ColecoNation

THE BLUE SCREEN
A Homebrew Manifesto
by Nathan Kozlowski

While going through my ColecoVision carts the other day, I couldn't help but be amazed by the amount of homebrews that are currently available for our favorite console. We're very lucky to have a dedicated group of programmers that are so eager to regularly produce new games and they seem to get released at more frequent rates now more than ever. As one of many ColecoVision fans, I feel it is crucial for us to support our hobby and the people trying to make it better, but it is also our role to want only the best for our preferred system. We should expect a certain level of quality and features for the amount of money that we invest in homebrews and that is why I've created a list of points that I feel could be applied to every new game made today.

1. Beta Testing
Every game should undergo some level of beta testing before it gets published. This will not only help weed out any bugs or glitches that may exist within the programming, but allows for the improvement of gameplay through evaluations by others.

2. Standard In-Game Features
Every game should provide for two-player play (usually alternating) and offer the ability to pause.

3. Free Demo
It's nice to test drive a product before buying it and the same goes for homebrews. Plus, allowing people to download a game's demo rom (one level or screen is enough) will often be enough to convince the undecided to buy the full version.

4. The Whole Package
Boxes and instruction manuals make for a complete package and are worth the extra money. Obviously, nobody's going to complain about paying less for just a cartridge, but most aren't going to be discouraged by a higher price tag if it includes a box and manual. Besides, if cost is such a big problem, then just provide the rom for free download or a small price and we will play it on our USB multi-carts.

5. Availability
Making only a limited number of a homebrew makes for many unhappy people. There are too many homebrew publishers out there to not have enough cartridges made so that every fan can buy a copy.

6. Confident Original
Original games can be as great as translations, but just be sure your original game is truly good enough to be published. It may be fun to play once or twice, but how about the 50th time? This is where beta testing becomes invaluable.

It's important to note that these are not aimed at any specific homebrew or type of game (most existing games miss at least one of the points), but are instead offered up as suggestions to ColecoVision programmers and publishers as relatively simple, noninvasive ways to improve their future projects. Everyone in the ColecoNation continues to eagerly support the future developments of the ColecoVision and encourage those that keep the Vision alive!   [02]

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The VGC Trade   ColecoNation@yahoo.com
Want a copy of Video Game Collector #6, but don't have the extra $6 to buy one? Well, ColecoNation's got a bunch of copies of the latest issue of Video Game Collector and we're looking to make a trade. All you have to do to get your own copy is send us a ColecoVision cartridge. It can be of any game you'd like, however it must work and be in good condition (not the one with the ripped label that smells of cat pee, please). If you're interested in making this trade and live in the US or Canada (sorry everyone else), send us an email and we'll finalize the deal.

John Dondzila Returns!   www.classicgamecreations.com
John Dondzila was one of the earliest ColecoVision homebrew programmers and created three games for the system back in 1996 and 1997. He stopped selling his games a while back and we've been sad ever since. However, his creations are back and ready to be delivered! Space Invasion (a Space Invaders clone), Star Fortress (a Star Castle clone), and Purple Dinosaur Massacre Demo all come with instructions and boxes and cost just $20 each.

GameConsoles Returns, Too!   www.gameconsoles.com
The classic gaming site, GameConsoles.com, has been reinvented to have a homebrew focus. The site hopes to be a resource for programmers and gamers of every classic system. Their first two releases were ColecoVision homebrews, Search for the Stolen Crown Jewels and Schlange CV (both programmed by Philip Krause). They hope to be releasing more homebrew games in the near future.

Good Deal Games Goings-Ons   www.gooddealgames.com
Good Deal Games will soon be selling two of Philip Krause's games, Search for the Stolen Crown Jewels and Schlange CV. They are currently taking pre-orders so send them an email if you're interested. Monster Masher is another Philip Krause ColecoVision game that is currently being finished up and will be available soon.

Opcode Games Odds and Ends   www.opcodegames.com
Opcode Games is planning to make a new batch of Space Invaders Collections, but they want to know who still needs a copy. Send Eduardo Mello an email if you're interested. Also, Opcode Games' website is slowly getting remade. Check it out to see a listing of all existing and proposed games that they're working on.

ColecoVision Products Online!   www.cafepress.com/colecovision
Cafe Press is currently selling various items with the "ColecoVision" and "Coleco" logo on them. Everything from t-shirts, coffee mugs, bags, to mouse pads have the two classic logos plastered on them and are eagerly waiting for you to check them out.

New Coleco Products At Target!   www.target.com
A plethora of new Coleco electronic games are showing up on Target's shelves. Ranging from handheld to plug-n-play devices, the products seem to be of higher quality then last year's items, but still have nothing to do with the original Coleco or ColecoVision.   [03]

ColecoNation

COLECO CHAT

Albert Yarusso
by Nathan Kozlowski

Albert Yarusso's Website
www.atariage.com

CVDrum [AtariAge]

Deflektor Kollection [AtariAge]

When you hear the name "Albert Yarusso" which word comes to mind? "Atari," of course, but after that then you think of "homebrews." Albert runs the website, AtariAge.com, which features extensive databases for most of the Atari video game systems and a very professional homebrew publishing service. AtariAge offers not just Atari homebrews, but ColecoVision as well and that's why we've asked him to answer a few of our questions about his classic gaming venture.

Nathan Kozlowski_ Can you give us some history on the AtariAge website?
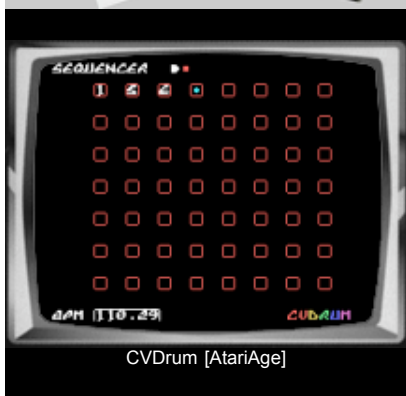**Albert Yarusso_** AtariAge actually began its life as the Atari 2600 Nexus back in the late 1990's and was started by Alex Bilstein. Back then I was not involved with the site, but used it as a resource to aid with my growing Atari 2600 collection. After some time, I began working with Alex on the Nexus website. Ultimately we decided that we wanted to broaden the scope of the site, which at the time was dedicated solely to the Atari 2600. In the fall of 2000 we began work on "AtariAge," which would initially encompass the Atari 2600, 5200 and 7800 systems, featuring quite a bit more content per system than the Nexus had. The site officially launched in April of 2001. Over time, sections for the Atari Lynx and Atari Jaguar have also been added. Some work has begun on adding an Atari 8-bit computer section, although I have not had as much time to work on that area as I'd like. Many other pages have been added to the site as well, such as the In Development section, a 2600 Hacks section, Blogs, a Magazines section, and more.

When we started AtariAge back in 2001, virtually all the information in the database was generated by Alex and me. All the box, cartridge, catalog, overlay, and manual scans came directly from our collections, which was a Herculean task at the time. We also spent many hours taking screenshots of all the games. Outside of the media and the database, there certainly were contributions by others. Once AtariAge went live, we did solicit and receive many contributions from the community to help fill in gaps on the site. This is especially the case where boxes are concerned, as well as manual scans for many of the systems. Without the community's support, the database would be far less complete than it is today.
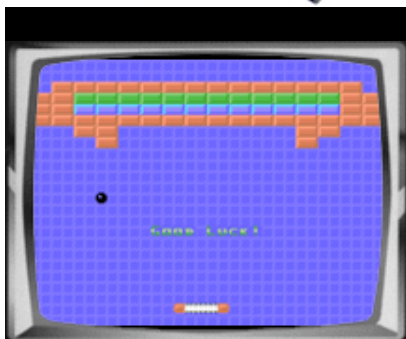
NK_ What's your background as a video game player?
AY_ I've been playing video games since the late 70's, starting with the various TV Pong systems that flooded the market at the time. I do remember being enthralled with "Star Raiders" when I was probably eight years old (back in 1978). The first video game system I owned was an Atari 2600, received as a Christmas present sometime before 1980. We couldn't afford to purchase many games, so my collection of 2600 titles didn't grow very quickly. I probably spent more time playing games at friends' houses, including the Intellivision and ColecoVision systems that I longed for but had no way to afford. Eventually I purchased an Atari 800XL computer with money made from mowing lawns and a paper route, after which I played the 2600 very little. Games on the Atari 8-bit were far superior and I also learned how to program in Atari BASIC (and ultimately machine language) on the 800XL. I even ran an Atari 8-bit BBS for several years. Later I'd buy an Atari 520ST, the first of several ST machines I'd own over the years. The ST also had a fair assortment of games, although nothing approaching the huge 8-bit library by that time. Still, games like Dungeon Master were quite impressive and enjoyable back then.

Fast forward to 1996, when I interviewed for a job with Looking Glass Technologies in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The project lead for the team I'd be working on, Rex Bradford, happened to be a commercial 2600 programmer "back in the day." He wrote several games for Activision and Parker Brothers, including Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back and Jedi Arena. This piqued my interest and it wasn't long before I bought an Atari 2600 at a flea market and started buying as many 2600 games as I could find. Mainly I was interested in playing all the games I couldn't afford as a kid, which was quite a few given the 2600's large library. This eventually blossomed into collecting every 2600 game, and at some point I started collecting for other cartridge-based systems as well. [04]

ColecoNation

COLECO CHAT
Albert Yarusso [continued...]

Reversi [AtariAge]

Astro Invader [AtariAge]

ten | 10.06

NK_ What's your background as a video game programmer?

AY_ Ever since playing Ultima III on a friend's Apple II long ago, I fancied myself writing games. I was writing boring insurance-related applications for Windows when one day out of the blue an ex-girlfriend (now working as a technical recruiter) called me up and said that a "multimedia company" was looking for a user-interface programmer to help them finish up a game. I asked her if she could tell me the name of the company and she stated, "Looking Glass Technologies". At that point my jaw hit the floor, as I was a big fan of Looking Glass games (Ultima Underworld I and II, System Shock, etc.) and I jumped at the opportunity.

The first project I worked on at Looking Glass was British Championship Open Golf (BOCG). After that I was slated to work on "The Dark Project" (later to be released as "Thief"), but due to the cancellation of a Star Trek Voyager game before BOCG was completed, most of those employees were transferred onto Dark and other projects. My choices then were to work on Flight Unlimited II or move to Austin, Texas to work on "Junction Point." I had never been to Austin, but the project was headed up by Warren Spector (whom had his hand in many interesting titles), so I visited in April 1997 and a month later moved to Austin.

On July 1st, Looking Glass closed our office, as they were in dire financial straits. While the writing was on the wall, we were still a bit surprised. Six of us decided to band together for two months, come up with a design for a game, and attempt to sell ourselves as a ready-to-go, experienced development team. One of our designs was for a 3D Joust-like game. Another was for an action/RPG title called "Shooter." On September 1st, we signed a deal with Ion Storm to create an Austin Ion Storm office. For the next three years we worked on "Shooter," which was eventually released as the critically acclaimed "Deus Ex," followed two years later by a PS2 release (both of which I worked on). Since then I have had my hand in a few projects, but nothing as involved or as rewarding as Deus Ex. For Deus Ex, I programmed the entire user-interface, the conversation system, a standalone Windows-based conversation editor (used to write and control the game's extensive dialog), the save/load system, and various in-game systems.

NK_ When and why did you decide to expand AtariAge into a homebrew publisher and retailer?

AY_ When we attended the Classic Gaming Expo back in 2002, we helped a few authors sell their games from our booth at the show. This included the Thrust+ Driving Controller Edition (by Thomas Jentzsch), Berzerk: Voice Enhanced (by Mike Mika), and Haunted House II 3-D (by John Swiderski). We also allowed Ronen Habot to sell copies of his new 5200 game Castle Blast from our booth. A few months after the show, we put up a simple store on AtariAge to sell a few games in the hopes that these sales would help us pay for the AtariAge hosting costs, several hundred dollars a month. and maybe help finance trips to future shows.

Over time, I approached many homebrew authors about selling their games in our store. We purchased a high-end, professional color laser printer for printing the labels and manuals and did a fair amount of research on die-cut labels, various types of paper, recycling 2600 carts, and so forth. We also worked with Joe Grand of Pixels Past to develop new Atari 2600 PCBs to use for producing our games. As an upshot of selling homebrew games in the store, I expanded the homebrew-related content on AtariAge. This included adding homebrew games to our database (which I try to stay on top of as new homebrew games are released), creating homebrew-related discussion forums, adding a Blogging module that allows homebrew authors to keep a diary of their development, adding an "In Development" section, and more.

We now have over 50 unique 2600 homebrew titles in the store and this number continues to grow every year. While newer homebrew games sell the best, even old titles continue to sell as people new to the classic gaming scene discover homebrew games. The store aspect of AtariAge can be time consuming, but I try to be as efficient as possible with production of games as well as shipping orders out.   [05]

ColecoNation

COLECO CHAT
Albert Yarusso [continued...]

Spectar [AtariAge]

Cosmo Fighter 2 [AtariAge]

ten | 10.06

NK_ When and why did you start publishing ColecoVision homebrews?
AY_ I've always been a big fan of the ColecoVision, ever since playing Donkey Kong on it. The ColecoVision was also the first system I experienced Miner 2049'er. After the 2600, the ColecoVision homebrew scene is one of the most active (the Vectrex also sees quite a bit of action). I don't remember the exact series of events, but the two initial ColecoVision titles we sold in our store were Double Breakout by Daniel Bienvenu and CVDRUM by Frank Emanuele. Double Breakout is a (you guessed it!) Breakout-style game that can be played with the driving controller or roller controller. We eventually had to change the name of the game to "Deflektor Kollection" after Atari complained about the use of the word "Breakout" in the game's title. CVDRUM is a drum machine for the ColecoVision (and a CVSYNTH cartridge is on the way). Since then we've published additional titles by Daniel Bienvenu and Scott Huggins. We've also sold all of Eduardo Mello's amazing arcade ports through our store and at the various shows we attend.

Joe Grand designed a new ColecoVision PCB and I had new ColecoVision die-cut labels produced. Most of the ColecoVision titles we've sold have been released with plastic VHS-style cases (come to think of it, all of them except CVDRUM). We've also been using new ColecoVision cartridge shells, which means that the parts used in creation of ColecoVision homebrew games are brand new (circuit boards, chips, cartridge housings, labels, manuals, and VHS cases).

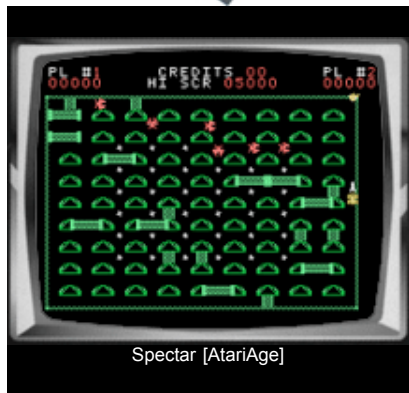**NK_ What was the first homebrew game to be published by AtariAge?**
AY_ Probably Thomas Jentzsch's Thrust+ DC Edition, which we were selling at the 2002 Classic Gaming Expo. We actually had professionally printed boxes created for Thrust, one of the few homebrew titles to receive this treatment (it's sadly quite expensive to have offset printed boxes created). The initial batch of boards for these carts (those sold at CGE) were soldered by Joe Grand, using PCBs created by Chris Wilkson. The boards were actually finished up in a mad rush the night before the show! We had a party in our suite Friday night and as anyone who attended can attest to, Marc Oberhauser and I were busy folding and gluing boxes all night!

NK_ What process do you go through to get a game produced and published?
AY_ The first step is connecting with the author writing the homebrew game. Sometimes I will contact an author and ask if he (they've all been men so far) would be interested in having their game published through AtariAge. Other times an author will contact me and ask how to go about having their game published. Once we agree to publish the game through AtariAge, the author has to finish the game if it's not already done. This usually (hopefully!) involves some beta testing, either publicly (by posting the latest version of the game to our forum, a blog, or a development page of some sort) or privately (when a select number of individuals work with the author behind closed doors to test the game).

While the game is being wrapped up, a label design needs to be created and work on the manual begins. We have a few artists and designers we frequently work with, but if the author wants to have a label contest I will set one up on AtariAge. The manual usually requires the author to write up the bulk of the text, which we then take and format into a stylized manual that we can print.

Once the label and manual have been completed, I take some pictures of the game for use in our online store as well as other promotions. When the author has completed the binary, I will then add the game to the store. I then have to take current screenshots and write a description for the game. At this time I'll also move the game from our In Development section to our main game database. Then I'll update the front page of the store highlighting the new game, post some news on the front page of AtariAge, and also start a thread in the forum that the game is now available. With orders for this new game coming in, I'll then produce a batch of carts and manuals up front to satiate the initial demand. Often times games are completed right before a show, in which case not only am I building copies of any new games, but also building up inventory of other games to sell at the show. [06]

ColecoNation

Cosmo Fighter 3 [AtariAge]

CVSynth [AtariAge]

CVDrum DX2 [AtariAge]

NK_ What are the highlights and lowlights of homebrewing?
AY_ For me, the most exciting aspect of homebrewing on classic gaming systems is the prospect that a single individual can design and program a game from start to finish, and even take the last step of producing the game in physical form. It can be quite a challenge, especially on the Atari 2600, which is quite arcane in terms of the wizardry involved to generate even a single pixel on the screen. I enjoy working with the authors as a game is developed, offering feedback where I can, and testing out iterations of a game as authors crank them out. I work closely with the authors, designers and artists on creating labels and manuals for the games. Sometimes we host contests on AtariAge that are related to a game's development, such as the various label contests we've held over the years. It's always enjoyable to see what members of the classic gaming community dream up, and the amount of talent out there is incredible. And it's very satisfying knowing that you're helping people enjoy new homebrew games in a physical form with production qualities rivaling that of many commercial games produced back in the day.

The only real "lowlight" I can think of is the actual physical production of the games. It's quite time consuming to build cartridges, as there are many steps involved in their production. Without resorting to mass production (which isn't really viable for the homebrew market), there aren't many ways to streamline the process since it's a fair bit of manual labor.

NK_ What's your analysis of the classic gaming homebrew market?
AY_ I believe there's a core group of classic gamers who enjoy buying homebrew games in cartridge form, and that this group has probably remained relatively constant in numbers over the past few years. People come and people go, but the scene really hasn't grown terribly much. The 2600 homebrew market gets a fair amount of attention, but because there are fewer ColecoVision homebrew releases, those that do come out tend to sell as well as if not better than 2600 homebrews (at least initially, over time the 2600 homebrews win out). Since most authors freely release the binaries to their games (something I encourage), most people enjoy homebrew games through emulation or via reprogrammable carts (such as the Cuttle Cart, Krokodile Cart, or modified Supercharger on the 2600).

As time goes on, "newer" classic game systems are the ones that people feel nostalgic about (since those are the systems they grew up with). However, systems newer in age than those from the late 70's and early 80's require more time and effort to produce quality games for, so I doubt we'll ever see a steady stream of homebrew games for them. As I mentioned previously, a single person can make a game from start to finish for the Atari 2600, including graphics and sound. The ColecoVision, which has superior graphics and sound capabilities over the 2600, can take longer to develop a game for and sometimes requires the help of an artist and musician. Modern game systems require entire teams of people, multi-million dollar budgets, and often years of development time to produce a single game! Eventually the PS2 will be a "classic" system, but I doubt we'll see many homebrews for it that rival the quality of today's commercial releases. Will people still be creating new homebrews for the 2600 and ColecoVision at that time? I'd like to think so!

NK_ Do you attend many of the classic gaming expos?
AY_ I've attended quite a few classic gaming events, anywhere from one to three a year for the past four years. The shows have been located across the country, including Las Vegas, Philadelphia, Tulsa, Milwaukee, Dallas, and Austin. AtariAge is well received at these events, and we generally have new homebrew games to sell as well as demos of games in development that people can play at the shows. I always try to have at least two ColecoVision systems setup for people to try their hand at new releases and demos. The ColecoVision systems are often busier than the 2600 and 5200 systems, as people don't see as many ColecoVisions these days as you might with an Atari 2600, and there is a lot of nostalgia for the ColecoVision when someone spots them in our booth.   [07]

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COLECO CHAT
Albert Yarusso [continued...]

NK_ Do you plan to sell homebrews for other systems in the future?
AY_ It's possible. There is a fair amount of activity on the homebrew front for other classic gaming systems, including the Vectrex, Intellivision and Odyssey 2. Adding another system to the lineup requires designing new circuit boards, exploring cartridge shells (whether to recycle or create new shells, if someone isn't already producing new carts), designing new label templates, and forging relationships with authors you haven't (usually) worked with yet. I don't want to spread myself too thin, so I've kept my focus on the 2600, 5200 and ColecoVision.

NK_ Do you plan to program your own homebrew one day?
AY_ Absolutely! As I've repeated to various people over the years, there are two systems I'd love to write a homebrew for: The Atari 2600 and ColecoVision. The 2600, because it requires a great deal of knowledge, patience, and perseverance. And the ColecoVision because it is more evolved than the 2600 with greater capabilities, so it's easier to program for and you can write more involved games. I have a few ideas for games that I'd like to program. I greatly look forward to having the time to sit down and create a homebrew game from scratch!

NK_ Thanks for taking the time to answer these questions. Keep up the great work!

SAME AS IT EVER WAS?
Carnival

Gorf is next!
Send your reviews by 11.24.06:
ColecoNation@yahoo.com

Carnival was one of the initial releases for the ColecoVision, released in the fall of 1982. Based on Sega/Gremlin's 1980 coin-op, Carnival wasn't your typical video game. You weren't fighting invading aliens or saving the world. You were just showing off your skills at the local shooting gallery and it was as entertaining as the rest.

Nathan Kozlowski ~ Nothing scared me more back in 1982 than those evil ducks in Carnival! No matter how many I shot, they kept coming until they reached the bottom and swooped in for the kill. The game became more manageable once I figured out how to clear a board (it took me a good year to finally read the instructions), but the threat of those web-footed beasts was always present. I loved the interlude stage with the bears, though. There are few things in life that are more enjoyable than continuously shooting a bear in the butt. Today, I find Carnival as enjoyable as I did when I first played it. The concept is unique and hasn't really weathered over time. The continuous musical tune gets old pretty quick (don't know how it didn't bother me before) and now I quickly turn it off to keep from inadvertently being lulled into a coma.

Shooting Gallery Screen [Coleco]

Ryan Cote ~ Carnival was and is a game in my collection (past & present) that was never really played too much. That's not to say that it's one of Coleco's worst games for the system. I compared Carnival to its arcade counterpart and I find it to be just as fun. No huge skill is required, so just about anyone can pick it up and play it with almost no problems. Graphics are great and control is easy. There's not much more to it. Like I said, I wouldn't say it was Coleco's worst game. But, it wasn't the best either. It's just an average game that would be a surprise if it weren't part of everybody's collection.

Next Issue: Gorf
Did you try out Gorf when it debuted on the ColecoVision way back in 1983? Have you been known to play it once and a while even now? Well, we'd like to read about your experiences with this classic game back in the day and today. In 150 words or less, write a past and present review of Gorf and let the ColecoNation know what you think. The deadline's November 24th and it's first come first served, so get going!   [08]

Bear Screen [Coleco]

ColecoNation

IN PLAY
CVDrum: Drum Machine
by Nathan Kozlowski

programmer: Frank Emanuele
publisher: AtariAge
packaging: Dale Crum
release: 07.2003
rom size: 32k
players: 1
controller: Standard Controller

Splash Screen [AtariAge]

Pattern Screen [AtariAge]

Have you ever had the urge to play the drums on your ColecoVision? As crazy as it sounds, Frank Emanuele wanted to do just that and so he went about creating a drum machine program for the classic console. CVDrum made its debut at the July 2003 Austin Gaming Expo as one of the first ColecoVision homebrews published by AtariAge. A month later AtariAge held a "splash screen" contest to add a little flash to the program and it has been sold in their store ever since.

CVDrum is not really a game, which makes it very difficult to review. Inspired by popular software and hardware drum machines, the program simulates the sounds, patterns, and tempos of a real drum set using the sound capabilities of the ColecoVision. It can create up to nine different one-measure patterns that can then be arranged into a fifty-six measure sequenced loop, perfect for your at-home rave parties. The program simulates eight different instruments: a bass drum, snare drum, hi-hat, bell, low-tom, mid-tom, hi-tom, and ride cymbal. As well as pre-orchestrated performances, there is also a live mode which turns your ColecoVision controller into a real-time drum.

Creating drum patterns and sequences in the editing mode can be quite confusing, especially to someone who's musically-challenged. The interface is very simplistic and those new to the program will struggle through it until they become more familiar with the process. The instruction manual (a wonderful homage to the original Coleco product) is your best friend, so be sure to keep in handy. The last page of the manual includes a custom-designed keypad overlay for quick reference and it's a shame that it isn't more economically feasible to produce a plastic version of it. Who wouldn't want another authentic overlay for their collection?

The live mode is a little less structured and generates some interesting results. The ability to do some free-style drumming is very amusing, but will most likely aggravate the people around you. The keypad has never been used as intensively or uniquely as with CVDrum and this is clearly experienced through the live mode feature of the program. This is a great example of the potential that Coleco most likely saw in their controller when they originally designed it.

The level of sophistication with which Frank Emanuele has explored and utilized the sound capabilities of the ColecoVision is truly impressive. One can easily tell that this is something he is very passionate about and it is reflected in every part of the program, from the synthesized voice that initially greets you to the range of sounds the can be created. However, a more user-friendly interface would make this accessible to a wider range of people.

In its current state, it is very much like an instrument. And, as with every instrument, if you don't know how to play it, then you'll pretty much just be making noise. A sample pattern is included in the instructions, so that you can get a sense of what a good composition sounds like. It would have been nice to see the inclusion of more samples to help the user become more familiar with the program.

Two more products are currently being developed by Frank Emanuele to further push the ColecoVision's (and your television's) sound. CVSynth will be a full blown synthesizer that will simulate the notes of a monophonic keyboard. CVDrum DX2 looks to be addressing the issues that we're raised in this review. Featuring a new and improved user-interface, this new version of our favorite drum machine should be easier to use, feature expanded drum sounds, and include some visual effects. It's always great to see programmers pursue unique projects for the ColecoVision and CVDrum is definitely one of these projects.   [09]

ColecoNation

IN DEVELOPMENT
Pac-Man Collection [Part Two]
by Eduardo Mello

Ms. Pac-Man Tile Set [Opcode]

Ms. Pac-Man Sprites [Opcode]

Pac-Man Collection Title Screen [Opcode]

Pac-man Collection Options Screen [Opcode]

Controlling Pac-Man
The original Pac-Man control scheme is very straightforward: four directions, 1P, 2P, coin and service mode. All those functions were mapped to the ColecoVision controller, though some aren't documented. Also, new functions have been added, like instant pause which is very useful considering that it's a home version.

Hidden Tricks and Bonuses
The ColecoVision version of Pac-Man and Ms Pac-Man has all the same hidden bonuses and tricks found in the arcade version, as well as some new ones. I am not going to list or describe them here, because I don't want to spoil the fun of discovering them all by yourself.
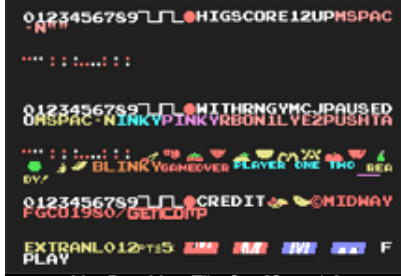
Porting Ms. Pac-Man
Converting Ms. Pac-Man brought some of the same challenges of converting Pac-Man, not to mention a few new ones. First, I was forced to make some graphic concessions with Ms. Pac-Man, because the ColecoVision wasn't able to display the distinct maze outline at all. For the arcade version, different colors were used for the maze outline and the fill, but this wasn't possible in the ColecoVision version. I tried to quickly alternate between two different frames, one showing the outline and the other showing the fill, but it ended up not working well.

Another challenge was that I couldn't have all the necessary maze patterns for all four mazes loaded in the ColecoVision video RAM at the same time, so I was forced to develop a routine to load maze patterns as necessary. Ms Pac-Man uses most of the same graphic routines that I created for Pac-Man, including displaying of maze and pallets, writing messages, animating sprites and others. Sound is also generated by the same basic routines with just the sound data changed. Another tricky issue with Ms. Pac-Man is that the whole game can't fit in just 32KB, which is the maximum allowed cartridge size for the ColecoVision. So how did I solve this problem? I didn't, but my friend Bryan Edewaard came up with a solution: the ColecoVision MegaCart. There will be more about it next issue.

Pac-Man Collection Opening and Options Screen
To round off the Pac-Man Collection package, I created an intro sequence for the game. I must say I am very happy with the final result and think it is one of the most detailed animations for the ColecoVision ever. Screenshots don't do it justice; you need to see it in motion. Hopefully it will become a fan favorite among the ColecoVision classics, like the alien from Space Fury. The game also offers a complete option screen with all the settings that were available in the arcade version. Is the game too difficult for you? Simply increase the total lives to "5." Is the game too easy? You can set difficulty to "hard."

Next Issue: The MSX Version and the ColecoVision MegaCart