Retrogaming Times

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One Less Show

After three years, the CCAG is no more. The Cleveland based classic computer and video game show has closed its doors. The final blow was when founder and the main man behind the show, Jim Krych was called into active duty. Without his vision, energy and time, we knew the show was doomed.

While the thought of having someone else pick up the ball and run with it, the weak performance from the past year and the loss of the armory as a place were enough to decide to pack it in. The show took a major drop in attendance last year, after a strong show in 2001. A big part was due to the 9/11 tragedy which took away the armory, which was both a very large and very affordable venue. It forced the show to move to a much smaller and more restrictive as well as expensive venue. This forced the end of the free tables and free admission, both of which made it very easy to draw dealers and attendees.

While the show is over, there is hope that a new show will one day become a reality. But for this year, the show is over. We would like to thank everyone who did help with the show and attended the past three shows. They were fun and most people did leave happy and with more games to play!

In .MOD We Trust

by Sam Miller

There are some people who don't like to bring up a topic like computer or videogame music, either because it doesn't sound like real music, they still don't understand after it has been explained. Most people don't even consider computer/videogame music, music. People say,"It's easier said than done." For this kind of music is probably easier done than said.

I've been listening to computer/videogame music for years. A few of the earliest themes from any videogame I heard were the themes from the arcade games Mappy and Spy Hunter. Now with emulators for arcade, computer, handheld, console, pinball, and music players like Playsid, Mod4Win, and Winamp that you can add plugins for various types of music files.

I've been using a Commodore 64 since the mid 80's and one of the first things I noticed was the music that played in games, animation demos, etc. One of my favorite collections of music was Laser Light Show and Synth Sample 64 which had the same 9 songs. They were Stationary Ark, Saturdays In Silezia, Spiral, Tubular Bells, Clockwork Orange, Oxygene2, Canon, and Enola Gay.

I thought the C64 .SID music format was the greatest, until I heard the .MOD format. The .MOD format has been since the late 80's and it still hasn't gotten recognized for how popular it is. The format was created on the Commodore Amiga and has created a following for those associated with the Amiga and the C64. The structure of the format is that there are 4 seperate channels (2 left, 2 right) for playing back samples. There are 2 different types of .MOD files. One that can store 15 samples to be used as instruments, and the other that can store 31. Other formats these days can hold more that 31 samples. The cool thing about using samples in .MOD, as apposed to MIDI, where the instrument selection is preset, is that a sample can contain any kind of sound, and if you don't like a particular sample, you can simply replace it. The .SPC format for the Super NES is just like a .MOD file, except that you can't change the samples.

The first time I heard about the format was when my cousin bought a used Amiga in the summer of 1992. He had a handful of files and played them for me and I thought it was brilliant. These files were about 40-200kb in length. I noticed in the early 90's that an IBM-PC was also capable of playing .MOD files. There were a few programs that supported the format, one came with the Pro Audio Spectrum soundboard, and the other one was listed in the third-party software chapter of an old Sound Blaster book called WOWII. By the end of 1993, I found some BBS's that had .MOD files. By the time I finally had access to the Internet, I had about 400-500 files in various formats like .MED, .S3M, and others. I even got into making some of my own music, but I never heard back from any of the BBS's or Websites that I uploaded my music to.

In early 1997, I sent away for a 4-CD set of 18,000+ .MOD files called Mods Anthology. When I got it, I never realized how much music I missed out on if only I had an Amiga from the start. Most of the people that like .MOD files probably had a C64. I find myself listening to computer/videogame music at times more than normal music because I don't like the state that today's music is in. One thing I noticed in videogames in the early 90's, is that CD tracks started appearing in games, that used a CD-type format (PC, Sega CD, Sony Playstation, etc.). Another, is a .WAV, .VOC, or similar file that basically has a digital copy of real music, no matter what the quality is, whether or not is compressed like an MP3. Most of today's arcade game music is also something you'd hear on a CD. All of this doesn't really feel like the kind of videogame I grew up listening to. I do like some of the stuff from today's games, but I miss how music used to be made from the ground up, like the C64. The same goes for the old arcade games that use the Pokey Sound format or something similar (Ms. Pac-Man: intermission music, Frogger: all of those little tunes, Mappy: the main theme lasts almost 2 minutes!). Then there was FM-Synthesis or Adlib for those who remember the old Soundblaster ->SBAWE series that had the OPL2, OPL3 chips (Bubble Bobble, 720, Off the Wall, all of the pre-BSMT Data East pinball games.).

I guess my point about why I like the .MOD file format so much is that how it's designed, it tricks people into thinking it could be a CD track. It also has a similar attitude and feel that made the music on the C64 so good, like the really high notes, and the really low bass notes. So, that's my take on the subject.

Here's a link to a very extensive article on videogame music: http://www.vgmusic.com/vgpaper.shtml. In the article that says, "The history of game music begins in earnest with the Nintendo Entertainment System", the games that I listed came out before the NES did. Below is a list of some of my personal favorites that are from Mods Anthology and from various BBS's and Websites. There are also links for downloading other formats of music and players listed below. I'm sorry that I couldn't write back any sooner.

Sam Miller
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I saw the list for the Top 10 Games of 1982. Did anyone else vote for Millipede, Pac-Man Plus, Pengo, Slither, Zoo Keeper, or Super Pac-Man?

COMMERCIAL VAULT

by Adam King

Greetings, gamers, it's time to serve up some more commercial goodness from the Vault. With Alan doing Joust and Turmoil for the Many Faces Of, I just happen to have commercials of both those games.

Both these ads can be found at the Atari Historical Society (www.atarimusem.com)

Joust

This commercial for Atari's arcade hit, which Tom pointed out in Issue 50, is totally surreal. The 2-minute epic starts out innocently enough; a teen runs in, shows his yellow bird his shiny new Joust game, and begins to play. Suddenly two life-size jousters riding buzzards burst from the floor and have their own joust. The teen just tries to avoid getting killed as the enemies battle. In no time at all the living room is trashed, and the teen finds and drinks an egg the jousters left behind, leading to a weird effect.

He's showing what he thinks is a normal game.

The bird knows something's coming.

"Mind if we fight here?"

"Dudes, this is my living room."

He has a front row seat for this duel.

The bird gets cooked near the end.

With his foe vanquished, he departs through the window.

"Looks like they left me a surprise."

You'll have to see the ending yourself. This ad is just beyond words. Anyway Atari made another Joust ad, a simple animated version, that probably replaced this one on the airwaves.

NOTE: If you have a broadband connection and/or a lot of time, you can downloaded a larger version of the ad at cyberroach.com. Beware, it is a huge file.

Turmoil
This spot for the 2600 version of Turmoil shows a game player going crazy from all the action going on, all the shooting and crazy stuff. Please note that the video I had was pretty poor in quality, so I couldn't make out the lyrics.

If you sit that close to the TV, you'll ruin your eyes.

Airline food, without the airplane.

Don't look know, but there's a tank behind you.

This guy must have watched the Exorcist.

Can this cart really drive people up the wall?

Not too much to this ad, though.

Don't forget you can help out the Vault. If you have a suggestion of somewhere where I can find videos, drop me a line at Hal_3000@rocketmail.com. Until next time, beware the next time you drop that Joust cartridge in your 5200.

Classic Pinball Video Games

by The Video Game Critic

Atari 2600:

Video Pinball (Atari 1981) C+

Here's a game that succeeds in spite of itself. It has square bumpers and spinners that actually slow down the ball. The physics is questionable, and the ball bounces unpredictably. But like any good pinball game, it has an addictive quality that keeps you coming back, trying to top your high score. You control two flippers, and can activate them together or independently. You can slightly affect the movement of the ball by "nudging" it, but if you get carried away a "tilt" occurs, ending your game. I remember playing Video Pinball with my childhood friend Billy, who could keep one ball going seemingly forever (much to my chagrin). The best part is clearing the diamonds at the top of the screen, which increases the bumper values. The rollovers are pretty cheap because they are situated directly over the bumpers, and by using the nudge you can continuously bounce the ball over them, running up some huge scores. Maybe this game isn't as good as I remembered, but I still like it.

Bumper Bash Ultravision 1983 B-
Bumper Bash is a good-looking pinball game, with round bumpers, drop targets, multipliers, rollovers, and ball kickers. The table looks pretty cool and there's plenty to do. The control scheme is unusual in that it uses two paddle buttons to activate the flippers (the knobs are not used). This makes the game feel more like real pinball, but rules out any kind of nudge control. The game is pretty hard because the flippers are small and there's a significant gap between them. In addition, one of rollers is poorly positioned directly over the hole. The physics is fair for the most part, but sometimes the ball seems to "stick" to a flipper instead of caroming off of it. In terms of fun, I'd have to say Bumper Bash falls somewhere between Video Pinball and Midnight Magic.

Midnight Magic (Atari 1988) B+
This late Atari 2600 game is probably the best pinball game you're going to find for the system. The table is small but colorful and finely detailed. There are bumpers, rollovers, drop targets, and two sets of flippers. Although the table may look sparse and wide-open by modern pinball standards, there are enough targets to keep things interesting. It's a challenging game, especially on the A difficulty. While I found Midnight Magic to be fun and addicting, I wasn't impressed with the control. There is no nudge, and the flippers could be more responsive. Still, pinball fans will be satisfied with the overall quality.

Intellivision:

Pinball (Mattel 1983) A
When it comes to classic pinball games, it gets no better than this. Intellivision's Pinball looks great and plays extremely well. There are THREE colorful tables, each loaded with targets to hit, and each table has two sets of flippers! You can even bump the machine to apply some body english. And Pinball plays as good as it looks. The round ball moves smoothly and realistically. Above all, the challenge level is just right. It keeps you coming back for more. To be honest, I can't find ANY faults with this game.

Odyssey^2:

Thunderball (Magnavox 1979) D-
Boy is this pinball game lame! Could they have come up with a less interesting table? It's

just an empty box with some round and square bumpers! This game was poorly designed. There's really nothing to aim for, so you just try to keep the ball alive. I'll say one thing for Thunderball - despite the huge size of the ball, it's surprisingly tough to keep that thing in play! The control isn't bad; you can even move the flippers slightly left and right. But the gameplay is senseless. The box brags about the "digital scoring". That's great, I guess I won't need to use my calculator this time. Up to four people can play, likely against their own will.

Vectrex:

Spinball (CGE 1982) D-
Some types of games simply don't translate well to the Vectrex. Add pinball to that list. Without the colors and flashing lights, pinball just doesn't have the same attraction. And Spinball has a host of other problems. First of all, there aren't many targets, and what's here is pretty dull (mainly boxes and dashes). The table is extremely unbalanced. You can keep the ball going in the top half for long periods of time, but once it falls into the bottom part you always lose it very quickly. The physics is terrible - the ball seems to have a mind of its own. The collision detection isn't too hot either, and the ball sometimes seems to get caught up within objects. But the worst part is that you can't see your score during play. As far as I'm concerned, part of the fun of pinball is being able to see your points rack up as you play. The constant flicker of the table also gets to you after a while. The one thing that Spinball does right is control. The flippers are responsive, and the joystick can be used to nudge the table. The game won't hesitate to call a tilt on you if you get carried away. But overall Spinball left me with an empty feeling, like having a small salad for dinner.

NES:

Pinball (Nintendo 1983) B
Initially, I thought Pinball was just a shallow, generic-looking pinball game. But after repeated plays, I found it to be remarkably challenging and addicting. There's only one table, and it doesn't have much of a theme, unless you consider "Nintendo" a theme. You have all the standard pinball trappings, like bumpers, spinners, flippers, and traps. The graphics aren't very impressive, but the action is smooth and the physics is good. There are two screens that display the top and bottom halves of the table, and each have their own set of flippers and a nice variety of targets. Although the table isn't flashy, it was thoughtfully designed. There is wide variety of targets to aim for, but with only three balls, there's not much room for error. You only control the flippers; there's no "nudge" button. Pinball isn't much to look at, but it's got it where it counts: the gameplay.

For over 1700 more reviews, check out The Video Game Critic at www.videogamecritic.net.

The Many Faces of...Joust and Turmoil

by Alan Hewston

A double header this month.

The Many Faces of JOUST...

As one of your favorite (voted for) games from 1982, let's extend our 20th anniversary tribute to review the many faces of Joust. Joust often gets mentioned in classic VG discussions about how it begat this game or that, or spawned off clones or copies. Perhaps one can argue that it started a new genre – the flying jousting or arena theme. It's a shame that Joust was not officially licensed on all home systems of the classic era, but with the help of games like Pegasis, Jouste, Dragon's Den, Dragonrider's of Pern, and Sir Lancelot, most systems had something close enough to the arcade.

At the arcade, Joust was a great game for 2 player simultaneous action. In some rounds you are rewarded for working together in others you could score points for unseating the other player. Player one jousts upon an Ostrich, player 2 on a Stork. The enemy knights ride on Buzzards and must all be unseated by bumping into them. Upon impact, the lower

rider got unseated (lost a life), if tied in altitude, they both bounced away. Once unseated, the buzzard would release a giant egg which had to be collected before it turned into yet another rider, one level harder than the previous. There are Bounders, who become Hunters, who become Shadow Lords, each a more skillful rider. Other hazards are the almost indestructible Pterodactyl and the deadly lava pit – with flames spewing upwards and the grasp of the lava troll who could grab your mount and pull you under.

<Not enough or as many faces classic as we'd all like to see>

Arcade: Williams 1982

Home Versions '83 by Atari or Atarisoft unless noted

Atari 2600, 5200, 8 bit, 7800 ('87), TI-99 ('8?), Apple 2 ('8?, Erid Parker, Eric Robinson) and Sinclair Spectrum (Softek, Andrew Glaister)

Unreleased: C64 ('85 Joe Hellesen), CV ('83 recently released by Digital Press)

Arcade Sequels: Joust 2: Survival of the Fittest by Williams (Warren Davis with Joe Hellesen and Christine Donofrio) – with an added button to transform into a Pegasis, having more power/skills.

Home Version Similarities - all versions have: all waves (Pterodactyl, Survivor, Gladiator, and Egg); the upcoming wave is told in advance; a bonus life every 20 K; new lives show up on screen with a grace period before you become active; but no version has lava flames. Additional home version elements, with those Missing In Action (MIA) <listed here>: two player simultaneous action <AP2>; all 3 types of Knights <AP2>; the lava troll <2600>; 6+ enemies on screen <2600>; 2 or more difficulty levels <AP2, CV>; a demo <CV, AP2>; regeneration pads <2600>; individual display of all points as you earn them <AP2, 2600, 5200, 8 bit>; pause <2600>; good collision detection <AP2>; an audio warning when eggs are about to hatch <AP2, CV>; hatched eggs become a rider <2600, 8 bit, 5200> who must await a mount.

Disqualified: TI-99, C64 & Sinclair Spectrum

Here's yet another not-too-hard-to-find TI-99 game that never shows up on ebay or in my hunting or trading grounds. Haven given up, I'm sure to find one now. As with most TI games made by Atarisoft, I expect that it would be a let down, but good enough to enjoy – probably matching the 2600. The C64 version that I & most gamers probably have is actually called "Jouste". Apparently Atarisoft did at least start a version, we may never know how good could it have been? The handful of Sinclair Spectrum arcade ports are reportedly good, so I'd expect the Sinclair Joust to have been fun.

Have Nots: Apple 2 (35)

My first reaction was the sound really bytes, so perhaps I don't have the full version of this game. But then there is a choice to toggle off/on the sound. Maybe this is their admission that it was bad. There is only one other choice - keyboard or joystick. This is not unusual, but Atarisoft typically does a better job, so I hope an original version will prove me wrong and boost these scores. Because this is only one player game, without any difficulty settings or demo, the Gameplay suffers, but is still decent (6). Other MIAs also hurt and the platforms are bounced off of before you hit them (poor collision detection) making for

even less on-screen maneuvering room. Another point is lost as the action really slows with 4+ enemies on-screen. Overall, the gameplay is in tact, and this is the only version that keeps track of the high score. The Addictiveness is very fun (8), with a pause <esc>. It could be improved with difficulty options, especially since the game is a bit difficult to play already. The Graphics are the best feature, very colorful and outstanding (9), but the Sound is mediocre (5) - just enough there to keep you interested, as some sound effects are missing. The Controls are effective (7) at best – with a major problem when flapping wings. Neither the fire button nor the space bar appears to be properly set up, or in synch to work all the time. This problem is amplified with increased number of objects, leading to a delay in, or even no response. "Oh, did you want me to flap my wings?" We need Tom, er uh Dr. N. Sane to interview the various Joust beasts of burden and find out. As usual, this version is only on disk, and still worth playing – even if solo.

Have Nots: Colecovision (38)

My first reaction was how does one score a game without any audio? Or should we DQ it, since it was not released. Someone at Atarisoft should have been strung up, keeping such a gem of a game from being completed/released. Maybe they were promoted as they insured that the 5200 could claim that Atari had the best version. Gameplay is impressive (8), but only for skill level one – being the only one completed. Skill level 2 is harder (as it should be) but you have an infinite number of lives, and skill level 3 begins but no enemies ever come out to joust. So it looks like they were pretty far along in this game when it was canceled or shelved - finished and polished, it may have beaten the 7800. Skill level 1 plays a bit harder than other versions, but not nearly as bad as CV arcade ports usually are. Each new life you get about twice as much safe time (15 sec) on the regeneration pads as the other versions. Provided you can get over having no sound, the Addictiveness is flawless (10) and you'll enjoy this game and its replay value tremendously. The pause is <#> and when a two player game is active, either controller's <#> will toggle the pause. This is great as it allows one player to have an Atari controller but not lose the pause feature. While the Graphics are a work of art (10), Sound is literally non-existent (0). This can make it a bit boring, but in this case, sound is not too critical to play Joust – so give it a try if you can. The Controls are excellent (10) using an Atari stick, and score no lower than a (9) with any of the CV controller options. This version released on cart by the Digital Press (good job guys!).

Have Nots: Atari 2600 (40)

My first reaction was why aren't there more simultaneous 2 player games on the 2600? Gameplay is very good (7) and contains all essential elements, just fewer enemies. Besides the MIAs above, the eggs and egg waves are unique. The eggs float in and around the screen until they are collected or they hatch. Similarly, the eggs from unseated riders do not land, they remain afloat until collected, fall into the lava pit, or hatch. There are only 2 difficulties. The kids version is great, but will not have long-term value. Fortunately, the regular difficulty is just right to keep you interested and gradually gets harder. Addictiveness is outstanding (9) and could only be improved with a pause. Graphics are effective (7), but contain simpler colors and few details. Sound is very good (7), just a bit missing or odd compared to the others. The Controls are excellent (10).

Bronze Medal: Atari 5200 (44)

My first reaction was the sticks. Just enough slop in there to drop the Controls score to great (9). The Gameplay is well done (9) only missing a few MIAs but having 4 skill levels. The Addictiveness is awesome (10) with the pause as <pause>. The Graphics are sharp (8) and clearly better than the 2600, but not as much animation and color as is possible. Sound is pleasant (8) with all the effects in place.

Silver Medal: Atari 8 bit (45)

My first reaction was there is no shame in finishing second place here. All the 5200 scores apply as this is the same game. The Controls are perfect (10) and no chance of error. The game was released on cart and can be found on disk as well.

Gold Medal: Atari 7800 (47)

My first reaction was the graphics are awesome, and if bought for $.80 MIB, makes it one of the greatest bargains of all time. Gameplay is complete with 4 skill levels and all elements are very well-done (9) – perhaps some day I'll re-score it a "10". The

Addictiveness is perfect (10) and this is pretty much as good as a game can get in the classic era. The pause is <pause>. The Graphics are truly awesome (10), just a wee bit better than the CV. The Sound is pleasant (8), and the best of the lot. An 8 is my max score for a game without a musical score or speech. The Controls are perfect (10) using a 2600 controller.

The Many Faces of TURMOIL...

Turmoil is a favorite of both Tom and myself we just had to review it - but I blew it, thinking that it came out in '83. So despite not having a chance for you to vote for it, we'll still give a proper 20th anniversary salute to this most excellent 1982 shoot 'em up game.

"Get ready for fast action" are words that I'll remember for a long time. They words were displayed while the C64 loaded up this game for me the first and every time since then. It wasn't long afterwards that I had severe hand cramps and blisters from playing great games like this over and over. I used to tell others that I've got a game that they'll lose all 5 lives in 10 seconds. Yeah Right! Sure enough, put on level 9 and see "Game Over" faster than the blink of an eye – appearing immediately after the enemy collided with you. The action then rudely freezes as well. Not quite the taunting of "Gorf" or even better, the Ha ha ha ha of "Impossible Mission" but a slap in the face that certainly requires immediate response - play it again! We all know how much fast action is involved with classics like "Robotron 2084" and "Kaboom". But there's never been a classic game before or since that has this much high speed action, combined with significant strategy, and all the while requires the discipline to NOT move or NOT fire at the wrong time/place. You'd better have a perfect working controller for this "death from the sides" game.

<Not very much fast action here – just the Faces of Turmoil>

Arcade: None, first on Atari 2600

Home Versions: all by 20th Century Fox and/or Sirius.

Atari 2600 ('82 Mark Turmell), Atari 8 bit (1983), Commodore 64 ('83 Jay Jones) & Vic 20 ('83 Jeremy Jones). The Jay & Jeremy Jones may be one in the same – my fault - not sure.

Rumor Mill: Colecovision version was at least planned. Apple II: unconfirmed if one was planned.

Home Version Similarities: All versions have a demo that runs a bit faster than the actual game, but is specific to each of 9 levels of play; there are no difficulty choices, but you can start from any of the 9 levels of action; a pause button; 7 horizontal traffic lanes where the aliens arrive from either the left or the right edges of the screen; and you alone move up and down a center corridor; you can point and fire to your left or right or travel down the lanes to collect a prize randomly located at the edge of the screen; prizes are worth bonus points but hurry before they turn into supersonic cannon balls; arrows that if not shot before crossing the screen turn into tanks that can only be destroyed from behind; tanks when shot from the front bounce backward a bit, but keep coming; the maximum speed of the enemies (aliens) is faster with each level, up to 9; enemy speeds are mixed so those

slow ones can be just as deadly; music to start and end each game; after completing 3 levels (4 on the C64 and Vic 20) or if you start at level 9, the next stage has invisible lanes, putting your observations skills to the full test; more of these invisible levels will follow about every 4 levels; the high score rolls over at 100K – which makes for a good goal to reach, but then requires videotaping to verify the score of those who excel at this game; an indestructible ghost ship arrives in the lane you just collected a prize in or one that you sit in for too long (at least 10 seconds, or after one enemy has passed by); an extra ship is earned after completing each level, with a maximum of 6 spares; and there is a current and high score saved.

Additional home version elements, except for those different or Missing In Action (MIA) <listed here>: upon losing a life, there's a brief delay in the action accompanied by a death sound FX along with a reset in the action on screen - all prizes, cannonballs and tanks are reset & removed <C64 & Vic 20>; a slight pause before the action returned <C64 Vic 20>; to un-pause hit the fire button <2600 & Vic>.

Have Nots: Vic 20 (40)

My first reaction was this is one awesome Vic 20 game. The Gameplay is great (9), and there is a lot of action and essence to this game, on all home versions. The Addictiveness is enjoyable (8) with the only drawbacks are that too many prizes, cannon balls and tanks can arrive within a short time frame. ie like 5 in about 5 seconds, which is an overload (especially on early levels) and makes it harder to play. Finally, factor in that these special aliens are not always cleared away (reset) after you lose a ship (life). You can begin a new life and be killed very quickly from enemies that have not gone away – which is not fair, but fortunately, these are not an automatic double death (see below). The pause <run/stop> is difficult to use – as there is not much of a chance to use it, save between levels. The Graphics are pretty good (7) and are just a little less color, detail and smoothness from the others. Fortunately, the action never slows, even with a full slate of enemies on-screen. Sound is respectable (6), nothing really bad here, but the music and most effects are weaker than the original 2600. The Controls are excellent (10). Available on cart (a bit rare) and possibly as a bootleg on cassette or disk. The Vic and C64 demos allow you to slow or pause the action and study the mechanics of gameplay – cool!

Bronze Medal: Commodore 64 (44)

Although I had this version first, my first reaction (after playing the 2600) is the sound effects are not as good. In fact initially, I wanted more sound, so I put on some fast music, like "Flight of the Bumble Bee" but then pause the action every now and then to rewind the tape. The music helps to enter "The Zone" and get absorbed completely. The Gameplay is great (9), pretty much everything is there for every version. Addictiveness is (9) super. The same drawback from the Vic 20 here (too many tanks & prizes too often) but an upgrade to the pause was made. <run/stop> toggles the pause, but the fire button will also resume the action. Quite safe! Quite cool! Graphics are outstanding (9) just a tad off from a 10. Sound is very good (7), but again the music is cheaper and some effects are odd, and one is missing. Controls are excellent (10). The game is only found on disk.

Silver Medal: Atari 2600 (45)

My first reaction was this game is one of the best games people will never know exists! The Gameplay is fantastic (9), for all home versions. There appears to be a limit on number of simultaneous tanks at 4 – probably so that you do not get randomly overwhelmed and cheated. This version has one unique minor problem that has been corrected on the 8 bit – the double death. Once understood, it can easily be avoided. It happens only if you stay in the lane too long, then grab the prize and afterwards fumble the stick and/or do not make it out of the lane, and then to make matters worse, stay on the edge of the screen - trying to delay the inevitable death from the ghost ship. If you do this, then as your next life is coming out, the next ghost ship (which comes out when you stay in the lane too long) comes out and gets you before you are able to move. So, if you are stuck in a lane, it's better to get killed ASAP – ie near the middle. The 2600 & 8 bit a also share a similar glitch, or purposeful feature where if you shoot the cannon ball just as it appears, the ghost ship suddenly appears through that lane – weird. Addictiveness is outstanding (9) but cannot score it a 10. The pause toggles using <color/black white switch>. Trying to get this toggled on such a fast action game is almost impossible to do

successfully every time. So, the pause is not very useful on this version. Graphics are superb (9) & Sound is nice (8). The music before each level is the coolest on the Atari version, and all effects are in place and audible. Controls are perfect (10).

Gold Medal: Atari 8 bit (46)

My first reaction was that although this looks/plays just like the 2600, it was slightly improved.

The Gameplay is wonderful (9) – see also comments on 2600. The Addictiveness is awesome (10) with the pause as <option> and the improved continue feature – via using the fire button. This helps considerably and at the same time the game is the same skill as the 2600 - not overloaded or unfair like the Commodore versions. Graphics are great (9), and Sound is pleasant (8) – pretty much matches the 2600 and maybe a little more. The Controls are perfect (10). Released on cart and available on disk – which makes it easier to find. Both Atari versions are highly recommended to enjoy this awesome "fast action".

Come back next month for a possible Imagic double-header salute to "Dragonfire" and "Atlantis" on most of these systems: Atari 2600 & 8 Bit, Intellivision, C64, Vic 20, Odyssey 2, CV & CoCo.

Alan Hewston can be reached at: Hewston95@stratos.net or to buy, sell or trade, see my lists at: http://my.stratos.net/~hewston95/Hewston_vg.html

What Next ?

By Fred Wagaman

I've been thinking lately. Thinking about where games are headed, what will they be. So what does the future hold ?

Swami Fred will look into his "Imagic" ball and see what lies ahead…

Arcades Are Dead.

In a few years, arcades as we know them, or should I say, as we knew them, are gone. Redemption machines have already pushed out most of the traditional arcade games. Pinball manufacturers are already extinct. You won't see any new games debuting at the arcades anymore. The next generation home machines will make arcade hardware obsolete. You may see home games show up at arcades after they've debuted at home.

There Can Be Only Two

When it all comes down, there will be only 2 major competing hardware platforms. The reason won't be consumer sales or critical mass, it will be 3rd party software companies. In the next few years, companies like Sony and Microsoft will continue to absorb software developers and make their content exclusive to their box. Nintendo may be able to limp along with their first party software… for a while. It would not surprise me at all to see some of the biggies (Capcom, Sega, Konami, etc.) getting bought.

No More Disks or Cartridges

Thank Microsoft for this prediction. Imagine no longer buying a game anymore. Instead, you'll pay to play a game. It will be downloaded into your machine and you will be licensed to use the downloaded game for a fixed period of time. The download will be encrypted and will only run on your machine. High speed access will make this possible. Solves the problem of software piracy. Companies like Microsoft and Sony would love this. And there would be no more used game market. Don't think it can happen ? A coalition of software vendors succeeded in getting a "no resale" law passed in one city in Japan. I think it has been overturned since, but their intention is clear. They want to own the software and they want to control what you do with it.

Online Games: Cell Phones or CB Radios ?

Content and game style will determine whether Online games are here to stay or not.

Sports, fighting and FPS are the mainstays right now. They will grow stale. Either because people will tire of the same thing each year, or the average gamer (not the hardcore) will tire of getting his ass kicked. Console online games may survive and grow only if the content expands genres. And I'm not talking about Massive Multiplayer Online RPGs. Simpler things like puzzle games or board games need to be made available. And "different" games, like the Sims, will expand the market beyond Madden-playing, basement-dwelling, arrested adolescents.

Mixed Media

Games, movies, TV shows. Separate and distinct entities. But not for long. Think of a Tivio-like machine that you can watch a show (let's say an action adventure show like "24 Hours" or "CSI"). After the show, you answer a couple survey questions, or log in and a game appears that continues where the show left off. It has multiple paths and multiple endings and lasts a couple of hours. Ads may appear while you are playing (hey, someone had to pay for this). Maybe the show's next episode will be determined by decisions that a majority of the players make. There was a movie ("Overdrawn at the Memory Bank"?) where there was an ongoing soap opera that incorporated people from the viewing audience (via cameras in the home) into the show as a visiting cousin or some such nonsense. It was a great honor to be selected. Could this be in future games ?

Or how about a wrestling game that you could download a highlights reel and match roster from the most recent show. New wrestler show up ? No problem. He's now in your game.

The "Imagic" ball grows fuzzy at this point. Time for Swami Fred to return to the land of the now…

(Fred has been playing games for over 25 years and actively collecting them for over 10. The 2500 + games that he has takes up most of his home office and Living room. He lives in Denver, PA with his understanding wife Jennie, his 7 year-old, button-loving son, Max and his 3 year old, 4th player, Lynzie. He has recently crossed over to the dark side. He bought an Xbox. He can be reached at fcw3@mail.ptd.net.)

Power of Joust

By Alan Hewston

With "Joust" on my mind and the theme music from "Back to the Future", my favorite all time movie trilogy (well until LOTR is complete), the "Power of Love", becoming the "Power of Joust" just came to me. I didn't force too many changes to the song, so it will sing (read) close enough to the original. but it is a unique song, with some tribute to Joust. I wish that I had more time for it, but this is good enough. Not like I'm gonna quit my day job and do rock parodies for classic video games.

Anyhow if you have it handy, play the Huey Lewis and the News song, heard on the BTF trilogy and also as a separate music video with Doc Brown as well is on the DVD set.

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The Power of Joust a glorious thing,
Make one knight fall, make another knight king.
Chase those Buzzards, attack from above,
More than flying – that's the power of Joust.

Tougher than diamonds, their eggs are green,
The strongest and hardest, are the shadow lord beings
Make a bad move then – make you lose your life.
Power of Joustin', keep you home at night.

Play Atari, Coleco or MAME,
Don't need no credit card to play this game.
It's rude if your partner can be cruel sometimes,

but he might just save your life,
that's the power of Joust – two-player Joust

First time you play it, it might make you mad,
Next time you play it, it might make you glad.
Watch out for Pterodactyl if he's around,
but the power of Joust makes the world go 'round

Play Atari, Apple II or MAME,
Don't need no credit card to play this game.
They say that all in jousting is fair – yeah you're in the air.
But watch that lava dude, when he get's a hold of you
That'll be the end right there.
That's the power of Joust – Williams brought us Joust
Won't ya play it?

Play Atari, TI-99 or MAME,
Don't need no credit card to play this game.
Tougher than diamonds, those eggs have appeal,
You won't feel it, 'til you feel,
Feel the power - feel the power of Joust.
That's the power - that's the power of Joust.

Feel the power of Joust!
Feel the power of Joust!
Feel the power of Joust!

Alan Hewston is a rocket scientist at NASA, so you won't see him singing "The Power of Joust" or the Pitfall song, "Livin La Vida Harry" professionally or even at the Philly Classics. But if you like this song, please contact him to tell him so at hewston95@stratos.net

Stardate 7800

by Adam King

Once again I serve up three more reviews for the system that could have been.

One thing Atari did right for their systems in the late 80s is to bring more modern arcade games to the 7800. They eventually realized people were not too interested in Asteroids anymore, plus the NES and Sega Master System were gaining ports of more advanced arcade hits. Atari tried to follow in kind, which resulted is some memorable titles for the ProSystem.

Thus, here are three arcade ports on the 7800. You can also find these games on the 2600, but I'll say right now that each of these titles are welcome improvements over their 2600 brethren, which are barely playable.

Commando (Atari, 1989)
An exciting game I played in the arcades, Commodore 64, and NES, this game provides non-stop shooting. You play a commando who's called in to destroy the enemy fortress. Your mission is simple: kill all the bad guys and reach the end of the level, while rescuing your men who have been captured. Your main weapon is a machine gun and grenades. You can also pick up a rapid-fire gun and a knife, as well as more grenades. You also have to locate the secret prisons that have POWs trapped in them.

This game has some very good graphics; the stages and characters do look like the arcade. They even included the intermission scenes between each level, complete with the soldier smoking. However, once again the weak 7800 sound rears its ugly head. The sound effects are decent, and the music is appropriate, but not the greatest. This is surprising since the game uses the POKEY sound chip, like Ballblazer. The game controls

very well, while the challenge is a little uneven. You shouldn't have too much trouble until you reach the strongholds at the end of each level, when enemy soldiers are pouring out of the doors. No doubt that Commando is a great arcade port, superior to the 2600 version, and even better than the NES cart.

Score: 8/10

Ikari Warriors (Atari, 1989)
This game is similar to Commando, but provides it's own challenges. You play as two warriors, Paul and Vince, who crash land in the jungles which are filled with enemy soldiers that swarm at you. One or two players can play simultaneously.

Once your plane crash lands, the fun begins. You're armed with a machine gun and grenades, both of which are limited, so you need to collect power ups to build up your ammo. You can also take control of tanks to plow your way through the soldiers. You cat shoot grenades and missiles, if you get the right power-up. However if you take too much damage or run out of gas, you'll be forced to evacuate the tank before it blows up, so keep getting gas. You also have to look out for other dangers, such as enemy tanks, gun turrets, and statues that shoot arrows at you.This game is enjoyable like the arcade version. The graphics are decent; the stages look good, but the characters looks weird. We have another problem with that weak 7800 sound. The sound effects are okay, but the game's attempt to play the arcade game's theme is just sad. The controls work well. However arcade players remember the cabinet had a paddle control that let you aim your gun while you're moving. You don't have that here, you can only shoot in the direction you move. Hands down Ikari Warriors is an excellent arcade port, plus two players can have fun mowin' down the bad guys.

Score: 9/10

Xenophobe (Atari, 1989)
It's pretty obvious this game was inspired by the movie Alien. If you're wondering, a xenophobe is someone who fears aliens. If you just happen to one, don't play this game, because it's filled with aliens which has taken over nine space stations. Your job is to explore each station and clean them out before the station explodes. You start with a normal gun, but you can find other weapons and bombs. You can also pick up several objects which are useless but do give you bonus points. Aliens are everywhere and you need to shoot them several times to frag them. You win each level by destroying all the aliens in the station. You have a limited time because if you take too long, the aliens will overrun the station and cause it to explode. If you want, you can also activate the self-destruct.

This game has some of the cool features but loses others. One of the big things about the arcade game was the split-screen feature, letting two or three players go their separate paths through the levels. Thankfully you'll find that here. Only two players can play, and you can't select your character; you're both stuck playing some bald dude. The graphics are good, though some of the creatures look goofy. There's no music, and the sounds are average at best. The controls are workable, though tricky to use at times. The game is not too challenging at first, but soon you reach bigger stations, and more aliens. If you enjoy a mix of exploration and shooting, then Xenophobe is for you. This game is great, perfect for two player fragfests.

Score: 8/10

So what we have here are three games which are much better than their NES cousins. It's a shame Atari didn't do this when they had the chance. Maybe they wouldn't have wound up as an afterthought.

Devastator II the Review

I spoke about the new Devastator II a few issues ago, but I had not actually tried it out.

Having spent a good amount of time with the original Devastator, I was quite familiar with the joystick and what it offered. But with all the changes that happened, I had to wonder if they really did add to the overall arcade experience or were just window dressing.

After spending an evening playing the Devastator II over at Jim Krych's house (my computer is a step from junk and MAME will no longer work on it, reason for the lack of MAME reviews), I came away with a new found appreciation for the controller. The new features do make the Devastator II a complete arcade experience.

The first big change was the inclusion of a button on the left side joystick. While this may seem like a trivial thing to some people, it makes a world of difference to playing games like Discs of Tron and Battlezone. Take if from a Discs of Tron fanatic (it is one of two games that I would like to own, along with Crazy Climber), this is huge! Finally, I can play the game much closer to the way the arcade played. Using the spinner to aim your shots and using the joystick to move your player and the button to throw the buttons is such a welcome addition to the old fumbling with buttons and wishing for a third arm.

Battlezone went from a trial to a joy! Before when you used the two joysticks to move your tank, you had to stop for a second while you took one hand off the joystick to shoot. But with the button on the controller, it makes it really easy to shoot and keep moving. It took one of the games that I tended to avoid on MAME and made it a favorite again. Before the Devastator II, I preferred the Atari 2600 Battlezone for this very reason.

This also holds true for Krull, Wild Western and Tron, where the inclusion of the joystick button makes all the difference. You really have to try it to see what a difference it makes.

Next to test were the trackball games. While the Devastator sported a trackball, the new Devastator II features a larger trackball. And this larger trackball does help as it gives you more surface for which to spin it. I did the usual rounds with Centipede, Missile Command and Crystal Castles and all three responded wonderfully. One nice thing to report is that the jerkiness that happened on the original Devastator when you moved your character in Centipede to quickly seems to be gone. Now you get a nice smooth movement and it greatly improves the game.

Another big improvement is the newly designed spinner. Jim found a way to nearly eliminate the friction from the spinner which results in better movement and no more periodic maintenance for the spinner, like you will have to do on other spinners (granted the maintenance is just relubricating the spinner, but it does require opening up your controller). The spinner now can turn for up to 25 seconds on one good turn of the spinner. While this does not add to the game (except for really lazy people who want to just turn it once in awhile on Tempest and just hold down the fire button), it does make the control very smooth and very precise. Tempest plays like a breeze and Arkanoid, a game that was all but unplayable with a keyboard, is now back at the top of the charts! Other games like Warlords and Super Breakout are also aided by this (of course to have a great game of Warlords, you would need four Devastator IIs, a very large room and a very big monitor).

Next I had to try out the new side pinball buttons. This was my request for Jim. Being a pinball fanatic, I thought this small addition would improve the game greatly. Taking out the Microsoft Pinball collection, I was soon feeling like I was in an arcade as I played one of my favorite pinball games of all time, Haunted House! While this may seem trivial to some people, when I consider an arcade controller, I want to emulate the entire arcade and pinball is a very big part of the arcade experience.

The biggest complaint with the Devastator was the lack of buttons. With only four buttons per joystick, people complained about not being able to play the newer fighting games. Jim took this criticism serious and the first improvement on the new version was the addition of two buttons per joystick. This small addition has greatly increased the library of games that can be emulated accurately. And with the popularity of Street Fighter II and Mortal Kombat, it was a necessary addition. And it also helps with Defender, a game that we forgot how much a large selection of buttons helped.

Last, I had to try out the two joystick games. While the original Devastator did well in the two joystick department, would the inclusion of the button affect it at all? I am happy to say it does not. It still plays two player games like a champ! I set a new high score on Crazy Climber 2 and it did well with the original Crazy Climber, Robotron and even Munch Mobile. About the only complaint with the joysticks is that with Jim's new housing, which is much thicker and sturdier than the predecessor, it made the joysticks seem a bit short. While most people will not have problems with it, I found it a little lacking for my large hands. I was able to get used to it without a problem, but I found that I had to limit my gameplaying and take rests as it would tire my hands more quickly than with my old V-Stick.

All the changes were not limited to just the addition of new controllers. The whole cosmetic look of the controller has been updated. The first thing you will notice is that it is now heavier and sturdier. With a thicker and stronger casing, the Devastator II can handle all the abuse you throw at it. It is one tough controller. And there is now a new logo which looks much nicer and more professional than the previous one. Even the sticker on the back looks better. The whole thing just is much more appealing to the eye. Granted it is still a huge stick and will take a very large desk to support it. It also is the only controller to come with a handle on the back, something you will greatly appreciate when you decide to move it or take it to a friend's house.

Most of you would think all these additions would boost the cost of the joystick up and that would seem logical. You are getting more buttons, a better spinner, a larger trackball and a sturdier controller. But due to the success of the first controller and some special purchases, Jim has not only given you a better controller, but has also dropped the price. It dropped from the original price of $450.00 down to $395.00! While this may seem a bit steep to some people, especially considering some rival sticks sell for half that, you must look at all you get. The rival controllers that sell for under $200.00 do not come with a trackball or spinner. They are not as sturdy and not made as solid as the Devastator II. I am not saying they are not great joysticks, but if you want the complete arcade experience and a joystick that you could make a family heirloom, then the Devastator II is the one to choose. You may pay more, but you get more. So next time you are fumbling with your keyboard and wondering why your arcade experience is feeling weak, you may want to start considering a Devastator II, because it really does make a world of difference.

The TI 99/4A
Farewell – For Now

by Jim Krych

Life has imitated art for me.

In the story “From Neptune to Earth”, my character Jon Kryton gets called up to serve in the Joint Military Forces, JMF. On the 30th of this month, I will no longer be in the Ohio Army National Guard. I will be in the U.S. Army.

My Battalion has been activated for a period of up to 365 days. We are tasked for security missions at various air bases around Ohio. Fortunately, my platoon will be an hour and a half from where I live. I have been on active duty before, with the U.S. Coast Guard, and was on active duty during the Desert Storm period.

I have been blessed with many interesting missions for the Ohio Army National Guard; San Diego, Southern Ohio Floods, and now with this activation. Duty calls, and I must go. Paperwork is nearly completed, and things are being finalized here.

One is that CCAG 2003 is obviously cancelled. We will be looking for a better place and perhaps CCAG 2004 will happen. But to do this, we need the cooperation of the many computer groups in the Cleveland Ohio area. And for some, that means working with people of “other” computers. I pray that humility will win over useless pride in this matter.

The other is that longtime friend Fred Horvat is taking over the production of Devastator II orders. I have known Fred for nearly six years, and he has been taught how to make the

Devastator II. Actually, there really isn't much since the boxes and top panels are pre-made for us. Fred's email is: fmh@netzero.net

Also, I will be coming home every once and a while (especially once we are settled in at the duty station) and I will help Fred out with the Devastator II orders. My wife Lori's is finished and it is such a blast to play the arcade games on! We may even use the original Devastator prototype at my duty station for off-hours arcade entertainment!

The best to you all, in this coming year! My prayers and well wishes!

And oh by the way Don, JUST BUILD IT!!!!! I am with you 100% in this!

"Hi, my name is Jim W. Krych. I am a 33 year-old electronics technician. I am also a 14-year veteran of both the USCG, active, and the Ohio Army National Guard, reserve with B Co. 112th engineers. I can be reached at: jwkrych@adelphia.net or jwkrych@n2net.net I have a three year-old son, Treyton, and he is the CEO of Treyonics! I have also been blessed with a beautiful wife her name is Lori!!! I have founded my own business and, of course, I named the company after my son Treyton!

And now, Treyonics is proud to present the Treyonics Home Controller System, model 9908(RF/LF)!!!

Better known as the …

Letters to the Editor

What has become one of the favorite columns in the newsletter, features even more classic game talk and zaniness. Once again, we offer answers to classic game questions or ask for an answer. We give you more Letters to the Editor!

What are the hostages saying? Is it, "Help Me!" or is it "Air Base"?

My gut instinct tells me they are saying Help Me!, but I am not 100% sure. Anyone know for sure the answer?

Know which game has this enemy in it?

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 #####
 #   #
##### #
#   # #
# # ###
#   #
#####
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It was a shooter I think.

It looks like one of the many enemies from Xevious to me. Anyone have a better answer?

Do you find yourself crying at night since there are no more cartridge games being made? I know that I find myself crying from time to time.

Cheer up little buckaroo, there are still Gameboy Advance games and they are carts. While I do miss the durability of carts and how they are better for kids (peanut butter and CDs do not mix), I do enjoy the immense amount of stuff that they can put on a CD and

especially a DVD. I like real music as opposed to synthesized music. I like huge levels and DVD extras. But I do miss carts ...sniff, sniff. Hope you are happy now that you made me all weepy.

I think the Activision Anthology is awesome but it made me want more. What would you like to see as the next anthology?

My dream compilation would be a multi DVD set that featured all the games that MAME has emulated and each one be complete, working correctly and be set for the controls of the unit. It would also have side art of all the games, pictures of marquees, information about it and more. Granted the legal work this would take alone makes it impossible, but it is a nice dream.

On a serious note, I would like to see a complete Intellivision emulation for the PS2 and other systems. It would have all the Mattel released games including the INTV games. I would love to see them release all three of the Dungeons and Dragons games under the Minotaur name they used on the PC version. I would also like to see bonuses like versions of the games with updated graphics, ability to play one or two player on all the games (including sports games), interviews, box art, overlay art and a bunch of extras. I would also like to see the computer and voice games be part of it as well as any prototypes and rarities. It would be nice to see some of the third part games as well, but that may be tough to pull off.