

August 2002

HELLO INTELLIFANS!

In this issue of our newsletter: A wrap up of the Classic Gaming Expo, *Intellivision in Hi-Fi* is released, Blue Sky music memories, readers ask the programmers about *B-17 Bomber*, and our monthly trivia contest!



Team Fat

LAS VEGAS WRAP UP

It was a fantastic weekend August 10 and 11 at the **Classic Gaming Expo!** **Blue Sky Rangers** **John Sohl, Dave Akers, Dave Warhol, Stephen Roney, Don Daglow, and Keith Robinson** attended in person; the other Rangers were there in spirit. We appreciate all of the Intellivision fans who dropped by the booth to share their

memories or just to say hello.

To celebrate our release of the new music CD *Intellivision in Hi-Fi*, we flew in the Austin, Texas, band **Team Fat** to perform their surf-rock version of the theme from *Thin Ice*.

The Expo, held at the **Plaza Hotel** in downtown Las Vegas, drew over 1,000 fans and collectors of the late 1970s and early 1980s videogame systems. There was a museum of rare consoles and peripherals, classic arcade machines set to free play, and panel discussions with the pioneers of the game industry (including, of course, **The Blue Sky Rangers**). Booth after booth offered consoles and games for sale.



Visitors to the Intellivision booth could play unreleased **Intellivision**, **Atari 2600**, and **ColecoVision** games, try out the *Intellivision Lives!* and *Intellivision Rocks* collections for PC and Mac, and run the classic Intellivision games on cell phones.

Visitors to the booth also received a free Running Man button. For one guest, that apparently wasn't quite good enough. After leaving the booth on Saturday, he hit the Vegas strip and returned on Sunday with a fresh Running Man tattoo! Check out photos of the tattoo and the other happenings at the Expo on our web site by following the link below.

[More photos and stories from the Classic Gaming Expo >](#)

AVAILABLE NOW: INTELLIVISION IN HI-FI



Our new all-music CD **Intellivision in Hi-Fi** made its debut last weekend at the **Classic Gaming Expo** and was an unqualified hit! Listening to the songs in the booth, everyone seemed to have a different favorite: the laugh-out-loud "**Lounge Shark! Lounge Shark!**," the powerful "**TRON 1.1**," the slyly satirical "**My Intellivision**." Most gratifying was the number of people who bought the CD on Saturday, listened to it all the way through Saturday night, then came back Sunday to tell us how much they loved it!

Now you can get **your** copy from our **Retrotopia.com** web site.

The album is packed with music that will bring a smile to anyone - whether familiar with the Intellivision console or not!

- Original themes from **Snafu**, **Thin Ice**, **Shark! Shark!**, **Mind Strike**, and others.
- Previously unreleased Intellivision versions of themes from **James Bond**, **Peanuts**, **Rocky & Bullwinkle**, and more!
- New arrangements of Intellivision themes: a surf-rock **Thin Ice**, a jazzy **Snafu**, a lounge-a-rific **Shark! Shark!**
- Two electronica tracks, **Closest Thing to the Real Thing** and **Compare This!**, with voice samples from the Intellivoice games and from the classic Intellivision TV commercials.
- "**My Intellivision**," a Pet Shop Boys/ABC-influenced song of lost love.
- Suite from the movie **TRON**.

Intellivision in Hi-Fi, nearly an hour long, is only \$14.95 plus shipping and handling.

INTELLIVISION LORE FROM THE FILES OF THE BLUE SKY RANGERS:



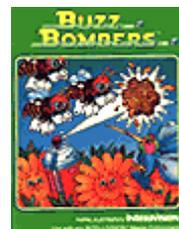
FLIGHT OF THE BUMBLEBRAINS

In 1983, the Mattel legal department asked all of the Intellivision programmers to list the music they were using in their games. The lawyers wanted to make sure that all of the music was in the public domain.

For **Mike Breen's** game **Buzz Bombers**, **Bill Goodrich** had composed music based on "**Flight of the Bumblebee**." Bill submitted that information to the lawyers. Soon they returned. When was "**Flight of the Bumblebee**" written?

Bill didn't know when it was written, but he knew it had to be in the public domain. The lawyers weren't so sure, though. If Bill couldn't document when "**Flight of the Bumblebee**" was written, it couldn't be used in the game.

In those pre-Web days, finding information often meant a call to the library, so a local librarian was contacted. She couldn't answer when it was written either, but she **did** find that the composer, **Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov**, had died in 1908.



Bill argued that even if Rimsky-Korsakov had written "**Flight of the Bumblebee**" on his deathbed, the copyright would have certainly expired by 1983.

The lawyers were finally satisfied and the music was released in the game. It may seem like nit-picking, but the lawyers couldn't be too careful. Well, maybe they could have been a **bit** more careful. Around the same time, they allowed the game **Melody Blaster** to be released containing the song "**Happy Birthday to You.**" Only months later did they discover that "**Happy Birthday to You**" was **not** in the public domain; its copyright was still valid. But by that time, early 1984, Mattel Electronics was collapsing. Contracts couldn't be fulfilled. A missed music license? Take a number.

[Get Buzz Bombers on INTELLIVISION LIVES! >](#)

ASK THE BLUE SKY RANGERS!

Scott and John Meservey write:



B-17 Bomber is without question the greatest game of all time! My brother and I have been playing it religiously since we first got it twenty years ago. He flies, I bomb. With that said, we actually have 2 questions:

1. Does what you bomb successfully in the game have any impact on what can be rebuilt? i.e. if you bomb factories will they rebuild everything slower? or if you bomb airports will less planes fill the air? and:
2. It seems that we can never run more than six or seven missions because the flak just becomes unbelievably tough even if your flying over a clear area the flak shoots you down as soon as you hit enemy territory, is there a reason for this? We've been trying for twenty years to actually bomb everything in Europe and finish the game without success (now come on, that's devotion)!

If you can offer any help with this we would crown you our official **King of Intellivision!** A very prestigious and honorable title in our book.

Bill Fisher, co-designer and programmer of **B-17 Bomber** (with **John P. Sohl** and **Stephen Roney**), replies:



Bill Fisher

It's great to hear from someone who's gotten so much enjoyment from the game. It's my favorite of all the games I did for Mattel. Keeping in mind that I have not looked at the code since the game was released, here are my thoughts:

1. *What you bomb does not affect what's rebuilt. That said, though, I believe that the airports **do** affect the number of fighters (so does being over water - you're a lot less likely to be hit by a fighter when over the water).*
2. *The reason for the flak is that we don't **want** you to be able to play forever. We needed a simple but effective method of increasing difficulty, and this was one of the techniques we used. The algorithm is pretty aggressive because John got*

burned on **Astrosmash** by not making the highest level hard enough, and Steve and I got burned on **Space Spartans**, though less so, because it was possible to go so far that you went past the end of the difficulty level table and got some really weird results (you could start moving the enemy bases around on the map). So we made sure that this algorithm would not let us down.

The flak is based on four factors:

- no flak over water
- the higher you go, the less you get
- the higher the difficulty level, the more you get
- if you're over a target, you get more

What that all boils down to is that the flak just keeps getting tougher the longer you play, and eventually gets to the point that you really can't play even if you're flying at 40,000 feet.

I'm very impressed that folks have been working so hard to beat the game by clearing every target. We tried to plant enough targets that that would not be practical, and I think that plan was successful. There's no special outcome if you clear everything.

Bottom line: remember that the entire game takes up only 7K decles (Intellivision's 10-bit bytes). 5K of that 12K cartridge was voice data. To this day, I'm amazed that we were able to get something resembling a flight simulator into that tiny a space. In fact, we had to take out a number of features to get it that small. We lost the top/bottom gunners, the rolling odometer display, and a number of other niceties.

John P. Sohl adds:



John Sohl

I agree with everything that **Bill Fisher** wrote. My memory of the last few weeks of completing **B-17** are a bit fuzzy, but I don't think we ever intended this game to be **won**.

B-17 Bomber was more of a low level tactical mission simulation than a strategic level game. As the crew members of the bomber, your duty is to deliver your bombs on target and return alive.

Despite the claims of **Colonel Billy Mitchell** in 1925, it is a bit unrealistic to think that one B-17 aircraft could clean out all the targets in Western Europe even with multiple sorties.

I had always planned the game to be called "**Flying Fortress**," which would have sounded better from the voice chip and been a more meaningful title to most people. Let's face it, most people don't know a B-17 from a B-25 or a B-52 just by the name. But the Marketing or legal people went for **B-17 Bomber**. It may have been that "**Flying Fortress**" was a trademark or was already the name of another game or toy.

[Get B-17 Bomber on INTELLIVISION ROCKS >](#)

[Got a question for the Blue Sky Rangers? Write us here >](#)

THE INTELLIVISION TRIVIA CONTEST!

A record 199 of you entered last month's trivia contest. The question:

Mattel Electronics released two "Las Vegas" cartridges for Intellivision: **Las Vegas Poker & Blackjack** and **Las Vegas Roulette**. But what common word associated with Las Vegas did Mattel deliberately not use in the packaging, advertising, and instructions for these games?



140 of you had the correct answer: **Gambling**. (We also accepted "gamble.")

From the 140 correct answers, the random number generator at <http://www.randomizer.org/> selected **Gloria Cospers** of Phoenix, Arizona as the winner of an **Intellivision coffee mug**.

Congratulations, Gloria! And thanks to all of you for playing!

Now try **this** question:

The 1900 opera *The Tale of Tsar Saltan* introduced what musical theme later heard in an Intellivision game?

[Submit your answer >](#)

We'll pick a random winner from all complete, correct entries received before NOON PDT, MONDAY, AUGUST 19. The winner will receive an official **Intellivision Coffee Mug** - just like we use here in the office for serving up steamin' hot java!

GOOD LUCK!

THE BLUE SKY RANGERS
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