

July 2002

HELLO INTELLIFANS!

In this issue of our newsletter: We offer you \$5 to come to the **Classic Gaming Expo**, an Intellivision programmer peddles cartoons in San Diego, our CD of Intellivision music nears release, another Intellivision sighting, Blue Sky memories of Las Vegas, a reader asks the programmer about *Major League Baseball*, and our monthly trivia contest!

WEASELS CLOSING IN? HEAD FOR LAS VEGAS!



Haven't made plans yet to attend the **Classic Gaming Expo** in Las Vegas? No problem! There's no destination better for a last minute, spur-of-the-moment road trip than Vegas, baby!

As **Hunter S. Thompson** says: "Every now and then when the weasels start closing in, the only real cure is to load up on heinous

chemicals and then drive like a bastard from Hollywood to Las Vegas."

Now, of course, assuming that by "heinous chemicals" he means **Jolt Cola**, and by "drive like a bastard" he means, "obeying all posted speed limits and right-of-ways," we agree 100%!

That's why **Intellivision Productions** is a proud sponsor of the **2002 Classic Gaming Expo**, taking place the weekend of **August 10 & 11** at Jackie Gaughan's **Plaza Hotel**, downtown Las Vegas. Get away from those weasels!

Stroll through the world's most complete collection of 1970s and 1980s video game systems! Sit in on Q & A seminars with the developers of your favorite games! Buy rare video game consoles and cartridges to add to your collection! Play classic arcade games (free!) and compete in high score contests!

And visit the **Intellivision** booth where you can get autographs from the **Blue Sky Rangers**, play unreleased **Intellivision**, **Atari** and **ColecoVision** games, get special deals on merchandise, preview our new music CD, ***Intellivision in Hi-Fi***, and try out classic **Intellivision** games on **cellular phones**!

And to celebrate the release of ***Intellivision in Hi-Fi***, we're

sponsoring an appearance on Sunday by **George "The Fat Man" Sanger and his Team Fat** with the first LIVE performance of "**Surfin' On Thin Ice**," George's surf-rock update of the theme he wrote for the Intellivision game *Thin Ice* back in 1983!



The Fat Man

As an incentive to all of you who need the last-minute boot in the butt, everyone who places an order through the Retrotopia web site between now and August 4 will receive a coupon good for \$5 off the admission price at the door!

But the smartest thing to do is go onto the Expo web site NOW and register. The organizers have arranged discounted rates on rooms, airfares, and car rentals, making this a fun, inexpensive weekend getaway, guaranteed to be **100% weasel free!**

[Make reservations for the Classic Gaming Expo NOW >](#)

[Place an order - get a \\$5 discount coupon for the Expo! >](#)



Keith Robinson

CARTOON BOY IN SAN DIEGO

Visitors to the annual **Classic Gaming Expo** are used to seeing **Intellivision Productions President Keith Robinson** running about wearing a *BurgerTime* chef's hat. But visitors to **Comic-Con International** next month will see Keith wearing a different hat: that of cartoonist.

Keith, who does the weekly newspaper comic strip *Making It* along with cartoons for *Playboy*, *Cat Fancy*, *Dog Fancy*, and other publications, will be joining with fellow cartoonists in the **National Cartoonists Society** booth at the convention.

Comic-Con 2002 will be held at the **San Diego Convention Center, August 1 - 4**. Over 50,000 attendees will meet hundreds of artists and writers from the worlds of comic books, cartoons, science fiction and fantasy films, and video games. The NCS booth will be in the exhibit hall on the first floor. Scheduled to be in the booth along with Keith are Greg Evans (*Luann*), Jeff Keane (*Family Circus*), Rick Kirkman (*Baby Blues*), Patrick McDonnell (*Mutts*), Mark O'Hare (*Citizen Dog*), Jerry Scott (*Baby Blues* and *Zits*), Jerry Van Amerongen (*Ballard Street*), and two dozen more.

In college, Keith had equal interests in art and science, which led him to jobs first in motion picture effects and then to **Mattel Electronics** in 1981 designing video games.

A week or two after Keith started at **Mattel**, an article appeared in *American Cinematographer* magazine that mentioned his contributions to the films *Masada* and *History of the World, Part I*. The article referred to him as "math whiz Keith Robinson." Keith casually showed the magazine around the office, "hoping to impress my new co-workers."

Unfortunately, one of the first to look at the article was **Mark Urbaniec (Vectron)**, who loudly exclaimed, "Math whiz? *Math whiz?* Is that like *Cheese Whiz?*" For weeks after, the new guy was known as "Cheese Whiz Keith Robinson."

Keith designed and programmed the **Intellivoice** cartridge **TRON Solar Sailer**. Promoted to Group Leader and then Manager, he oversaw the development of **Shark! Shark!**, **Thin Ice**, and **Hover Force**, among others. He also supervised three graphic artists - **Peggi Decarli Fiebig**, **Joe [Ferreira] King**, and **Monique Lujan-Bakerink** - who created animation and backgrounds for dozens more **Intellivision**, **M Network**, and **Aquarius** games. But perhaps Keith's biggest contribution to the Intellivision legacy was designing the **Blue Sky Rangers** logo.

After **Mattel Electronics** closed in 1984, Keith pursued a career in cartooning and illustration. In 1985 he started his weekly comic strip, **Making It**. It's appeared in over 50 newspapers, been collected in three books, and been on the web since 1994 at makingit.com. It even was turned into a Sega Genesis video game: **Normy's Beach-Babe-O-Rama**.



In 1985, he returned to work on **Intellivision** for the new owners, **INTV Corp.**, designing the packaging for almost all of the INTV releases. He did the illustrations himself for many of the boxes, including **Thin Ice**, **Diner**, and **Learning Fun I** and **II**.

At **Comic-Con 2002**, Keith will be signing copies of his **Making It** books. But stop on by - he's always happy to talk about **Intellivision** and to autograph any Intellivision memorabilia. Which raises the question: Cartoons, Intellivision - how can he do it all? What can we say? He's a Cheese Whiz.

[Info on Comic-Con 2002 >](#)

[Read the *Making It* comic strip by Keith Robinson >](#)

COMING IN AUGUST: INTELLIVISION IN HI-FI



Michael Schwartz

As announced last month, our new all-music CD **Intellivision in Hi-Fi** is nearing completion. The album includes three types of tracks: original music inspired by the Intellivision system, new arrangements of Intellivision game themes, and actual Intellivision music - including several never-heard themes from unreleased and unfinished games.

The music inspired by Intellivision includes two pieces by the Electronica group **Confusium**, "**Compare This!**" and "**The Closest Thing to the Real Thing**," and a song performed by **Michael Schwartz**, "**My Intellivision**." The Confusium pieces sample phrases from classic Intellivision commercials and Intellivoice games. The song "**My Intellivision**" captures the sound of 1980s groups such as Pet Shop Boys and ABC to tell the story of a man separated from his true love.

Familiar Intellivision themes getting new arrangements are **Thin Ice** ("**Surfin' On Thin Ice**"), **Shark! Shark!** ("**Lounge Shark! Lounge Shark!**"), and **Snafu** ("**A Swingin' Snafu**"). And the themes from the Disney movie **TRON**, heard in the Intellivoice game **TRON Solar Sailer**, get a new spin in "**Tron 1.1**."

Three sections of the album focus on music actually played on the Intellivision. The first section includes game themes such as ***Snafu***, ***Shark! Shark!***, ***Mind Strike***, ***Melody Blaster*** and others. The second section focuses on classical music heard in Intellivision games, from "***Also Sprach Zarathustra***," heard on the original ***Intellivision in-store demo cartridge***, to the selections from Schubert, Moussorgsky, and Beethoven heard in ***Thunder Castle***. The final section presents Intellivision music that's never been heard by the public. This includes music from an unreleased ***Rocky & Bullwinkle*** cartridge, themes for proposed ***Peanuts*** and ***McDonaldsland*** games, and a terrific rendition of ***The James Bond Theme*** that was the result of a programmer just blowing off steam.



One track features **Steve Ettinger's** arrangement of "**The Maple Leaf Rag**," done for his unreleased game ***Magic Carousel***. Steve did a great job arranging the whole piece for Intellivision. Unfortunately, only an excerpt could be fit into the game. We were happy to finally publish the game itself on our ***INTELLIVISION ROCKS*** CD-ROM collection last year. Now we're happy to present Steve's uncut version of this ragtime classic.

You can preview three of these selections, "**The Maple Leaf Rag**," "**Compare This!**" and "**Surfin' On Thin Ice**" on our MP3.com page. Or come to the **Classic Gaming Expo** and be among the first to hear the entire album. **George "The Fat Man" Sanger** will be there Sunday, August 11, to perform "**Surfin' on Thin Ice**" live for the first time ever!

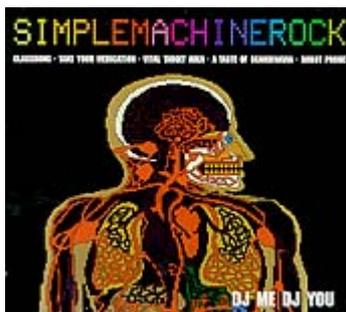
Intellivision in Hi-Fi will be available for sale on our **Retropia** videogame store in mid-August.

[FREE! Hear/download selections from *Intellivision in Hi-Fi* on MP3.com >](#)

ANOTHER INTELLIVISION SIGHTING!

Last month we reported that the group **The Anniversary** had used graphics from the Intellivision game ***Microsurgeon*** on the cover of its album ***Designing a Nervous Breakdown***.

This month we heard from an Intellivision fan (who simply signed his e-mail "Dave") letting us know of another album, predating ***Designing a Nervous Breakdown***, that also uses ***Microsurgeon*** on its cover: ***Simplemachinerock*** by DJ Me DJ You.



DJ Me DJ You is **Ross Harris** and **Craig Borrell**. ***Simplemachinerock***, their first record, is described as "a cut-and-paste romp through hip-hop breaks, Indian film scores, and numerous other aural oddities."

Why is ***Microsurgeon*** on the cover? Explains Ross Harris: "I am a big Intellivision fan. I have most of the original games in the box with overlays and all that. My favorites are ***Microsurgeon***, ***Utopia***, and ***Advanced Dungeons & Dragons***. Don't get a lot of time to play, so I try and use them in

the music or artwork. The two albums we put out on the **Emperor Norton** label had a theme of a man whose insides are visible.

"Onetime we hooked *Microsurgeon* up to a video projector and played the game on a three-story wall at a show. The sound was pumping thru a big P.A. That's as good as it gets!"

INTELLIVISION LORE FROM THE FILES OF THE BLUE SKY RANGERS:



VIVA LAS VEGAS!

What city says **Intellivision** more than **Las Vegas**? **Intellivision** was introduced to the world there at the **1979 Consumer Electronics Show**. The game packed in with the original master component? **Las Vegas Poker & Blackjack**. And now every year **Intellivision** returns to Vegas for the **Classic**

Gaming Expo.

The **Consumer Electronics Show** of January 1983 was Intellivision's biggest party in Las Vegas. The video game industry was flying high, **Mattel Electronics** had an enormous booth, and dozens of employees made the trek from Mattel headquarters in Hawthorne, California.

A few weeks before the show, **Director Don Daglow** was informed that all of the marketing and programming personnel would be staying at the **El Rancho Hotel**. Don wasn't happy. He knew the El Rancho was an old, dumpy hotel at the end of the Las Vegas Strip. Always protective of his programmers and always mindful of the political advantages of being near the seat of power, Don asked around and found that the Mattel Electronics *executives* would be staying at the **Holiday Inn** right in the heart of the Strip (now the location of **Harrah's**). Quietly, he changed the reservations for the programming staff from the El Rancho to the Holiday Inn.



Don Daglow

Don wondered if he had made the right decision the evening he arrived in Las Vegas, the day before the show. Tired from a week of supervising last-minute bug fixes in the games to be shown, he was looking forward to nothing but a good night's sleep. But in the lobby he ran into **Stav Prodomo, Senior Vice President of Mattel Electronics**. Stav was in a partying mood and he wanted to hit the town. Stav grabbed all of the Mattel personnel he could find, including Don, **Vice President Gabriel Baum, Director Mike Minkoff**, and a handful of programmers, and dragged them out to show them "his" Las Vegas.



Stav Prodomou

One of the stops was Stav's favorite restaurant: **Battista's Hole-in-the-Wall**. Battista's was a huge, noisy Italian restaurant, a real holdover of the old Las Vegas. The walls were covered with celebrity photos. Bottles hung from the ceiling. Carafes of wine came free with dinner.

Stav was holding court, chortling through one of his memories of Vegas, when a little old man shuffled up to the table lugging an

accordion about the same size that he was. "And where are you fine folks from?" he asked.

"Los Angeles," bellowed Stav.

"Ah," smiled the wrinkled little man. "Then this is for you..." He hugged the accordion and it wheezed out a funereal rendition of "California Here I Come."

Stav laughed and gave him a huge tip. As the old man shuffled away, Stav pounded the table and exclaimed, "I love this place!"

When Stav announced that the next stop would be **Siegfried and Roy**, Don finally begged off. He headed to the hotel and to bed.

The next morning in the Intellivision booth, Don felt great. Not only had he gotten a good night's sleep, but as the marketing people arrived they did nothing but bitch and moan about the **godawful El Rancho Hotel**. And that made Don feel *terrific*.

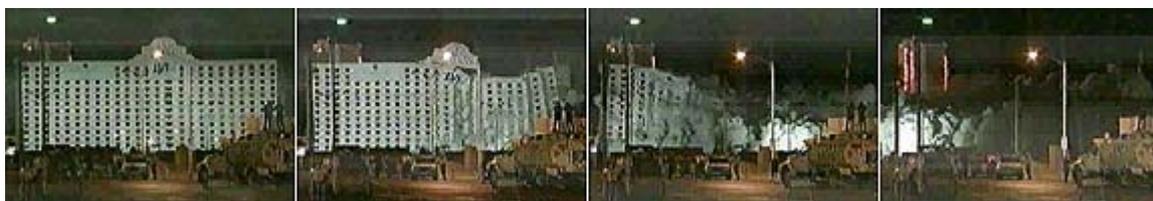
Sixteen years later, the first year the **Blue Sky Rangers** attended the **Classic Gaming Expo**, they decided to celebrate their return to Las Vegas with a trip back to **Battista's Hole-in-the-Wall**. The restaurant was still there, apparently unchanged. They wondered - could the accordion player still be alive?

"And where are you fine folks from?" he asked, shuffling up to their table as if on cue.

"Los Angeles," sputtered one of the programmers.

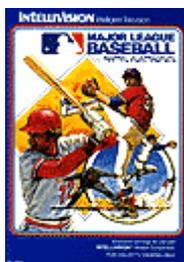
"Ah, then this is for you." Same man, same accordion, same rendition of "California Here I Come."

Last time we visited, in August 2001, he was still there, happily playing the accordion. Oh, and the **El Rancho**? It was closed in 1992 and blown up October 3, 2000. Bye-bye.



ASK THE BLUE SKY RANGERS!

Craig Genualdo of Lynn, Massachusetts writes:



I absolutely loved Intellelevision and it was a HUUUUUUGE part of my growing up. My favorite games were **BurgerTime**, **Super Pro Football**, and, especially, the original **Major League Baseball**. My best friend and I had absolute wars that would sometimes last into the 14th or 15th inning.

I used to drive him nuts because I was a master of scoring with two outs. My strategy would be to get the leadoff guy on base, then hit and run him over to second and then to third, sacrificing an out each time by hitting the ball to the right side. Then with two outs, I'd try to get a running start and just put the ball in play and score before the third out was made at first. Perhaps it was a flaw in the game but I used it as a part of my game strategy.

ANYWAY, I have a few questions regarding the greatest video game of all time...

I swear to God that one time I saw a fly-ball out to the left fielder in **Major League Baseball** (I'm not getting it confused with **World Championship Baseball**). Maybe it was a dream. Was there any code in the game whatsoever, even if it was a one in a million chance, that a ball could be "caught"?

What was the logic for home runs? Was it just after a certain number of balls hit "the wall"? I used to love bunt home runs, especially right down the line. Just made me laugh hysterically!

Was there any truth to the rumor that balls landing between the "S" and "T" in "VIST" had a greater chance of being a home run?

Were there balls that were "destined" to go out? It seemed every once in a while you'd hit 3 for your right fielder but he would deselect himself and the ball would go out. Any truth to that urban legend?

These are just questions I've been pondering for a while. All the best!

David Rolfe, designer and programmer of **Major League Baseball**, replies:



David Rolfe

In my version of baseball, there were no fly balls - whatsoever. So the question of being able to catch a fly doesn't apply.

I knew about the bug that if a run scored and then the third out occurred in the play, the run nevertheless counted. Basically, resources were too tight to fix that. You can imagine that the concept of a roll-back under special circumstances wasn't trivial, and we were full to the brim.

The algorithm for determining a home run was a random probability based upon the speed of the ball when it hit the wall.

The faster the velocity, the more likely it was to be declared a home run. There was no low-speed cut-off so, yes, you could occasionally bunt a home run. Of course, since there were no fly balls, the outfielders could always prevent home runs if they could move quickly enough.

There were no special regions of high probability or attempts to trip up the outfielders.

I think that covers the essence of the questions.

[Get Major League Baseball on INTELLIVISION LIVES! >](#)
[Got a question for the Blue Sky Rangers? Write us here >](#)

THE INTELLIVISION TRIVIA CONTEST!

A whopping five of you entered last month's trivia contest. The question:

In 1983, Mattel Electronics created a new programming job title and classification just for one person. Who was the programmer, what was the new job title, and why was it created?

Four of you had the correct answer: **Eric Del Sesto was given the title Junior Programmer because he was only 17 years old when hired.** Someone in the personnel department had misread his resume and brought him in for an interview, thinking Eric had recently graduated college instead of high school. But he impressed all of his interviewers so much that the Junior Programmer classification was created for him. He started work a few days after turning 18.

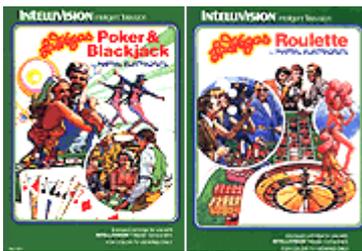


Eric Del Sesto

From the four correct answers, the random number generator at <http://www.random.org/> selected **Kevin Bushre** of Marshall, Michigan as the winner of an **Intellivision coffee mug**.

Congratulations, Kevin! And thanks to all five of you for playing!

Now try **this** 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?

[Submit your answer >](#)

We'll pick a random winner from all complete, correct entries received before NOON PDT, FRIDAY, JULY 26. 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!

IN MEMORIAM



Gene Smith
1950-2002

Gene Smith, designer/programmer of the Intellivoice game ***Bomb Squad*** and the developer of the IBM PC versions of ***BurgerTime*** and ***Lock 'N' Chase*** passed away July 14, 2002 after a short fight with cancer.

A native of Berkeley and a graduate of the **University of California at Berkeley**, Gene's career in interactive games spanned 20 years, beginning in 1981 at **Mattel Electronics**. He went on to work on computer games at **Activision** and then **Accolade**, where his ***Unnecessary Roughness*** series of football games was nominated for **Best Computer Sport Simulation of 1992**.

Since 2000, Gene developed online games for **Skyworks Technologies**.

Outside of his work, Gene's great passion was for nature and the outdoors. Every year, he would spend several weeks hiking and camping throughout the western United States. His friends and co-workers enjoyed his friendly, easy-going personality and admired his talent as a world-class computer game designer.

Gene is survived by his father and stepmother, Art and Kathryn Smith of Santa Monica, and a loving and extended family of aunts, uncles, and cousins.

THE BLUE SKY RANGERS

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