ORPHANED COMPUTERS
& GAME SYSTEMS

After its first three issues, this newsletter passed into the realms of extinction. Like some strange freak of nature, <u>OC&GS</u> has come crawling back from the grave, much like the hardware and software that will be discussed.

Even from the beginning, I had support from the whole community; but I was the only person responsible for the creation of the newsletter. That has all changed now. Beginning with this issue, it has become a two-person effort.

Chris Federico has been involved with all the classics since, well...since they were the hip new items. Take it away, Chris!   -- AJT

Okay, you're making me sound older than you, Adam, so cut it out. You were fighting to gain control of those weird biplanes yourself, buster.

Video games are a state of mind that some people can't tap into. Those poor, deprived souls. I've had a consistent obsession with video games since 1981 that will speak for itself as you read this new and improved newsletter. What can I say? Welcome to <u>OC&GS</u> No. 4. Fortunately, people like Adam begin periodicals with no profit margins, no targeted demographics and no test-marketing...just a love for a hobby that thousands happen to share. Dig in, folks. I'll be hiding in the background until Adam lets me come out and talk.   -- CF

Okay; now that I have shackled Chris back into his corner, I can continue.

A lot has changed since I put out the first issue of <u>OC&GS</u> in June of 1994. Paper newsletters have been replaced by Internet sites. Three years ago, there was talk of how everyone in the country could communicate with one another; the Internet was considered, but many people thought that a BBS would be a much better idea!

I grew away from the newsletter scene because I began to use the Internet so often. I eventually became so caught-up in the hundreds of Internet sites that I decided that everything that could be said about video games had been said already. I gave up.

But a few months ago, I got a phonecall from Chris, asking where he might be able to get a Commodore 64. We talked for a few minutes; it was great talking to someone in town about our mutual hobby. Chris and I now get together at least once a week and spend lots of time looking for, playing or reviewing classic stuff.

Between the two of us, we have thirty-two years of game-playing experience. (Ack! That makes me ill!) We have strong opinions about the game-playing world that we see around us today. We plan to express as much as we can about our favorite subject within the confines of this newsletter.

This publication is being created without an IBM-compatible or Apple computer.

It is being created on various models of Amiga, which, when I first wrote this newsletter, was an orphaned system, but has since been purchased by Gateway 2000. They say that new Amigas are on the way!   -- AJT

If I might interject, Adam, it seems like the new Amiga will be nothing more than another IBM clone. Gateway 2000's declared use of PC boards inside the new box isn't encouraging to me. The Amiga's strengths lie in its speed, multitasking and graphics-handling capabilities, not to mention its dynamic RAM disk and its efficient DOS. What will become of these qualities if a PC chip set is used? If new Amiga games will be anything like the average PC game, we can kiss the Amiga goodbye as far as games go. It will also probably be unaffordable, as this is a brand-new venture for 2000 and they can't hope to compete in a market already established by the current Pentium chip licensees. What's next? Windows for the Amiga, replacing the super-efficient workbench? I guess that's all from me for now.   -- CF

Well, Chris is quite right. It seems that the days of the affordable home computer passed by a long time ago. Even a free OS such as Linux requires expensive hardware.

It seems that all computers are becoming orphaned nowadays; I suppose the Pentium is next, so watch out!   -- AJT

We'd like to remind everyone to send in your ads for our upcoming classified section. As always, submittal is free. This is an excellent forum for finding things you can't buy at the store anymore! Send your classifieds to the address below.

Want another issue?
One more costs a measley dollar.
Give this to your friends! Spread the word! We appreciate your help!

If you would like to exchange your 'zine or newsletter, send it! We'll send the next OC&GS!

If you would like to be a contributor, send us your stuff.
If you received this issue free, think about sending a buck for the next one. Suggestions are always welcome. What subjects would you like covered?

THE OC&GS PANEL TRADES TOP TENS
THE CHOICES OF CHRIS
By Chris Federico and Adam Trionfo

Every video veteran has played certain games at points in his life that contain, as far as that person's concerned, the strongest qualities of those game types.

"Good" is such an abstract term that I guess a top-ten list, difficult as it would be for anyone to compile, really depends on what the lister's looking for. It also depends on how far back into game history the person goes. You'll find my list, for instance, dating as far back as 1979.

So what about you? C'mon -- just for fun. Here are my and Adam's top picks from the annals of video game history, going right up to the present; but we'd be very interested in seeing what you guys think. Send your lists to the address at left. Every one will be read. The top ten that are most found on your lists will be published in the next issue (or, if we get a lot of replies, we'll include more than one list, going by genre). Descriptions like ours aren't necessary, but it'll be neat if you at least include brief reasons why you love those games.

Here I go. Rest assured that Adam's list will be almost completely different.

Oh yeah -- these are NOT in order. There IS no order. Your lists needn't be in order. Can I overexplain a little more?!   -- CF

1) ADVENTURE
   (Atari 2600)

The idea of the multi-screen, exploratory graphic adventure game might seem old-hat by now, but this, folks, was the first. And for some reason, simplistic graphics or not, it's still the best. Maybe the eerie quality it offered when I was 10 still lingers. This game really is huge for being inside one of the first 2600 carts. It's also quick-moving and offers a coordinational release that's hard to explain. This was also the first game with an Easter egg. Boy, did that fascinate me. (Need help finding the secret message? Write!)

2) SUPER MARIO BROS. 3
   (NES)

I guess games on this list don't have to be orphaned. Purists, don't worry -- this is the only Nintendo game I'll mention. But this was the culmination of the first scrolling platform game era.

It would have just been the best Mario game, and not necessarily in my top ten, if it hadn't been for the tons of secret places Mario can fly to, secret rooms he can stumble upon, hidden objects behind the scenery and such. Neato!

3) ARCHON
   (8-bit computers)

The idea of merging Chess, magic and shoot-'em-ups was brilliant, and it couldn't have been handled more magnificently. And the computer makes a decent opponent -- a rare quality!

4) MINER 2049'er
   (8-bit computers)

First of all, you don't just get to the top of each unique playfield, a'la DONKEY KONG and its scores of imitations. You fill in the ground. Every spot on every screen has to be visited by Bounty Bob. Second, this mechanic was incorporated in a lot of unique ways. So many elements stuffed into a single main idea!

5) DOOM
   (Atari Jaguar)

I know, I know. But it really is fun. In fact, it's one of the most fun games ever invented. I prefer the Jaguar version over the PC; it's

more...well... GAMEY. Play both versions and you'll see what I mean.

This game takes both the shoot-'em-up ethic and the exploration idea to their ultimate extremes. And there are secret rooms (Awriiiiight!). The game's not for everybody; maybe that's why blowing away possessed soldiers with a chain-gun is so much fun. The game also really communicates its atmosphere successfully. It pulls you in. It's dark and scary and beautiful. ID Software really knows how to pick the ultimate villains: WOLFENSTEIN 3-D pits you against the Nazis, and even Hitler himself. DOOM presents demons from hell.

6) RAID ON BUNGELING BAY
(8-bit computers)

Broderbund hit upon the ultimate shoot-'em-up with this smooth-moving sensation. This thrilling game took the ASTEROIDS ethic and inflated it to a fantastic degree. The huge, multi-screen island jigsaw wraps around to rejoin itself as your chopper scrolls over it, and factories repair themselves if you don't re-load and finish the job of bombing them to ashes in time. More and more automated enemies pop up across the islands as the game progresses.

And somehow, the game keeps offering a great deal of challenge no matter how many times you've beat it. A true winner for trigger-happies.

7) IRON SOLDIER
(Atari Jaguar)

How many games have attacking planes that actually burst into realistic flames and pieces when shot, which fall to the ground dramatically? How many first-person shoot-'em-ups move quickly and smoothly without compromises in the graphic detail? IRON SOLDIER beats every other windshield simulator I've played. You're in the cockpit of a giant,

armed robot. There are sixteen different missions located in sixteen different (and very huge) fields or cities. Your robot can blow the hell out of everything -- buildings, tanks, turrets, planes, choppers, enemy robots, doorways, armed carriers, factories, water towers, convoys of trucks, houses, trees...

8) WIZBALL
(Commodore 64)

Am I the only one who's ever played this wonderful Ocean import? The Commodore 64 has never looked, played or felt better. All of its strengths are exploited in full as you control a rotating, armed sphere that sets out to capture liquid colors so its own world can have color again.

Every time a color is completed, you have access to an additional, horizontally scrolling, beautifully detailed surface. There are nine in all, and they're all very different from each other, with eerie alien sulptures, lava formations or protruding metallic tubes. Each has its own color scheme and it's fun to bonk the Wizball around each little obstacle course, zapping aliens and trying to collect liquids. This is the best 64 game I've ever played.

9) ZORK
(8-bit computers)

Since all three started out as one big text adventure, I just specified their shared name. The trilogy was a watershed in adventure games. Up until Infocom's founders came up with this spooky, often humorous and always mesmerizing interactive tale, text adventures were limited to two-word parsers (GET APPLE) and cold, boring descriptions (THERE IS: APPLE TREES HERE).

This is a prime example of successful atmospheric communication. This, folks, is WAY more fun than any illustrated text adventure. A good story doesn't

need graphics. Infocom knew this so-called secret for years, and at the end of the first home computer era, their position as the best group of adventure writers was secured without argument.

10) DEFENDER
(Raster coin-op)

Eugene Jarvis, the creator of this incredible contest, summed it up perfectly: "It's a game for punks, for guys into games, for life-and-death gamers. It's not for people who aren't as dedicated, who just want to have a good time. It's for game nuts like myself. The explosions and the speed give you power, the feeling of omnipotence. That's what I'm after: The higher high, the spacier space, the rush." (From Video Invaders by Steve Bloom, @1982 Arco Publishing.)

Even more than SPACE INVADERS, ASTEROIDS or any of those earliest contests, DEFENDER sums up excitement like few coin-ops from my past are able to. TRON, maybe, competes for that adrenaline-stimulating total recall.

By the way -- the best home version is Yak's CLASSIC DEFENDER, which is included on the Jaguar cartridge DEFENDER 2000.

Okay, Adam, your turn! -- CF

--- HEY! ---

We're looking for stuff about the Bally Z-Grass keyboard, the Imagination Machine and the Channel F. Does anyone have some information (or the systems)?

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THE OC&GS PANEL TRADES TOP TENS
THE CHOICES OF ADAM
By Chris Federico and Adam Trionfo

It isn't necessary to read what Chris had to say first, but you should read both of our lists. We made them seperately, and were both quite surprised to see that we had any crossovers.

I took a different approach to the top ten. I made a few rules that I wanted to follow because I feel that other lists I have read have been too influenced by current games. This list will only cover games available at home. It will not cover arcade games unless there is a conversion available at home. By the way -- this might exclude some games that don't have a good home translation. This would include a game like Operation Wolf, because most conversions lack the gun -- or your machine gun acts like a pistol (as in the NES version).

I will not say that this is a final list of my top favorite games of all-time, because I hate to be quoted. I may have forgotten a game, which is by no means a reflection on the game's quality. When you have hundreds and hundreds of cartridges and disks for various game systems and computers, it just becomes difficult to remember them all. Besides, even if this list is 100% accurate today, my tastes may change an hour from now. These types of lists are always hopelessly dated.

You know, before I discuss my actual favorites, I would like to speak briefly of some of the games that almost made it. At other times in my life, these games would have been on the main list. Maybe they will be again later. I don't know. Some of the games that didn't quite make it are:

1) Shark! Shark! (Intellivision)
2) Checkmate (Bally Astrocade)
3) Ms. Pac Man (Atari 7800)
4) Centipede, when used with roller controller (Atari 7800)

5) Galaga (Atari 7800)
6) Zork Trilogy (All systems)
7) Phantasy Star (Sega Master System)
8) Gate of Thunder (Turbo Duo)
9) Minestorm (Vectrex)
10) Bomberman (Turbo Duo)

The plan was to have ten descriptions for each list, but since I am so long-winded, I will only be able to fit my first five choices into this month's issue. My other five choices will be listed at the end of this article, but not "reviewed" yet; that will have to wait until next time.

So here is my actual top ten, again in no particular order:

1) THE LEGEND OF ZELDA (NES)

There have been sequels and rip-offs, but none capture the elegance of the original. Something that bothers me is that many people refer to this game as an RPG. It isn't. It is an action game that takes place in a fantasy setting with swords and quests, but it is not an RPG.

Even by today's standards, this game is quite big. I've heard many people refer to the fantastic puzzles of Zelda. Well, I want to tell you something: there are no fantastic puzzles in Zelda. There are NO puzzles in Zelda! Everything in this game can be beat through brute force. Sure, you may have to go find something, but that isn't a puzzle. Anyway, this isn't meant to be a review of the previous past ten years of reviews!

I like The Legend of Zelda. It is very simple to learn. (You will notice that all the games on my list are easy to learn.) Zelda came with an excellent tutorial as well; it lead you all the way to the second level in case you were slow or something.

One of my favorite things about

this game is that there is a second, harder quest. It is exactly the same as the first, except that everything is in a different position in the game, and the mazes are shaped differently. This was a neat idea. I had played the second quest before beating the first quest by entering my name as Zelda, which was also a neat trick.

This game has excellent play control -- the only way a game is fun. I've played so many games that would have been good, perhaps great, if the play control had been just a bit better.

What else can I say? Play it!

2) SUPER MARIO BROS. 1 & 3 (BUT NOT PART 2!) (NES)

I wanted them both on this list. (So sue me. I cheated a bit.) Super Mario Bros., as everyone knows, is the game that put Nintendos in so many homes. It's also the game that shaped platform games, and the entire game industry for that matter.

One of the best things about this game is that it doesn't have that horrible side-effect of some platform games -- something I call drag. You know what I mean: a game has good control, seems like great fun, and then, for reasons that only the company might know, it seems as if they turn off all the fairness in some places that was in the rest of the game. Not fun; and that is why Super Mario is not a drag.

The Super Mario series really shows off the NES, even part 2. Part 1 is completely linear; there is no going backwards. It actually gains strength from this. If you miss a power-up or coins, you can't go back for them. But by the end of the game you might wish you could go back. And this is why sequels are created!

Super Mario 3, although still

quite linear in nature, gives the player much more freedom. It is this freedom, and the much-improved graphics, that make part three the best of the series.

I have only one complaint about part 1 *or* 3. (Forget about part 2; that isn't even a Mario game!) The last world of Super Mario 3 is far too hard and frustrating.

As with every other game on this list, play it again and enjoy.

3) JUMPMAN
(C64/Atari 8-bit)

I read the comparative review for Lode Runner and Jumpman when I was eleven or twelve. They said that they were both fun and worth the money. I had played Jumpman Junior on my friend's Colecovision and thought it was okay, but it only had ten levels, which my friend had mastered quickly. Lode Runner had 150 levels. Wow! It was going to be great!

I somehow scraped together thirty dollars to buy Lode Runner. The lady at the local computer store rented the game as well, and offered to rent it to me first. If I liked it, she would take the two-dollar rental fee off the game when I bought it the next day. I thought the idea was stupid; I knew I was going to love Lode Runner, since it had 150 levels! She stressed that there would be no refund if I didn't like the game. I bought it anyway, with the most intense desire to play it on my 64 when I got home. Boy, was I ever disappointed.

I could not believe that the little character could not jump. I felt like I had made the biggest mistake. After playing Jumpman on the Colecovision, this game seemed like a bad rip-off.

So there I was, the very next day, with a game I could not return. I was so upset. But my stepfather seemed quite hopeful that we could get a different game. I guess he called the store or something, and

the lady agreed to just charge a rental fee for the game, so I could get something else. Back went Lode Runner, and out came Jumpman.

Purchasing Jumpman was a choice I never regretted. In reflection, I want to say that I actually like Lode Runner now; but it is completely different from Jumpman. Where Jumpman is all about reflexes (or, in my case, lack of them), Lode Runner is more of a puzzle game. But in my mind, clearly Jumpman, even with only thirty levels, is much more fun. If you haven't seen Jumpman before, it is quite a treat. The graphics are well-done, even though now it looks like the character is a stick figure (he never seemed that way before). But the game has all sorts of enemies, the most pesky of which is the simple bullet.

The graphics were never what made this game great fun anyway. It was always the fact that the play control was so precise. The character always did exactly what I wanted. It continues to be the game which I swear at the least, because everything is my own fault, and there can be no blame placed on the control mechanics. Excellent!

A few notes in comparison between the C64 version and the Atari 8-bit: They are the same game. no differences there, really. What makes this game better on the Atari is that it loads, like all Atari games, much faster than the C64 version. Considering that after each level is played the new level must be loaded, it can really brighten your day. (Special note: A friend of mine loaded Jumpman into the 256K RAM expansion he had on his C64 and played it that way. As expected, it loads as fast as a cartridge would! But it takes about ten minutes to load into RAM anyway...)

4) WARLORDS
(Atari 2600)

It's amazing what a slight variant of Breakout can be. I mean,

there really is little difference between this game and the other Breakout clones that have been written. So what makes this so different from the rest? First of all, you are defending a warlord with your shield. It doesn't matter if you lose all your bricks; you just cannot have your warlord hit by the flying fireball (the pixel that is bouncing around the screen). Sound simple? It is, and like all great games, it's totally addictive.

Have you ever played this game alone? I'm sorry if you have, as it really wasn't meant for that. Even if you play against three other computer-controlled players, the game is far too easy. The secret to this game is a bit of friendly competition (or, if you are Chris and I, a bit of me bashing on him... he he)! [**FORCED INTERJECTION:** Adam, don't make me have to set you straight by whipping you at networked DOOM again....grrrrr...]

When you play with up to three other people, the game really shines. One other game on my top ten list, Scorched Tanks, is also best when played with three other people. (I am a sucker for multiplayer games, as you can also see from my choice of Bomberman on the near-hits list.)

A great tip for all you paddle fans out there: Try spraying the inside of the paddles with WD-40. It makes them like new again: smooth and precise. With precise paddles and three other players, this game becomes a must-have for the 2600 player, or any game player for that matter.

5) BALLBLAZER
(Atari 7800)

I did not play this game until about four years ago. I had read the reviews for it in all the magazines in about 1985 or 1986, when the game was first released; it looked okay, but boring.

When I started collecting for the 7800, I happened upon this

cartridge. I brought it home and thought it was excellent. I brought the 7800 and Ballblazer game to the next Atari user group meeting and played against someone already familiar with the game. It was great fun.

The game is really simple, yet holds elements that give it quite a bit of depth, such as the ability to launch the ball toward the goal when it is not in sight and get the maximum three-point score, which always infuriates the other player!

I heard this game was going to have a sequel on the Playstation called Ballblazer X. I'm not sure what happened to that idea. Does anyone have more information about that? This game is simply good, clean fun.

Okay, that's it for now. Next issue, I will be taking a closer look at the following five games:

Megaball (Amiga)
Doom 2 (IBM PC)
Scorched Tanks 1.90 (Amiga)
Tetris (Game Boy)
Archon (Atari 8-bit)

-- AJT

Hey, everyone --
what do you think about a programming section? Would anyone like to see tutorials etc. on BASIC, AMOS, or anything else in this newsletter? Drop us a line or give one of us a call. If you have any suggestions about the format a programming-related article should take, mention that too. Addresses and phone numbers are on page 2. Don't hesitate to let us know what you'd like inside this publication!

Let me confess -- my first computer was an Atari 8-bit. I selected it after comparing it to all of the other computers on the market at the time. I was much younger and more gullible back then; I actually called Atari Co. to order or at least reserve a 1450 XLD. I could not understand why they would not take my money. I ended up with an 800 XL from Montgomery Ward for less than $200.00. Little did I know that a computer without a storage device was virtually useless.

I got an Atari tape drive next, and then a 1020 plotter (I still think that this was perhaps Atari's greatest product). Then I got a 1030 modem, and finally an Indus disk drive that cost $500.00. You know, most of this stuff is still working! Now I have several Atari 8-bit computers, several disk drives and a lot of other Atari-compatible stuff, as well as hundreds, perhaps thousands, of disks full of programs.

A computer is a tool. As long as it does the job for which it was designed and purchased, use it. You don't throw your old screwdriver just because you got a new one. Same with computers. If my old, reliable Atari still does what I need it to do, why go out and get this week's latest "must-have" wonder? You can bet that there will be another terrific, overly hyped product next week. If I use my computer to type a few letters a month, why would I need a 233 MHz, $3,000 computer? A pen would do, or a pencil, but since I have a computer, why not use Atariwriter and my old dot-matrix printer? I don't need to get the latest Office program, one that costs more than my whole system is worth; all I need is a way to format my deathless prose, and a spell-checker. Why anyone would want or need all the bells and whistles on the all-inclusive word processors is beyond my comprehension.

Too often we get caught-up in the "mine is bigger, better, faster, and stronger than yours" syndrome. Almost every computer ever made has at least one feature that sets it apart from the rest of the hardware out there, so we tend to focus on our chosen computers' strengths and ignore any faults that they might have. If we were to look at a computer as a tool and not as a way to keep up with the neighbors, perhaps we would have less unused computing power on our desks and more money in our pockets.

The great graphics that the newest computer games feature are used to show gore and violence at the drop of a hat. I'm sure that you have all seen the Doom-type games. They remind me of Monty Python's Black Knight. You hack some poor computer-generated character's arm off, and the blood sprays all over everything. I'm surprised that this doesn't attract piranhas to chew the toes off to create more blood to attract the sharks, to attract the giant squid, to attract the killer whales, to attract Moby Dick, to attract Ahab; boy, what a screen-saver that would be.

The old days were not necessarily better; just simpler. Pac-Man had ordinances passed to keep kids out of the game rooms during school hours. Now you have Internet troubles: who can see or have access to what. The more things change, the more they stay the same!

-- ER

YOUR BASIC ARTICLE

by Adam Trionfo & Chris Federico

For me, English is a simple language to use. Sure, I make mistakes, but I can work through them. Errors may occur from time to time, but I can find them and correct them. I could even write an extremely technical newsletter about animal species without using Latin names, but in this case, pure English would be difficult and cumbersome. There are faster ways to describe species. "A large, gray, four-legged animal with a big nose" may very well describe an elephant, but what kind of elephant? I could spend an entire paragraph explaining what I mean, when the simple Latin word would suffice. (Guess what? I have no idea what the Latin word for "elephant" is!)

Okay, I guess it is time to spill the beans: What the hell am I talking about? Programming. I would like to compare any variation of BASIC to other languages that are faster. BASIC has taken an awful amount of slack over the years. There are many reasons to complain about BASIC, and I will list only one here. Everyone has heard that BASIC is slow. Well, I can't deny it. Yes, folks, BASIC is slow. So is this 8088 notebook that I am writing this article on. I boot to IBM DOS 3.2 and use the 360K disk drive to boot a simple text processor. This notebook serves my needs well. I can say the very exact thing about BASIC.

BASIC allows the user to create a program much easier then if that same program were being written in a lower-level language like Assembly. I have spent some entertaining time writing some programs using a language called AMOS on my Amiga. It is a variation of BASIC that places high emphasis on game development. I have never written a complete game with it, but I have made several interesting starts. (Actually Chris and I have put a bit of effort into a game called Pig Blaster...) I would not have even bothered to write such a learn-as-you-go game if I had to do it in Assembly.

BASIC gives freedom to the user. It allows for the user to have more control over the computer he is using. Have you ever used Microsoft's Visual BASIC? Yes, it is slow. Yes, you can complain about it if you must. But it gives you freedom to create. It gives you power over your PC. You can even use it to customize some programs. I would not say that it is the pinnacle of all BASIC languages, but it is certainly a worthy product.

-- AJT

I agree with Adam; and I have another take on it.

The problem in the early 80s -- the element that spread the computer market so thin that it went temporarily down the tubes -- was a failure to simplify or standardize. There were just too many options for the potential enthusiast. We'd already seen it briefly, in the form of the video game shakeout: "Do I buy a 2600, or should I get something with better graphics, like a ColecoVision? Do I want an Intellivision or should I wait for the Odyssey 3?" and on and on and on. Many consumers took the best available choice: not to buy anything.

Then the personal computer market broke into three sects, all fiercely opposed to one another: Commodore (the most popular), Atari and Apple. Each of these companies released too many products on too many market bandwidths (types of targeted buyers) to afford researching anything actually innovative. The exception was the acquisition (not the development, which was already complete) of Amiga technology by Commodore.

Modern computers -- even Pentium-driven PCs -- are in danger, like their ancestral counterparts, of driving buyers away by being rendered obsolete within minimal time frames. Everything is instantly improved, added-to, upgraded, or made "deluxe" nowadays, and by the time you've chosen a language to learn, developed your savvy, gotten the code together, debugged it and run-tested it, the lanuage either won't run on the average chip set-of-the-moment, will require obsolete video cards, or will be guilty of some other form of inadequacy that didn't exist when you first chose that language. Q-BASIC has mutated, with our point-and-click penchant, into Visual BASIC; C had pluses added to its name every few months; and Java seems just another "revolution" to be made obsolete by some other kind of data-transfer application. Here's what I'm leading up to: THERE IS NO RISK-FREE PLATFORM. It endangers the personal computing industry at large, and discourages one's urge to create his own software (not a mistake; you can see why modern companies would love this hampering of creativity).

BASIC was guilty of none of these things. If I sit down today, and write a program in C-64 BASIC, I know that if my computer breaks and I go to the used-stuff store to buy a different one, the program will work identically. It doesn't matter what year the actual model was made in; all it has to be is a 64, and my BASIC code won't let me down.

The era of Compute! magazine, and the inclusion of BASIC as a standard startup program in every home computer, are sorely missed aspects of the computing world. What the industry desperately needs today is a community of home programmers with fresh ideas. Everything about the industry discourages such a possible threat to the top dogs'

wallets; Windows doesn't even come with Q-BASIC, and Microsoft's Office throws in, as a bone to the hackers of yesteryear who might opt for IBM patronage, a script language based on Visual BASIC. Do you think there is any sort of tutorial in the Office manual? Do you think modern computing publications help users become skilled in using the scripter as a possible step toward actual Visual BASIC? If you do, you're as buried in yesterday as this article might seem.

BASIC caused no worries about a chip being replaced (consider the Pentium II and its inevitable following chips) that made half your code unusable; BASIC was simply to be learned, mastered, and used, and it didn't have to be mutated to run on your friend's computer down the street. It would always work, provided that you stuck to one brand of computer. And if you wrote a BASIC program that didn't utilize your computer's special memory locations for sound and graphics, your program could even be typed into the Microsoft BASIC of yesterday with minimal or no translating effort. The keywords barely differed from brand to brand.

BASIC encouraged programming imagination and creativity in every possible type of user; but kids, especially, used the language's wide availability and widespread media support to take their first steps toward becoming full-fledged, multi-platform programmers, many of whom went on to become the creators of imaginative software, the ilk of which is lacking in 1997.

If you have a computer, buy and learn a good language and start adding to the underground programming community before it's gone. Corporate dominance means high prices and low quality. Not that we've seen signs of that yet...

So there's my $002.
                                    -- CF

Warren Robbinett's House
An OC&GS Exclusive
By Chris Federico

Warren, as some of you might know, created ADVENTURE, the first multi-screen, fast-action adventure game. It came out in 1979 for the Atari VCS (2600). If you haven't played it, you might not want to read this interview. It might not make sense.

As you can see from the brief transcription below, my interview, which began a few minutes after I arrived at Warren's house, was short-lived before he got up and announced that he was going to talk to his "special friends in the closet." I will make no comment on Mr. Robbinett's psychological state, but I will print the total interview for your discretion:

Chris: After the coding was finished and you decided that ADVENTURE was completed, what did you think of it as a finished product, as compared to your original vision of the game?

Warren: Neat.

Chris: Um..where did you get the ideas for the places in the game?

Warren: Can't remember. Excuse me a moment.

After completing the above interview, and watching my subject get up and leave the room, I decided to make a little exploration of his house.

I opened a strange black door next to the sofa -- a shrewd decision on my part, since it led in the opposite direction from where Warren had gone -- and I entered a room that was pitch black. I flicked on my lighter, and although I could now only see a few feet ahead of me and to either side, I realized that I was in the middle of some sort of maze. I don't know how the guy fit it into his house, which had looked rather small from the front. For some reason, the walls of the maze were orange.

I wandered around in there for god only knows how long, and finally came upon a weird purple bridge. I walked across it, noticing nervously that it had two side rails but no visible floor, and I wound up in a tiny room within the maze. Jutting from the wall was a weird, fist-sized dot. I wrested it from the plaster and made my way back to the living room, wanting to find Warren and ask him if he'd been looking for it. I can't quite explain what it was made of. It was difficult to physically assess for some reason.

But when I got back to the living room, I noticed that one of the walls was gone! The dot was evidently doing something strange; had I triggered a mechanism that hid Warren's valuables or something? Feeling guilty, but wanting the scoop, I dropped the dot on the loveseat and snuck into the new room revealed through the missing wall.

In the center of the room was one sentence, scribbled on the floor in blocky letters and flashing wildly for no immediately discernible reason:

THIS HOUSE WAS BUILT BY BILL GATES.

I might have known.
                                    -- CF

Is anyone interested in starting up a classic video game user group? We're wondering how many people would be interested in something like that. Write or call --addresses and phone numbers are on page 2.

Atari 2600 Secrets Revealed!

DISCOVERED AND DULY REPORTED TO YOU BY YOUR FEARLESS EDITORS

A little-known fact about the 2600 version of Pitfall II, by Activision, is that there are at least two cartridge versions! This was brought to our attention when we realized that the theme songs for each version are slightly different!

After we opened up the cartridge (it had to be done), we were shocked to discover that Data Age manufactured the version with the less common music! We did some further covert investigation, and were shocked to discover that the theme music was more sparse for a good reason: The cartridge manufactured by Data Age contains Pitfall III: The Lost Caverns II, previously thought to be available only in the 5200 and Atari 8-bit versions of the game, in the form of a hidden level. The shock went even further when we brought up the program on a PC. Jeff Minter's name -- the guy behind many Atari Jaguar games -- turned up in the source code! We could *not* believe it. But the tale gets stranger!

We contacted Jeff through E-Mail, and he told us the whole story. It seems that in 1983, while working on Gridrunner, Jeff had the opportunity to do some work for Data Age. Jeff, being friends with programmer Bob Whitehead of Activision, pursuaded him that he could fit the secret cavern into the Pitfall II cartridge on the 2600 with a special compression method he had developed. Pitfall II ("Version II," as it was secretly known in-house) took four months to program, including the secret part.

When Jeff finished the game, he showed it to everyone at Activision, and they were quite surprised. A special deal was made with Data Age, Jeff's employer, to produce this special version, which would be sold only via CompuServe mail-order -- and even then, only at 150 baud.

The deal eventually fell through, but not before one thousand carts were produced by Data Age. Most of these were destroyed, but a few happened to get out, probably through some programmers that worked for Data Age. Jeff was quite shocked to find that anyone had the Version II cartridge. He asked for a copy of ours, as he didn't even have a copy for himself.

But it doesn't stop there, either! It seems that Jeff wasn't the only one who found out that we had located the infamous Version II (or, as its special chip was affectionately known, Henry Winkler).

We were up late one night, typing. We got so tired from working on this newsletter for you good people that we fell asleep in our chairs.

At about 4 A.M., we heard a noise at the window. We peeked through the drapes, and there, with a ski mask on and suction cups in his hands, was someone trying to break in! When we opened the window and told him the jig was up, he removed the mask. It was Pitfall creator David Crane. He turned beet-red, looked around nervously, and asked sheepishly if we had any duplicates of Fishing Derby that we could give him. We promptly shut the window on his fingers. We then ran downstairs and out the door with an Atari and a portable TV, and tortured him until the cops arrived by making him play his own Decathlon game over and over and over.

The next day, Adam was at the bank alone. As he was leaving, he turned down the alley where he'd parked his truck, and felt a Coleco Telstar light gun in his back.

"Let's have it," he heard a voice growl in his ear.

"What?" Adam asked. "Cash?"

"Nope," the voice replied. "Version II. I know you have it on you."

Unfortunately for the robber (later identified as a creatively frustrated Carol Shaw), Adam didn't have the cartridge on him. Four more attempts were made by various programmers (and, for some reason, Matthew Broderick as he appeared in Wargames) before we decided to paste a Frogs and Flies label on the cartridge to prevent further interest.

The secret level in this 2600 cartridge is actually a little different than the hidden level in other versions. For example, Pitfall Harry comes across a disheveled, blocky-looking Sammy Hagar, onto whose head Harry must leap before the aging rocker's jaws open up; and toward the end of the secret part, a vine like the ones in the very first Pitfall is encountered, but instead of playing the usual fanfare when Harry grabs it and swings across the pond, the game plays, for some reason that we're still investigating, Culture Club's "Karma Chameleon."

We have risked our lives to bring you this story. What was that noise behin28?*9…,;,;,;.mfdng.syz.?yngy.;',',/,,..,!!!.......

THE OC&GS REVIEW PANEL

The problem with game overviews is that half the readers don't agree with the writer. A title dismissed as a piece of garbage might be an old favorite or absolute gem to someone who looks for different game strengths than the writer does. That's why we're proud to present our two-member review board for Atari 2600 games. This was Adam's idea (although he probably didn't think I'd actually go ahead and start typing it), and most of the time he has utterly different opinions on games than I do. Apply or enjoy. Add to it, if you feel the urge, by dropping a line to either Adam or I.   -- Chris

HOME RUN -- This is really not bad, considering the unexplored code available to the first VCS wizards. As long as you forget what a real baseball diamond looks like, you can enjoy the mechanics of this game on their own terms. It even goes to lengths to include the sounds of the crowd. It has a very select group of fans...sort of a Great Underground Umpire. -- Chris

I haven't played it in a while. Next? -- Adam

RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK -- I'm sick of reading old reviews about this game that claim it "bears no resemblance to the movie." It bears quite a strong resemblance to the movie, in fact. What did they expect, digitized stills of Harrison Ford? A Nazi rally, maybe? (Can't you just see it? They coulda used the crowd noise from HOME RUN.) Anyway, the most important parts of the plot remain intact in this, one of the 2600's best games; and Indy's penchant for patient exploration and his skills with whips and guns were incorporated nicely without being mere extras. Let's face it -- this game didn't sell very well because it was involved and took time, offering no immediate fast action. I consider it the proper sequel to ADVENTURE.

I have only two complaints: When you win, you're treated to a terribly anticlimactic ending (in fact, it's the opening scene!); and the mesa in which the Ark is hidden -- one of very many -- isn't selected with enough randomness.   -- Chris

RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK -- Picture, if you will, a dark theater with a boy of 9 watching a man's face melt as he looks at those creatures that live in the Ark. Now, picture this same boy hearing that there is a 2600 game based on the movie. I had to have it. But alas, it never happened.

In the seventh grade, a guy in my class named Mark Gibson told me about the game. (This is a number of years after the game actually came out, by the way.) He told me that it was an impossible game to play, a game that he could lend to me so that I could see for myself. But, thanks to my mother, I no longer had an Atari 2600. (She sold mine for $20 with six games at a yard sale in 1983. Some kid got a hell of a deal.)

Anyway, when I finally got another 2600 in 1990, Raiders Of the Lost Ark, with no instructions, was one of the games that came with it. I tried it, and had no idea what to do. About a year later, a friend of mine named Chris Lammert got quite excited that I had the game; he showed me how to play. He knew how to beat it, but he never showed me the end. He got distracted by Mountain King.

Okay, fast-forward to now. Chris Federico showed me the ending, which is, of course, really the beginning. There is no way that I could beat this game; instead, I shall give you the impression I get from watching and playing this game (however futile that may be).

Indeed, I believe that this is one of the best games available on the 2600; I just can't play it well. Also, the replay value is not all that great. (But then, if you got months, or years, out of this game, like some people I know, you got your money's worth.)

The game's graphics are well-done. The way you select the inventory is well-thought-out. I can find little to fault in this game at all. It is just a difficult game that requires a player to think, rather than to just keep pressing that fire button!   -- Adam

SURROUND -- Okay, I know I said it didn't matter whether or not you have good graphics in front of you if the game's entertaining, but this contest has zero cleverness. How long do you think this "game's" creator spent on the code? Ten minutes? Fifteen tops? You have two squares making trails. The trails are also squares. There are two sounds in the game: making a trail of squares, and running into someone else's trail of squares. There is one graphic in the cart, besides the generic all-purpose VCS score digits: a square. Sure, Disney stole the trailing idea and used it for TRON's cool Light Cycles...but come on! Can you imagine shelling out thirty beans back then for a piece of technology that makes squares on the screen?! There's ONE play-against-the-computer variation ...but it's easier than PONG, except with worse graphics. If the VCS had offered only gaming options like this one, we'd still be playing BATTLESHIP today, because no video games would have sold, and there goes your first business boom.   -- Chris

SURROUND -- I wonder, did Chris even give this game the ten minutes that he thinks the author gave it? I doubt it. I have to agree about this game in the graphics department; it has some of the worst the 2600 has ever seen. Data Age games look good in comparison. If the game play had depended, even in a small way, on the graphics, well...Surround would have been ruined.

Thankfully, Surround is one of the games that, to me, make up the reason a game is a classic. It is the reason I say that it doesn't matter how good a game looks, but how well it plays. Surround has what it takes; well, that is, if you play against another player. (If you play against the computer, I agree with Chris in every way; the game just sucks.)

BUT, try this game against a friend. It is one of the most addictive games I have ever played. (Even more addictive then a certain Russian puzzle game!) Sure, you are big blocks moving all jerky around the screen. Sure, there isn't much room for movement. Instead of taking away from the game, these things add to it. (Really!)

A small pet peeve I have: What is the point of the drawing part? I don't care how well you draw, there is no way to get a good picture out of this cartridge! I think the memory could have been used for something with more purpose. The game could have been given more depth. (A shooting variation of some sort?)   -- Adam

SEEYA NEXT TIME!