

Imagine if there was one company that fulfilled all the needs of all gamers, classic and current. Imagine if one company owned the rights to all the classic games and reissued them in contemporary and classic editions. Well, before you get your hopes too high, you may as well know that such a company does not exist. But what if there was one company today that has some involvement with nearly every console that ever existed? By all reasoning, this company would surely be the Ultimate Video-



game resurgence of the late eighties. Hasbro reentered the electronic gaming forum in 1995



Frogger (Hasbro Interactive)

game Company. And this company does exist!

During the height of videogames' popularity, when every imaginable company was joining in, it was completely assumed that toy companies would be interested in claiming a piece of the videogame pie. Mattel, the number one toy company, wasted little time in creating an electronics division and diving right in. Other toy and game companies such as Coleco, Milton Bradley, and Parker Brothers followed suit.

Surprisingly, Hasbro, the second largest toy company, never joined the fray. Referred to as 'Has-Been' by its competitors, the Hasbro myth was that it was an old-fashioned company with absolutely no interest in electronic fads at all. The truth of the matter was that the company's CEO, Stephen Hassenfeld, wanted to jump on the electronic bandwagon all along. Unfortunately, Hassenfeld didn't trust his own designers to build a winning videogame system from scratch and he wasn't thrilled with the concepts that independent developers offered him. So Hasbro stayed away from the electronic industry during the early eighties.

Hasbro formally entered the elec-

tronic age in 1988. Under a new division imaginatively named Hasbro Electronics, the company planned to market a new interactive console called *Control-Vision*, which had been developed by Nolan Bushnell's company, Axlon. Unlike the existing consoles, the Control-Vision was going to use videotapes. Axlon developed a compression routine that allowed five full-motion video tracks and sixteen digital audio tracks to be crammed together on one videotape without any quality loss. The system could switch back and forth between the 21 tracks instantaneously. Hasbro claimed that the new system would be a cross between a movie and a videogame and produced two live-action games at a cost of \$4.5 million.

Hasbro had hoped to sell the system for \$200 and intended to market it directly against the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES). Unfortunately, the cost of dynamic RAM (DRAM) was more expensive than Hasbro had anticipated and there was no way that the company could sell the system for under \$300. Nobody at Hasbro or Axlon felt that the Control-Vision could ever succeed at that price so the project, as well as Hasbro's hope of being a major force in the electronic arena, was scrapped.

In a classic rags-to-riches type story, today Hasbro is one of the leading software developers in the world. Through many acquisitions, the companies under the Hasbro umbrella own the majority of games that were available during the early eighties. But Hasbro's reign doesn't only cover the classic games. Hasbro owns several companies that played a part in the video-

when it formed Hasbro Interactive. The company quickly created a niche for itself by releasing computer versions of practically every board game in its catalog. Then, in 1997, it released *Frogger* for the PlayStation and PC. After the game sold millions of copies, Hasbro Interactive knew for certain that there was money to be made with well-known classic games. The company



Night Trap (Hasbro/Sega CD)

decided to go after bigger fish.

In 1998, Hasbro Interactive purchased the remnants of Atari from JTS Corporation for a mere \$5,000,000. Hasbro Interactive's plan was to update such well-known titles as *Missile Command*, *Centipede*, and *Pong*.

Owning the Atari catalog alone would have given Hasbro the title of being the 'Ultimate Gaming Company.' And since the company also owned all of Atari's consoles from the JTS deal, it could theoretically re-release the 2600/7800 and 5200 with enough software to keep potential hardware customers supplied with 'new' software for many years.

And what about the third party titles? Well Hasbro owns much of those too.

The Parker Brothers titles could be available since Parker Brothers is a division of Hasbro. In fact it was one of those Parker Brothers titles, *Frogger*, that set Hasbro Interactive on its retro awakening.

Parker Brothers' perpetual rival had always been that other Massachusetts-based game company, Milton Bradley. And naturally Milton Bradley had also jumped on the 2600 bandwagon, re-



River Patrol (TigerVision)

leasing a couple of lame games (with some really strange controllers). Well, since Milton Bradley is also a Hasbro company, those titles could be available if Hasbro ever decided to re-release its classic consoles.

Avalon-Hill was a third board game company but in a different league than Parker Brothers or Milton Bradley. This company produced games that appealed to strategists rather than the family-oriented games being produced by its competitors. And for a short while Avalon-Hill also put out a slew of Atari 2600-compatible games such as *London Blitz* and *Out of Control*. Because these games weren't distributed as widely as those by other companies, Avalon-Hill 2600 games are generally pretty rare today. But since Avalon-Hill is now a Hasbro company, there's no reason why it couldn't re-release its



game.com (Tiger Electronics)

catalog of games.

Tigervision's River Patrol recently sold on eBay for \$800. Well if our scenario came true and Hasbro Interactive re-released the 2600, there would be nothing to stop Tiger Electronics from re-releasing its line of 2600 games. After all, Tiger Electronics is a part of Hasbro.

There are other third party 2600 titles whose current ownership is questionable. When Selchow & Righter (publisher of Trivial Pursuit and Scrabble) went bankrupt, their assets were purchased by Coleco. Among them was the Scrabble-based 2600 game, *Glib*. And when Coleco went bankrupt in 1989, guess who was there to purchase its assets for \$85 million? Hasbro, of course. The belief is that Hasbro does not currently own the rights to the Coleco videogames. But if it doesn't, who does?

Thanks to the Atari acquisition, Hasbro owns the rights to all of Atari's consoles. Hasbro owns other consoles also and nearly every videogame console has benefited from products released by companies that now fall under the Hasbro umbrella. Although Hasbro's ownership of the Colecovision is questioned, the console can play games that were produced by Parker Brothers. Intellivision owners have also been able to play Parker Brothers

games.

Hasbro even has a major interest in the portable market. The company owns the Microvision, the world's first programmable handheld console, through its Milton Bradley division. (Hasbro doesn't own the Vectrex, which Milton Bradley acquired when it purchased General Consumer Electronics (GCE). When the unit was discontinued, all of its rights reverted back to its original developers. Hasbro also owns the rights to two other portables: the Atari Lynx and the Tiger game.com, furthering Hasbro's title as the Ultimate Videogame Company. When it comes to the modern consoles, Hasbro again is no slouch. In addition to releasing software for all of today's three systems (PlayStation, N64, and Dreamcast), the company's Galoob subsidiary was responsible for bringing the Game Genie to America. And if we really want to get technical,



Microvision (Milton Bradley)

Hasbro's Tonka division once distributed the Sega Master System. And Hasbro also has the future in mind by announcing games for the X-Box, PlayStation 2, Dolphin, and Nuon game systems.

Hasbro also had a major impact on the way games are displayed to the public. One of the games that Hasbro created for the ill-fated Control-Vision was *Night Trap*, a game that was later released for the Sega CD and one of the primary games which influenced the current videogame rating system.

After an unsuccessful early bid at joining the videogame race, Hasbro has turned around to become a major impact in both the current and retro markets. It has truly become The Ultimate Videogame Company.

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Systems listed: Odyssey2, Intellivision, Colecovision, Vectrex, Turbograftx-16, 32X, NES, Neo-Geo, Supervision, Atari 2600, Super/Nintendo, Genesis, TI-99/4A, Lynx, Playstation, Sega Master System(SMS), Atari 7800, N64, Saturn, Jaguar, Phillips CD-i.