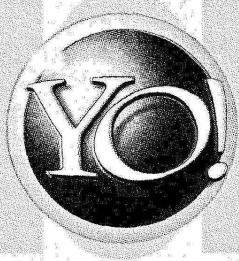


AT HOME

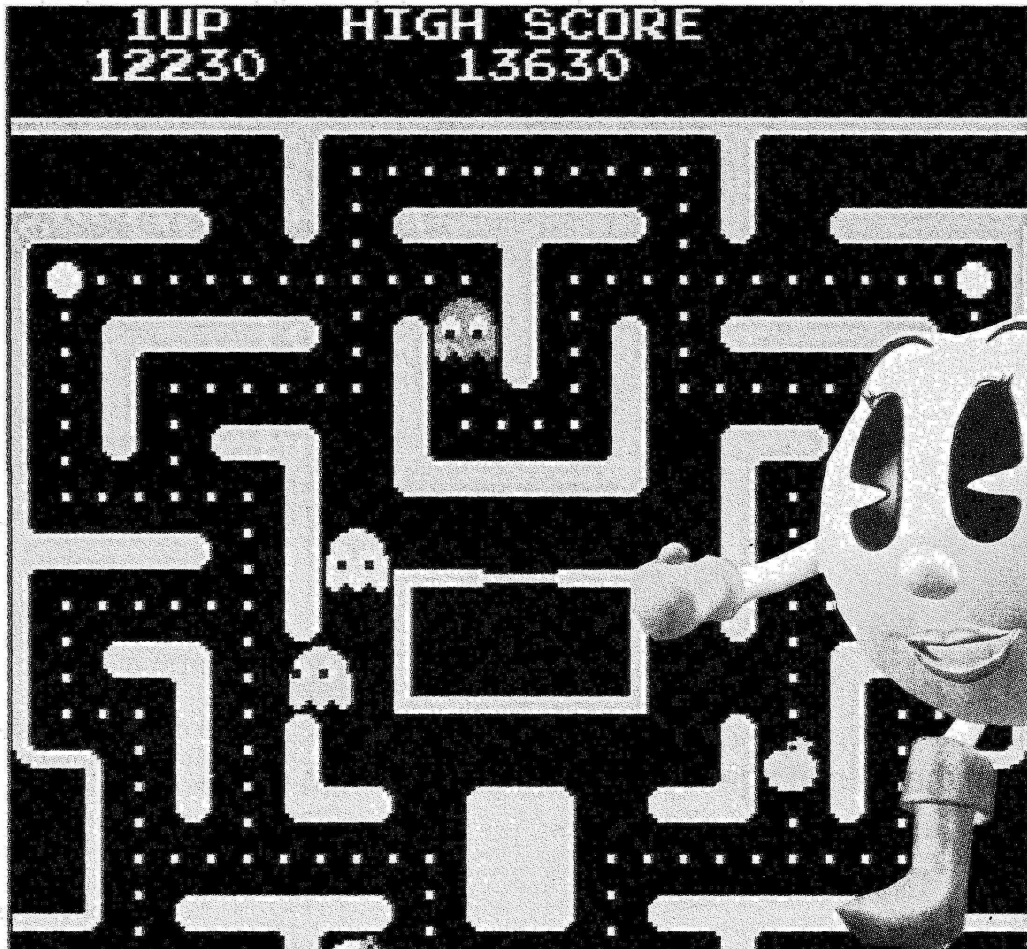


Ask Martha

MAKE YOUR MARK WITH MONOGRAMS
Martha Stewart, Page 48

Gizmo

THE FUTURE OF HOME VIDEO GAMES?
Jonathan Takiff, Page 50



MS. PAC-MAN COMES HOME

Collectors lust for vintage arcade games

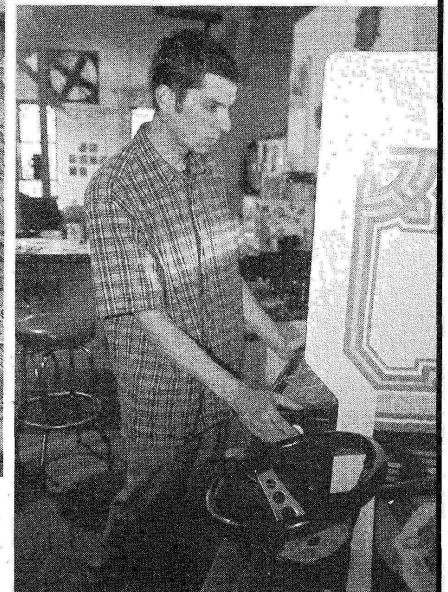
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A classic Ms. Pac-Man game screen and a graphic depiction of the character

Cover Story



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YONG KIM / DAILY NEWS

They got game

Children of the golden age of video games take them home

by Collin Keefe
For the Daily News

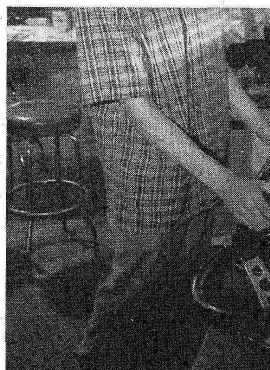
Like a cross between the robot-hustling Jawas in "Star Wars" and Santa's little helpers, Todd Tuckey and his small staff work day and night, six days a week, rebuilding and refurbishing arcade classics like Pac-Man, Centipede, Defender and Galaxian.

Tuckey's TNT Amusements is selling more video games than ever before. And he's selling these games for twice as much as he was two years ago. But no one seems to be complaining.

Business is so good, in fact, that he's stopped advertising and at times actually turns prospective customers away.

"I've got a gazillion orders," Tuckey says, sitting amid the encroaching clutter of work orders spilling out of every nook and cranny in his tiny office in Southampton, Bucks County.

He's doing a brisk business even though the bot-



MARK LUDAK / FOR THE DAILY NEWS

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tom fell out of the arcade business 16 years ago.

"The vending business is dying fast. Arcades are going bankrupt," Tuckey says. "Last year, in Center City, there were three good-sized arcades on Chestnut Street. Today, there's only one, and we own all the classic games in it."

"The thing is," he pauses and smiles, "we're still making the same money we were when there were three arcades."

What has happened is, as arcades slowly become a thing of the past, games like Asteroids, Robotron and Frogger are drawing collectors who played the games when they were young. Even though they're nearly two decades old, the magnetic appeal of these classics is still intact, and people are bring-

ing them into their homes.

The fruits of the golden age

Back in 1979, Tuckey was ahead of the game, so to speak. He was holding down the two arcades at

Temple University's Student Activities Center and had started up a small but lucrative video game route, supplying stores in and around Philadelphia with the latest games. The industry was young and looked as if it had a promising future.

Between 1978 and 1984 — the golden age of video games — hundreds of thousands of games were developed and marketed throughout the world. Utilizing less memory than the smart chip you find in modern, high-tech toaster ovens, and running on processors that are tortoiselike by today's standards, these games quickly materialized in the vacant corners of just about every pizza joint, bowling alley and convenience store throughout the land.

With the proliferation of arcades that followed, the power of the microchip was in the hands of the masses. The digital revolution was building its ranks, and the 50 million kids who came of age in this formative era became a part of it for the measly price of 25 cents.

The video game boom pushed the limits of technology to the fullest extent, and the progress developers made directly influenced how the computer industry and tech culture of today evolved. Concepts like the front-end graphical interface that revolutionized the way we use operating systems and the World Wide Web were first fleshed out in video games. And advances in dis-

play monitors and computer-generated graphics grew with every quarter plunked down for a game of Donkey Kong.

The mice we've grown so attached to in recent years are merely Trak Ball controllers like the ones featured on such early Atari games as Missile Command and Centipede — but miniaturized and turned upside down.

But just as quickly as these games swept the globe, they started to fall by the wayside, as personal computers and home video game consoles gobbled up the market like a rabid Pac-Man tweaked out on power pellets. Since the demise of the golden age, countless video games have come and gone, and so have the companies that made them.

The video craze lives on

Oddly enough, after all these years, these digital-age dinosaurs are growing in value and demand. The generation of kids who grew up playing these games are now in the work force and have disposable incomes larger than a pocketful of quarters. They want these games for their homes and they're willing to pay top dollar for them.

"If you asked me back when I was a teenager in the '80s what I wanted to be when I grew up, I would've told you I was going to own an arcade," says Mark Davidson, a 35-year-old collector from Rockaway, N.J., who has amassed a pretty impressive collection of 50 games since being reinfectured by Pac-Man Fever back in 1996.

"I guess with the end of the video game

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FAKING IT

Emulators are computer programs that, when paired with the original source code of a game and its graphics, fool your computer into thinking it's an arcade game. Arcade emulators started surfacing on the Web as early as 1996.

When it comes to classic arcade games, there are some serious gray areas concerning intellectual property rights. Under current U.S. copyright laws, when you buy any software, you're entitled to make backups. This same law holds true for used arcade games, but since arcade games' ROMs can't be backed up without the use of absurdly expensive machines, many Web sites provide ROMs and graphics as a public service.

MAME (Multi Arcade Machine Emulator), one of the most popular emulators on the Web, was designed for the purpose of documenting and preserving the long-lost hardware and software that made up most games from the classic era. When combined with the source code and images of a game, one of MAME's perks is letting users play the game.

Technically, if you don't own the computer board from an old game, you're in violation of the law when you download its source code and graphics. But since a lot of these games, and some of their manufacturers no longer exist, and no longer make profits from the games, many argue that no harm is being done.

MAME and most other emulators are available on a free shareware basis, but in order to protect the programmers from being liable for copyright infringement, emulators, source codes and graphics can never be distributed, downloaded or posted on a Web site together in one package. ■

— Collin Keefe



MARK LUDAK / FOR THE DAILY NEWS

Donkey Kong was a monster success in the '80s

WEB GAME SOURCES

Here are Internet sources about video games and related info.

■ www.mameworld.net
The best MAME site.

■ www.arcadeclassics.com
The site for Blast from the Past, one of the best places to purchase vintage arcade games.

■ www.videoconnect.com
The site of Video Connection, a California-based company that specializes in vintage video games.

■ www.gamearchive.com
This site is a directory of resources for vintage game enthusiasts

■ www.videotopia.com
A traveling museum exhibit dedicat-

ed to the history of the first interactive medium — video games.

■ www.twingalaxies.com
Twin Galaxies is an almost mythological arcade in Fairfield, Iowa, that keeps track of and posts high-score records from all over the world. It also holds tournaments. There are tons of information on this site about vintage arcade games, geared more to players than collectors.

■ www.usamusement.com
U.S. Amusements is a site much like eBay, but the only things auctioned from this site are arcade games and pinball machines.

— Collin Keefe



MARK LUDAK / FOR THE DAILY NEWS

Galaga left Space Invaders on the ground

TOP 10 VIDEO GAMES

According to the Video Arcade Preservation Society, www.vaps.org, the 10 most popular collectibles from the golden age of arcade games:

1. Ms. Pac-Man: Following in the footsteps of the classic era's archetype Pac-Man, Ms. Pac-Man was introduced in 1981. Today, Ms. Pac-Man is the most popular and consequently the most expensive of classic games. Not to mention the fact that this is one of few games women will play.

2. Pac-Man: Technically a latecomer, Pac-Man defined the golden age of arcade games. Manufactured by Namco, the game was intended to appeal to a broader player base — namely women. The name Pac-Man is a derivative of the Japanese expression Pukapuka, which means flapping one's lips. After its initial release, Pac Man won the hearts of a generation. The game inspired at least a dozen spinoffs, every imaginable tie-in from breakfast cereals to bed sheets, and even became the subject of an ABC Saturday morning cartoon.

3. Tempest: Introduced in 1980 by Atari, Tempest was a stunning demonstration of available technology. One of the first games to feature a color vector monitor, Tempest's brilliant 3D graphics made it an instant hit with arcade-goers in the '80s, as well as a hot commodity among today's collectors.

4. Galaga: In the wake of the overwhelming success of 1979's Galaxian, Namco outdid itself in 1981 with this epic shoot-'em-up arcade game. Similar to but far more technologically evolved than the archaic Space Invaders, Galaxian makes you the pilot of a spaceship fighting off squadrons of aliens flying in complex attack formations.

5. Centipede: This legendary game from Atari was the first one ever designed by a woman. With a Trak Ball and a firing button, players fight off a string of advancing centipedes through a maze of mushrooms. Watch out for surprise attacks from spiders, fleas and other creepy crawlers. The dazzling side art makes it a favorite with collectors.

6. Donkey Kong: Released in 1981 by Nintendo, Donkey Kong is historically significant for many reasons. First and foremost, it introduced the character Mario (the namesake of the immensely popular Mario Bros. franchise which features dozens of games, merchandise, a TV show and a major motion picture) to a generation of players. Second, Donkey Kong paved the way for "platform" games (games where players have to work their way through a series of obstacle-ridden boards). And the amazing success of Donkey Kong helped Nintendo seize control of the home console-game market.

7. Asteroids: When Atari introduced this early, black-and-white vector game, arcade owners had to modify its coin box, because the one it came with couldn't accommodate all the quarters that were rolling in. As the pilot of a spaceship, the player dodges and blasts asteroids into tiny pieces while fighting off enemy ships.

8. Joust: For lack of a better description, this game, one of the first with two joysticks for multiple players, took the platform model introduced with Donkey Kong to the next level when first released in 1982. Armed with a lance and perched atop an ostrich, you assume the role of a fighting knight in this game. While fighting off enemies mounted on buzzards, players must avoid trolls, pterodactyls and flaming lava pits.

9. Defender: This game, introduced by Williams in 1980, shares the title of the highest-grossing video game of all time with Pac Man. The object: defend the human race against the onslaught of alien spaceships. A fast-paced game, Defender pits you against a complex variety of spaceships, mines, bombers, pods and swarms. Ironically, because of its five control and fire buttons, industry experts predicted Defender would be a dud.

10. Robotron: 2084: With two joysticks in your hands (one for movement and the other for firing), you are the only thing that stands in the way of the evil Robotrons and the last surviving human in this game released by Williams in 1982. Up against five different varieties of enemies, you have to save men in blue suits, women in pink dresses and little boys in red suits. ■

— Collin Keefe

GAMES

Continued from Page 47

era, my desire was shelved up until just a few years ago," he says. "Back when I was a teen-ager, this was all pretty much a pipe dream. Now I'm 35 and I have money, and it's not that far off."

Davidson says you can chalk up the growing popularity and prices of vintage games to eBay. Ms. Pac Man is the most popular and most sought-after game; it's also the most expensive. Before eBay, a Ms. Pac Man game in relatively good condition went for roughly \$350. Today on eBay, it runs from \$850 to \$1,300, and other games aren't far behind.

"It's all just so much more accessible since eBay hit the scene," says Van Burnham, the 29-year-old production director of Wired! and the author of the forthcoming book "Supercade: A Visual History of the Videogame Age, 1971-1984" (MIT Press).

"Back in the day, you were really lucky if you lived in Silicon Valley, or somewhere where there was a large concentration of arcades that went out of business," she says. "It was fairly easy to come across games that were still in good condition. Now with eBay, you see people paying upwards of \$1,500 for something that's not even a classic game, and then pay an additional \$200 to ship it."

Web browsing

Burnham says the Web in general has just as much to do with the growing interest in classic games as eBay. In the '90s, free, downloadable software and files that replicate specific video games on your personal computer first surfaced on the Web. Burnham believes these emulators are what really got the ball rolling. Anyone with the slightest tech know-how can go to a site like MAME (Multi Arcade Machine Emulator), download an emulator and start playing games that have been out of circulation for years.

"There are so many Web sites dedicated to games on the Internet that it makes it so much more accessible for people to remember what it was that they loved so much about them when they were teen-agers," she says. "Then the thought of actually having the real thing in your house is really exciting. Not to mention the fact that this generation of kids that grew up in arcades finally have money, and the dream of owning your own Defender is not that far out of reach."

"Your best deals are never on eBay, or at any auction really," says Seth Soffer, 26, director of technology for Cruise411.com in Holland, Bucks County. In the past three years, he's built up a collection of 40, mostly older black-and-white games. "Usually, you find the best prices from old operators or somebody who just has a game they want to get rid of."

Soffer, who says he got into collecting games simply because he never completely got his fix as a kid, agrees that eBay and emulators are feeding the flames of this growing craze, but feels that things like newsgroups are building solid networks of collectors. Running a simple search turns up dozens of people who have rare

owner's manuals, schematics, repair tips and spare parts to trade or sell.

"The Web has put me in touch with so many resources that normally I would never know anything about," says Davidson. "Without it, I probably wouldn't be into this." ■

