

September/October 2003

GEORGE PLIMPTON 1927 - 2003

Despite the many tributes to **George Plimpton** the past weeks, it's been rare for anyone to mention that in the early 1980s, Mr. Plimpton was the spokesman for the **Intellivision** video game system. That doesn't really surprise us; when recapping a life as full as Mr. Plimpton's, it's difficult to shoehorn in his brief time hawking video games.

But that's how we'll always remember him. Comparing **Atari** and **Intellivision** sports games. Showing off "our most exciting visual effect - total destruction of a planet!" Introducing new games to child actor **Henry Thomas** ("Hey, Mr. Intellivision!").

Mattel hired Mr. Plimpton because of his reputation for "participatory journalism." Who better to vouch for the realism of a sports video game than someone who had actually suited up and played for real?

But he brought more than his journalistic reputation to Intellivision. Since Mattel's policy was to keep the Intellivision programmers, **The Blue Sky Rangers**, anonymous, Mr. Plimpton became our public face. His persona became the persona of Intellivision: a mix of smug superiority with a healthy touch of self-deprecation.

We have to admit that pretty well described the **Blue Sky Rangers** back then, and, yeah, that pretty well describes us to this day.

Even though Mr. Plimpton's formal relationship with Intellivision ended in 1983, we still considered him as our ambassador, whether he was discussing literature on **C-SPAN2** or appearing as a **Simpsons** cartoon character. And he always did us proud.

We were a little nervous when we spoke to him by phone shortly after the 1998 release of **Intellivision Lives!** Did he recall Intellivision fondly, or was that a period of his life he'd rather forget?

Actually, he told us, he had rather enjoyed his role as spokesman for **Intellivision**, although he said his father, a prominent lawyer and diplomat, was "appalled" that he had sunk to being a common huckster.



He remembered that Mattel had given him both an Atari 2600 and an Intellivision so that he could compare the games and honestly sign an affidavit that he found Intellivision to be superior. "And I did find it to be the better system," he told us. He paused, then added, "Of course, they *were* paying me, so I guess I did have somewhat of an incentive to find it better. Still, my children liked it, especially the ***Skiing*** game, I believe it was."

He seemed both amused and pleased that Intellivision was making a comeback and that fans - and the programmers - remembered his part in it.

After twenty years, we're still proud to have been represented by **George Plimpton**. (Imagine working for a company whose public face is **Carrot Top**...) He was intelligent, curious, and generous. He was a man of good humor, widely quoted as saying, "I have never been convinced there's anything inherently wrong in having fun."

We lucked out. Not only did we get a pitchman, we got a role model.

Thank you, Mr. Intellivision

INTELLIVISION DUE ON PLAYSTATION 2 AND XBOX IN NOVEMBER!

The **PlayStation 2** and **Xbox** versions of ***Intellivision Lives!*** are scheduled to hit store shelves late in November, just in time for the gift-giving season! Each version will carry a suggested retail price of \$19.99.

As announced in our August newsletter, ***Intellivision Lives!*** drops you into **Hal's Pizza**, a 360 degree 3-D environment that evokes memories of the '80s. Arcade machines of different themes - Space, Sports, Battle, etc. - ring the restaurant. Each machine serves as an interface to the original Intellivision games.

Over 60 classic Intellivision games are included, including some never released in the 1980s. This is the actual software from the original cartridges, playing on emulation software newly created for the **PlayStation 2** and **Xbox**. The games look and sound just as they did when played on the original Intellivision console!



Particular care has been given to optimize each game individually for the modern game controllers. Control is as good or better than with the original controllers. And many games have the added feature of vibration feedback!

Another first-time feature is the ability to save high scores on many of the games! Some games have goals that you can beat to turn on hidden features, such as classic TV commercials. And some games can be played in bizarre modes such as upside-down, backwards, or in a small, moving window that ping-pongs

around the screen!

On-screen instructions and production notes are included for each game. There is also a history of **Intellivision** narrated by Intellivision Productions President **Keith Robinson** and video interviews with a number of the original programmers.

A jukebox of Intellivision-themed music plays in Hal's Pizza and, optionally, while games are playing. Very few Intellivision games had background music; now they do, if you want.

If you grew up on **Intellivision**, all of these features will make you experience the games in new ways! But we hope that putting **Intellivision** on today's hottest consoles will bring these games to many who are too young to remember the '80s.

"We are extremely excited to be the company to introduce these classic **Intellivision** games to a whole new generation of video game players," says **Nima Taghavi**, chief executive officer of **Crave Entertainment**. "Today's games may be big on graphics and special effects, but they can never come close to capturing the endearing nostalgia and fun that **Intellivision** has kept alive for over 20 years."

Look for **Intellivision Lives!** in a few weeks, wherever you buy **PlayStation 2** and **Xbox** games! (Prices and release dates for outside of the United States is pending.)

[More info and screenshots from *Intellivision Lives!* for PS2 and Xbox >](#)

INTELLIVISION LORE FROM THE FILES OF THE BLUE SKY RANGERS:



THE FURNITURE ELVES

In November 1983, hundreds of workers were laid off from **Mattel Electronics**. This was the third round of layoffs, but it was the one that hit the Intellivision programming department the hardest. Afterwards, the massive sea of cubicles lay

two-thirds empty.

Morale had never been lower. It was difficult to continue designing games while surrounded by the graves of fallen comrades.

Management quickly drew up a new floor plan: the Intellivision department would be consolidated into a smaller, more intimate area.

Everyone wanted to move into the new space as quickly as possible, but there was a roadblock. In the **Mattel Electronics** building, there were only two people who were unionized: **Tom Canard**, the building manager, and his assistant. No piece of furniture could be moved, no cubicle wall shifted except by these two. And Tom said it would be three to four weeks before they could get the department moved.



Mark Urbaniec

The programmers were outraged. Manager **Mark Urbaniec** complained to Director **Don Daglow** that three to four weeks was ridiculous. "Let's just do it ourselves," he said. "We could get it done in a couple of days!" But Don, along with Director **Mike Minkoff** and Vice President **Gabriel Baum** told everyone that they would have to follow the rules; Mattel had a contract with the union. No one could move a desk lamp without the help of **Tom Canard**.

A day or two later, the Intellivision staff walked into the building and found that, overnight, all of their offices had been moved to the new area. Televisions, computer terminals, development units, file cabinets, books, manuals, personal photos, even the cartoons pinned to the walls - everything was in place. Everyone was - or acted - surprised.

"Hey," Mark exclaimed to Don, smiling, "the furniture elves came in the night!"

Don frowned at Mark suspiciously.

Tom Canard was furious. Red-faced, he complained loudly to Gabriel about the programmers taking it upon themselves to rearrange the offices in clear violation of his union's authority. Gabriel listened sympathetically, then promised to discipline those responsible.

The programmers got back to designing games. The furniture elves were never caught.

ASK THE BLUE SKY RANGERS!

Gary writes:



Hey, I played **Imagic's Swords & Serpents** a lot, I mean really a lot. Was there an end to the game? All we ever found were 3 initials inside the dragons lair, that we assumed were the initials of the guy who wrote the game. Was that it? We always wonder if we missed something.

Thanks for any closure.

Brian P. Dougherty, creator of **Swords & Serpents**, tells us:



Brian P. Dougherty

Yes, that was it.

*Brian says that in 1982, a few months after the game was released, he was awakened by a phone call in the middle of the night. Two teenage boys were on the line. They had been playing **Swords & Serpents** for days on end, had worked their way repeatedly to the final level, but couldn't figure out how to defeat the dragon.*

*Brian's name was listed in the instructions, so the frustrated duo called information for Mountain View, California, home of **Imagic**, and asked if there was a Brian P. Dougherty listed. Getting the number, they called him immediately and begged for the secret of killing the dragon.*

Sleepily, Brian confessed to them that there was no way to kill the dragon. He had run out of room in the cartridge, so there was no climactic battle, just uncovering the "treasure": his initials.

Brian says there were a few seconds of silence on the line, then the teenagers let loose with a string of obscenities. They called him every name in the book, then hung up.

Brian now has an unlisted number.

[Play Swords & Serpents on Intellivision Rocks >](#)

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

THE INTELLIVISION TRIVIA CONTEST!

206 of you entered August's trivia contest. The question:

In the photo of the two kids in the August newsletter, what Intellivision game are they playing?



118 of you had the correct answer: **Racing Cars** in the **Triple Action** cartridge (we accepted either **Racing Cars** or **Triple Action**.)

From the 118 correct answers, the random number generator at <http://www.random.org/> selected **Dane Golden** as the winner of an **Intellivision coffee mug**.

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

Now try **this** question:



George Plimpton

In 2002, former-Intellivision spokesman **George Plimpton** poked fun at his pitchman legacy by appearing as himself in a fake commercial for an educational game meant to teach children the finer differences between imported cheeses. What TV show featured this fake ad?

[Submit your answer >](#)

(If you have trouble following the above link, or if submitting your answer fails, type the URL <http://www.intellivisionlives.com/contest.shtml> into your browser and try again.)

We'll pick a random winner from all complete, correct entries received before

NOON PST, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 7. 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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