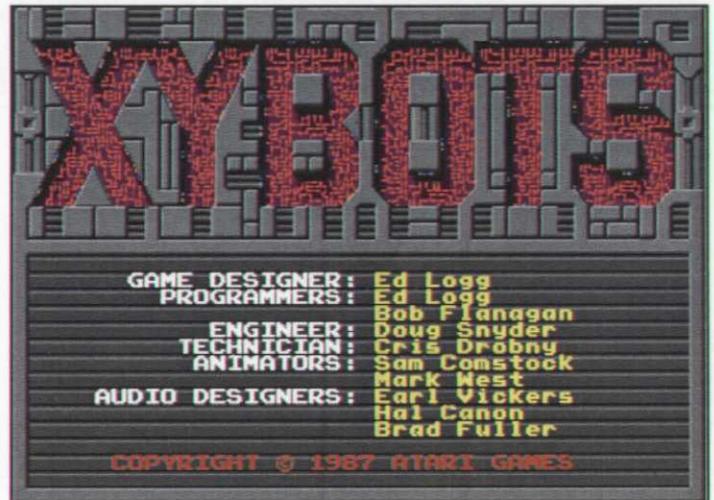
Letters to the Editor

SqUeal likE a sTuCk PiG

"Current Rags" backlash?

JWC, did you get any hate mail from the magazines which were criticized in your "Current Rags" article?

Jeff Klasne

I'm sure it ruffled their feathers a little, but no hate mail. Next-Gen thought it was funny, and were geniuinely interested in rectifying their Asteroids high-score debacle. So, they get bonus points. I think PC Gamer is in the same building as Next-Gen, but I didn't hear from them. I desperately wanted to receive some hate mail from EGM, but alas it did not happen. There's always next time, though. <maniacal laughter>

Where the Classic Consoles be?

Syzygy, I know you guys are the most "eclectic" magazine currently covering video games, but where is your classic console coverage? All your classic video game coverage deals with coin-op! I love this, but I would love to see some console stuff, too.

Sam Blackley

What Sam wants, Sam gets. Be here next issue, Sam. We've heard from a few people who want more console coverage. Oh, and the Hardcore Gamer next issue is a console collector.   Not to mention being a bit disturbed.

UT challenged...

JWC, I did not get the cartoon in ithe beginning [of issue #2]. Help!

Edward Trayer

Do yourself a favor and play some Unreal Tournament. Then you'll get it. However, then your school or work will suffer, as will your relationships with loved ones. Your golf game will go down the tubes, and you will get cramps in your left hand for a change. So, on second thought, maybe you better not.

Cover art...

JWC, I loved the Robotron cover! You seem to love comic book art, and I hope you continue with the great covers of issue #1 and #2!

Charles McHugh

Charles, I grew up living and breathing comic books. So, I am naturally drawn to comic art. You haven't seen the last comic art cover from us. And maybe my love for comics is why I am putting a Letters section on the first and last page of the magazine? There has to be some explanation.

Hotmail genius...

JWC, you and Exidy are dead meat if you dare show your faces at CGE this year!

unsigned
dragon877531@hotmail.com

Do me a favor, and yell something scary and witty right before you start shooting, so I can dive behind Exidy! Oh, and we shouldn't be too hard to spot, since we plan on having a booth there this year. Cheers!
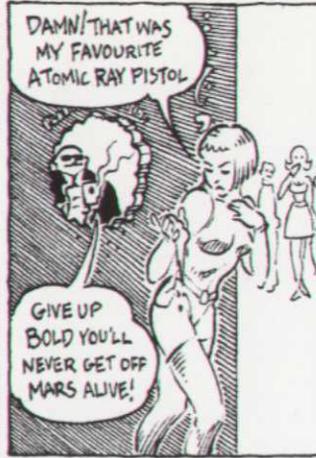
STORY - JIM WATT   ART - MARCUS GRAY