

Q*bert (game)



The Q*bert arcade machine.

Q*bert was an arcade game released around 1982 from Gottlieb. Until since 2010, the game was co-produced by Skunk Studios and Sonographic Imageworks. The game was started by an American company, known as Gottlieb. The concept and design was made by Warren Davis and Jeff Lee.

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History

Gottlieb, a popular pinball game creator (famous for the pinball game "Baffle Ball") began catering towards the popular video game market making games for arcades such as Insector and Tylz, neither of which were released.

Q*bert was well received in arcades and among critics. The game was Gottlieb's most successful video game and among the most recognized brands from the golden age of arcade video games. It has been ported to numerous platforms. The success resulted in sequels and the use of the character's likeness in merchandising, such as appearances on lunch boxes, toys, and an animated television show. The character Q*bert became known for his "swearing", an incoherent phrase of synthesized speech generated by the sound chip and a speech balloon of nonsensical characters that appear when he collides with an enemy.

Because the game was developed during the period when Columbia Pictures owned Gottlieb, the intellectual rights to Q*bert remained with Columbia even after they divested themselves of Gottlieb's assets in 1984. Therefore, the rights have been owned by Sony Pictures Entertainment since its parent Sony acquired Columbia in 1989. Q*bert appeared in Disney's computer-animated film Wreck-It Ralph under license from Sony, and later appeared in Columbia's live-action film Pixels in 2015.

Gameplay

The game is played using a single, diagonally mounted four-way joystick. The player controls [Q*bert](#), who starts each game at the top of a pyramid made of 28 cubes, and moves by hopping diagonally from cube to cube. Landing on a cube causes it to change color, and changing every cube to the target color allows the player to progress to the next stage.

At the beginning, jumping on every cube once is enough to advance. In later stages, each cube must be hit twice to reach the target color. Other times, cubes change color every time Q*bert lands on them, instead of remaining on the target color once they reach it. Both elements are then combined in subsequent stages. Jumping off the pyramid results in the character's death.

A square video game screenshot that is a digital representation of a multicolored pyramid of cubes in front of a black background. An orange spherical character, a red ball, and a purple coiled snake are on the cubes. Multicolored discs are adjacent to the left and right sides of the pyramid. Above the pyramid are statistics related to gameplay. The eponymous Q*bert hops diagonally down the pyramid to avoid Coily, who is pursuing him. The game tracks the player's progress above the pyramid. The player is impeded by several enemies, introduced gradually to the game:

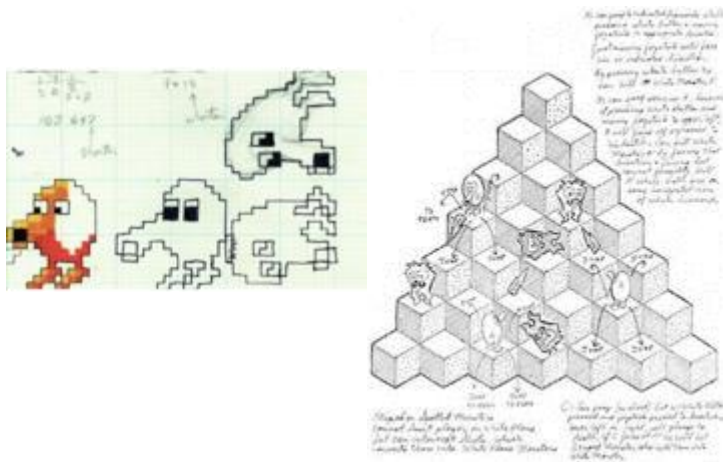
- [Coily](#) – Coily first appears as a purple egg that bounces to the bottom of the pyramid and then transforms into a snake that chases after Q*bert.
- [Ugg](#) and [Wrong-Way](#) – Two purple creatures that hop along the sides of the cubes in an Escheresque manner. Starting at either the bottom left or bottom right corner, they keep moving toward the top right or top left side of the pyramid respectively, and fall off the pyramid when they reach the end.
- [Slick](#) and [Sam](#) – Two green creatures that descend down the pyramid and revert cubes whose color has already been changed.

A collision with purple enemies is fatal to the character, whereas the green enemies are removed from the board upon contact. Colored balls occasionally appear at the second row of cubes and bounce downward; contact with a [red ball](#) is lethal to Q*bert, while contact with a [green one](#) immobilizes the on-screen enemies for a limited time. Multicolored [floating discs](#) on either side of the pyramid serve as an escape from danger, particularly Coily. When Q*bert jumps on a disc, it transports him to the top of the pyramid. If Coily is in close pursuit of the character, he will jump after Q*bert and fall to his death, awarding bonus points. This causes all enemies and balls on the screen to disappear, though they start to return after a few seconds.

Points are awarded for each color change (25), defeating Coily with a flying disc (500), remaining discs at the end of a stage (at higher stages, 50 or 100) and catching green balls (100) or Slick and Sam (300 each). Bonus points are also awarded for completing a screen, starting at 1,000 for the first screen of Level 1 and increasing by 250 for each subsequent completion. Extra lives are granted for reaching certain scores, which are set by the machine operator.

Development

Concept



Q*Bert's concept designs.

In this concept sketch, Q*Bert is still depicted shooting his foes. The sole enemy type is also not included in the final game.

The basic ideas for the game were thought up by Warren Davis and Jeff Lee. The initial concept began when artist Jeff Lee drew a pyramid of cubes inspired by M. C. Escher. Lee felt a game could be derived from the artwork, and created an orange, armless main character. The character jumped along the cubes and shot projectiles, called "mucus bombs", from a tubular nose at enemies. Enemies included a blue creature, later changed purple and named Wrong-Way, and an orange creature, later changed green and named Sam. Lee had drawn similar characters since childhood, inspired by characters from comics, cartoons, Mad magazine and by artist Ed "Big Daddy" Roth. Q*Bert's design later included a speech balloon with a string of nonsensical characters, "@!#?@!@", which Lee originally presented as a joke.

Implementation

Warren Davis, a programmer hired to work on the action game Protector, noticed Lee's ideas, and asked if he could use them to practice programming randomness and gravity as game mechanic. Thus, he added balls that bounced from the pyramid's top to bottom. Because Davis was still learning how to program game mechanics, he wanted to keep the design simple. He also felt games with complex control schemes were frustrating and wanted something that could be played with one hand. To accomplish this, Davis removed the shooting and changed the objective to saving the protagonist from danger. As Davis worked on the game one night, Gottlieb's vice president of engineering, Ron Waxman, noticed him and suggested to change the color of the cubes after the game's character has landed on them. Davis implemented a unique control scheme; a four-way joystick was rotated 45° to match the directions of Q*Bert's jumping. Staff members at Gottlieb urged for a more conventional orientation, but Davis stuck to his decision. Davis remembered to have started programming in April 1982, but the project was only put on schedule as an actual product several months later.

Audio

We wanted the game to say, 'You have gotten 10,000 bonus points', and the closest I came to it after an entire day would be "bogus points". Being very frustrated with this, I said, "Well, screw it. What if I just stick random numbers in the chip instead of all this highly authored stuff, what happens?"

- David Thiel on the creation of Q*bert's incoherent swearing.

A MOS Technology 6502 chip that operates at 894 kHz generates the sound effects, and a speech synthesizer by Votrax generates Q*bert's incoherent expressions. The audio system uses 128B of random-access memory and 4KB of erasable programmable read only memory to store the sound data and code to implement it. Like other Gottlieb games, the sound system was thoroughly tested to ensure it would handle daily usage. In retrospect, audio engineer David Thiel commented that such testing minimized time available for creative designing.

Thiel was tasked with using the synthesizer to produce English phrases for the game. However, he was unable to create coherent phrases and eventually chose to string together random phonemes instead. Thiel also felt the incoherent speech was a good fit for the "@!#?@!" in Q*bert's speech balloon. Following a suggestion from technician Rick Tighe, a pinball machine component was included to make a loud sound when a character falls off the pyramid. The sound is generated by an internal coil that hits the interior of a cabinet wall. Foam padding was added to the area of contact on the cabinet; the developers felt the softer sound better matched a fall rather than a loud knocking sound. The cost of installing foam, however, was too expensive and the padding was omitted.

Title

The Gottlieb staff had difficulty naming the game. Aside from the project name "Cubes", it was untitled for most of the development process. The staff agreed the game should be named after the main character, but disagreed on the name. Lee's title for the initial concept—Snots And Boogers—was rejected, as was a list of suggestions compiled from company employees. According to Davis, vice president of marketing Howie Rubin championed @!#?@! as the title. Although staff members argued it was silly and would be impossible to pronounce, a few early test models were produced with @!#?@! as the title on the units' artwork. During a meeting, "Hubert" was suggested, and a staff member thought of combining "Cubes" and "Hubert" into "Cubert". Art director Richard Tracy changed the name to "Q-ber*", and the hyphen was later changed to an asterisk. In retrospect, Davis expressed regret for the asterisk, because he felt it prevented the name from becoming a common crossword term and it is a wildcard character for search engines.

Testing

As development neared the production stage, Q*bert underwent location tests in local arcades under its preliminary title @!#?@!, before being widely distributed. According to Jeff Lee, his oldest written record attesting to the game being playable as @!#?@! in a public location, a Brunswick bowling alley, dates back to September 11, 1982. Gottlieb also conducted focus groups, in which the designers observed players through a one-way mirror. The control scheme received a mixed reaction during play testing; some players adapted quickly while others found it frustrating. Initially, Davis was worried players would not adjust to the different controls; some players would unintentionally jump off the pyramid several times, reaching a game over in about ten seconds. Players, however, became accustomed to the controls after playing several

rounds of the game. The different responses to the controls prompted Davis to reduce the game's level of difficulty—a decision that he would later regret.

Release

A copyright claim registered with the United States Copyright Office by Gottlieb on February 10, 1983 cites the date of publication of Q*bert as October 18, 1982. Video Games reported that the game was sold directly to arcade operators at its public showing at the AMOA show held November 18–20, 1982. Gottlieb offered the machines for \$2600 per unit. Q*bert is Gottlieb's fourth video game.

Ports

At the 1982 AMOA Show, Parker Brothers secured the license to publish home conversions of the Q*bert arcade game. Parker first published a port to the Atari 2600, and by the end of 1983, the company also advertised versions for Atari 5200, Intellivision, ColecoVision, the Atari 8-bit computer family, Commodore VIC-20, Texas Instruments TI-99/4A and Commodore 64. The release of the Commodore 64 version was noted to lag behind the others but appeared in 1984. Parker Brothers also translated the game into a stand-alone tabletop electronic game. It uses a VFD screen, and has since become a rare collector's item. Q*bert was also published by Parker Brothers for the Philips Videopac in Europe, by Tsukuda Original for the Othello Multivision in Japan, and by Ultra Games for the NES in North America.

The initial home port for the Atari 2600, the most widespread system at the time, was met with mixed reactions. Video Games warned that buyers of the Atari 2600 version "may find themselves just a little disappointed." They criticized the lack of music, the removing of the characters Ugg and Wrong-Way, and the system's troubles to handle the character sprites on screen at a steady performance. Later Mark Brownstein of the same magazine was more in favor of the game, but still cited the presence of fewer cubes in the game's pyramidal layout and "pretty poor control" as negatives. Will Richardson of Electronic Games noted a lack in audiovisual qualities and counter-intuitive controls, but commended the gameplay, stating that the game "comes much closer to its source of inspiration than a surface evaluation indicates". Randi Hacker of Electronic Fun with Computers & Games called it a "sterling adaption [sic]" In 2008, however, IGN's Levi Buchanan rated it the fourth worst arcade port for the Atari 2600, mostly due to a lack of jumping animations for enemies, which instead pop up instantly on the adjacent cube, making it impossible to know which direction they travel before they land. Entertainment Weekly called Q*Bert one of the top ten games for the Atari 2600 in 2013, saying the port "lost the cool isometric perspective but none of the addictive gameplay".

Other home versions were well-received for the most part, with some exceptions. Of the ColecoVision version, Electronic Fun with Computers & Games noted that "Q*bert aficionados will not be disappointed". Marc Brownstein of Video Games called it one of the best of the authorized versions. Warren Davis also considered the ColecoVision version the most accurate port of the arcade. Mark Brownstein judged the Atari 5200 version inferior to the ColecoVision, due to the imprecision of the Atari 5200 controller, but noted that "it does tend to grow on you." Video Games determined the Intellivision version as the worst of the available ports, criticizing the system's controller for being inadequate for the game. Antic magazine's David Duberman called the Atari 8-bit version "one of the finest translations of an arcade game for the home computer format", and Arthur Leyenberger of Creative Computing listed it as a runner-up for Best

Arcade Adaptation to the system, praising its faithful graphics, sound, movement and playability. Softline was more critical, criticizing the Atari version's controls and lack of swearing. The magazine concluded that "the home computer game doesn't have the sense of style of the one in the arcades ... the execution just isn't there". In 1984 the magazine's readers named the game the fifth-worst Atari program of 1983. Computer Games called the C64 version an "absolutely terrific translation" that "almost totally duplicates the arcade game," aside from its lack of synthesized speech. The stand-alone tabletop was awarded Stand-Alone Game of the Year in Electronic Games.

In 2003, a version for Java-based mobile phones was announced by Sony Pictures Mobile. Reviewers generally acknowledged it as a faithful port of the arcade original, but criticized the controls. Modojo's Robert Falcon stated that the diagonal controls take time to adapt to on a cell phone with traditional directions. Michael French of Pocket Gamer concluded: "You can't escape the fact it doesn't exactly fit on mobile. The graphics certainly do, and the spruced-up sound effects are timeless... but really, it's a little too perfect a conversion." Airgamer criticized the gameplay as monotonous and the difficulty as frustrating. By contrast, Wireless Gaming Review called it "one of the best of mobile's retro roundup".

On February 22, 2007, Q*bert was released on the PlayStation 3's PlayStation Network. It features upscaled and filtered graphics, an online leaderboard for players to post high-scores, and Sixaxis motion controls. The game received a mixed reception. Dunham and Gerstmann did not enjoy the motion controls and felt it was a title only for nostalgic players. Eurogamer.net's Richard Leadbetter judged the game's elements "too simplistic and repetitive to make them worthwhile in 2007". In contrast, Parish considered the title worth purchasing, citing its addictive gameplay.

Q*bert Media	
Main Series	Q*bert Q*bert's Qubes Q*bert 3 Q*bert (1999 game) Q*bert: Rebooted
Spin-Offs and Ports	Q*bert (MSX) Q*bert (Game Boy) Q*bert 2004 Q*bert 2005 Q*bert Deluxe
Board Games	Q*bert Q*bert's Quest
Television and Film	Saturday Supercade Wreck-It Ralph Pixels
Unreleased	Faster Harder More Challenging Q*bert

Source: [https://qbert.fandom.com/wiki/Q*bert_\(game\)](https://qbert.fandom.com/wiki/Q*bert_(game))