

Retrogaming Times Monthly

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Press Fire to Start

by Adam King

Weclome to another spine-tingling edition of Retrogaming Times Monthly. The fall season has arrived, and with that comes cooler temperatures, falling leaves, and several holidays. This issue has a darker feel to it beacuse this is the October issue, and that means Halloween is nearby. Thus this months features several tricks and treats that we hope you enjoy.

8-Bit Frightmares

by Adam King

Believe it or not, Halloween and videogames go hand-in-hand. Over the years there have been many horro-themed titles to get you into the Halloween spirit. Even the NES and Sega systems have their share of spooky software. Here is a look at some of the ghoulish games you can find for both systems.

NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM

Castlevania (1987 Konami)

For course I have to mention the Castlevania series. The legendary saga began with this classic cartridge. You play as Simon Belmont, the latest in a long line of vampire hunters. The evil vampire Count Dracula has risen after 100 years, and began to terrorize Transylvania with his army of monster. Your mission is to go through the Count's castle and put an end to Dracula's evil. Castlevania consists of 18 levels, six main areas with three stages each. And each one is filled with just about every monster imaginable. Bats, zombies, skeletons, and many more await to stop Simon. Luckily Simon is armed with his trademark mystic whip, and can upgrade it twice, to a chain whip and a long chain whip. Simon can also pick up special weapons to use, including an axe, boomerang, dagger, and fire bombs (holy water). You need hearts to use special weapons, so stock up. Each level is timed, and at the end of every third stage, Simon must battle a boss monster to keep going, such as Medusa, the Frankenstein Monster, and the Grim Reaper. Of course the Count is the baddest monster of all, and he waits for you at the end of the game.

The first Castlevania may not have all the features of future titles in the series, but it still manages to be a fun and enjoyable trek. The graphics haven't aged well; the backgrounds do fit the mood but are also dull in spots. The characters do have a decent look. That great Castlevania music makes its debut here. The tunes are still great to listen to and set the atmosphere well. The controls are okay but do have some faults. You can't control your jump in mid-air, meaning you can't change direction if you're flying into an obstacle. As far as challenge goes, this game starts off easy but gets difficult fast. There are many ways for the enemies to cause many cheap hits and deaths, such as knocking you into a pit. Plus in the later stages getting hit once takes four life bars, meaning you die if you're hit four times. These gripes aside, Castlevania is a true classic. It still provides plenty of monster-whipping action, and does a great job setting the precedent for the rest of the series. The life hasn't gone out of this game yet.

Castlevania II: Simon's Quest (1988 Konami)

The next chapter in the Castlevania story. In the original game, Simon Belmont was successful in defeating the evil Count Dracula. However, since then, he's been in constant pain, especially at night. He soon finds out that he's under Dracula's curse. In order to break the curse, Simon must find the five remains of Dracula, which are scattered across Transylvania, and burn them to destroy the vampire once and for all. Unlike the first (and third) games, Simon's Quest is an adventure game with some RPG elements. Simon must travel through Transylvania to find five mansions, each one hold one of Dracula's body parts. As he makes his way to each mansion various enemies will come toward you for a fight. Simon has his trusty whip, and must fight the monster to obtains hearts, which he needs to buy equipment and use special weapons. There's no candles to whip here; you have to find or buy extra weapons. Defeating enemies will also give you experience points to raise your levels, but experience isn't really important so don't worry to much about it. Simon needs to visit many towns to buy equipment and get clues. If your life is low, you can visit a church to refill your energy. One thing to remember is to watch the time of day (on the subscreen). There's a day cycle and a night cycle. When 6pm rolls around, night falls on Transylvania, and things change. The townspeople go into hiding, you can't visit shops, and the enemies become twice as strong (but they're worth twice as many hearts). When you finally reach one of the mansions, the object is to find the Dracula body part within. You need to purchase a stake from a hooded figure and use it on the orb at the end of the mansion to get the body part. Once you have all five body parts and the Cross, you need to go to the Count's castle and burn the body parts. This'll bring Dracula back from the dead, giving you a chance to destroy him for good.

Simon's Quest may be different from other Castlevania games but it's still a good choice. The graphics are slightly above average. The background aren't great, plus everything looks the same, except for different colors. All the towns look almost exactly alike, all the forests, and so on. On the other hand, this game has excellent music, just like the rest of the series. The musical themes really set the mood well. The controls are decent, but Simon still can't control his jump in mid-air. The main problem I see is the game is too easy to beat. The main challenge is figuring out the puzzles and where to go next. The enemies are not too tough to handle and the action hardly gets intense. There are also three main bosses in the game (Vampira, the Grim Reaper, and Dracula himself), but they're also very easy to topple if you know how. You also have unlimited continues, and when you die you start from the same spot you were at. However it's still fun to kill monsters and explore the game world. Plus there's three different endings depending on how fast you finish the game, challenging you to go a little quicker each time you play. This is a long adventure, so you get passwords to save your progress. Simon's Quest may not be the best Castlevania game, but it's still worthy of the name.

Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse

The third (and best) game in the series takes place 100 years before the original Castlevania. The evil Count Dracula is terrorizing the people of Europe with his army of monsters. You are Simon Belmont's ancestor, Trevor Belmont, and you must face off against the evil count. For the third title, the game play returned to the original formula instead of the RPG like play of Simon's Quest. As you make your way through the 17 levels, you must fight monsters such as skeletons, zombies, mud men, and more. Your basic weapon is a mystic whip, which can be upgraded twice, and you also get the Castlevania I special weapons, including axes, daggers, and so on. Once again you can whip candles to get weapons and hearts to use the special items. This game is not totally linear, since at certain points, the path forks, promoting Trevor to choose a path. When you start Trevor is alone, but he can meet up with one of three spirits which become helpers throughout the game: Grant DaNasty, the pirate captain who can climb walls; Sypha Belnades, the wizard who can cast several powerful spells; and Alucard, Dracula's rebellious son who can become a bat and fly, plus uses a ball of destruction. Trevor can shapeshift into his helper at any time, but they share the same life bar. Many bosses stand in your way, while Dracula awaits your arrival in his castle.

This game tops the others two titles hands down. The graphics are much cleaner than the original, with some good effects here and there, though some stages (such as the first level) are still blocky. The sounds are unchanged, but the excellent Castlevania music is still present, once again setting the mood. Controlling Trevor and his helpers is a bit tricky, since you still can't change direction in midair, but the controls work good overall. While this game is not as frustrating as the other two, it still gets tough fast, especially in the later level, where one hits clips off four bars of your life meter. The different paths and spirit helpers provide high replayability, with four different endings, and you still get passwords to mark your progress. This game provides plenty of exciting monster-killing action. Overall THE best of the three Castlevania NES games and one of the top NES games of all time.

Ghosts 'N' Goblins (1986 Capcom)

This title is a port of the arcade classic. You play as Sir Arthur, who's out to save his princess from the demon leader, Lucifer. But that means fighting your way through seven nightmareish levels fill with creatures of all shapes and sizes, and you only have a certain amount of time to get to the end of each stage. You start out with a spear as your weapon, but you can find other weapons, such as an Ax, Fire, and the Cross, which you need to finish the game. As you travel you can shoots orange pods for weapons and bonus points. However, you can only take two hits per life. The first hit knocks off your armor, leaving you in your underwear(!), and the second hit kills you. At the end of each level you

need to fight one or two boss monsters to get the key to the next stage. In the last level you face Lucifer, but you can only kill him with the Cross.

As one of Capcom's earlier titles, Ghosts 'N' Goblins is a good port of the arcade version. The graphics are very small and primitive, and the backgrounds are above average. The sounds are high pitched and get annoying after a while. Plus the music is decent but repeats too much. The biggest thing this game is famous for is that the game is EXTREMELY difficult. Enemies swarm you at all times, making it hard not to get hit, and only two hits kill you. Also, odds are when you reach the end, you won't have the Cross, so you have to go through the game TWICE to beat it. However, the game is compelling, daring you to try again. At least the game is generous with continues; you have unlimited retries, plus if you reach the midpoint of each stage, you begin from there when you continue. G'n'G may be frustratingly hard, but it's very enjoyable at the same time.

SEGA MASTER SYSTEM

[Ghost House \(1987 Sega\)](#)

Now this game is just sad. Originally released as a Sega Card, you play the role of Mick, a youngster who has just inherited a cache of treasure. However the treasure is hidden in Dracula's mansion. So you have to find it by battling the ghoulies inside. You have to travel throughout the mansion searching for keys and passageways leading to the treasure. You fight the ghosts and monsters by simply punching them. You also have to defeat five Draculas to get the jewels.

It's games like these that give the Master System a bad name. The graphics are average, but the characters look goofy and stupid. Forget about the sounds; they're just as bad as the graphics. The game gets boring fast, and it seems unfair at times. There are places where you fall through the floor for no reason. Plus there's no continues, so if you lose you have to start over (as if you wanted to). Avoid this like the Boogeyman.

[Ghouls 'N' Ghosts \(1991 Sega\)](#)

This is a port of the arcade and Genesis title, which was a sequel to Ghosts 'N' Goblins. Once again Sir Arthur is on a princess-saving mission. This time his nemesis is the evil Prince of Darkness, Loki. Arthur's mission covers five treacherous levels, each with two stages filled with different enemies. Arthur's main weapon is his spear and he can get better weapons to fight with. Arthur can even summon magic spells to help him out. As he travels along he'll come to several treasure chests lying on the ground. Arthur can open these, and they may contain an entrance to a treasure room. There you can get upgrade your armor and weapons or refill your magic and life. However chests may contain magicians who try to turn you into an old man or a duck! If Arthur reaches the end of the second level of each area, he has to battle a boss to get the key to the next level. However Arthur can only take two hits initially; the first hit will take his armor, leaving Arthur in his boxers, and the second will cost him his life. Can Arthur get to the end and bring down Loki?

Toward the end of its life in the US, the Master System got some great arcade ports, and this is one of them. The graphics are excellent, very close to the original, and they set the stage nicely. The music is not the best but it's still okay. Once again the game is extremely difficult, and at times it may seem impossible. Not to mention that just like every other version, you have to play through the whole game twice to really beat it. YOU still get unlimited continues to help you along. However despite the difficulty the gameplay is fun and addictive. If you enjoyed the arcade and Genesis originals, you'll find the Sega version to be an excellent port.

[Vampire/Master of Darkness \(1993 Sega\)](#)

This game isn't Castlevania, but it's darn close. This title takes place in London during the 19th Century, and you play the role of Dr. Ferdinand Social, a psychologist and occult buff. Social has come to London seeking the Prince of Darkness himself, Count Dracula, who's responsible for several murders in the area, plus the Count has abducted Social's friend. The Doctor's quest spans five areas of London: the Thames River, the House of Wax, a graveyard, a laboratory, and the Count's Castle, each with three areas each. As you travel many different monsters will attack you, including bats, zombies, ghosts and more. However Social can use different weapons like swords, stakes, axes and more. Social can also fight with shooting weapons such as guns and bombs. The floating white masks in each level contain these and other power-ups. Social has a limited time to finish each stage. At the end of every third section Social must defeat a boss to continue his quest. Even if Social makes it to the end, he must still overcome Dracula himself to save his friend.

Those of you looking for a great Castlevania-like game on the Sega will not be disappointed. The graphics are excellent, with some great scenery and nice animated characters. The music also helps with the atmosphere and never gets old. The sound effects are just okay and not great. The controls work well, and any Castlevania master will have no trouble here. Going up and down stairs can be a problem, but it's not too bad. The game gets challenging quickly, but not too frustrating. However if you die you start back at the beginning of each level, and if you lose all your lives you have to resume from Round 1 of each stage! Despite the unfair starting points, Vampire is a great title for all Sega players. It's also another great cart Master System fans in the US missed out on.

NOTE: This game, not released in the US but released in Europe, was released under two names, Vampire and Master of Darkness, but are both the same game.



Collecting in Australia - GOING TO THE ARCADES



by [Tonks](#)

One of the great thrills while growing up was going to the Video Game Arcade with a few friends. There was nothing greater than spending a whole months pocket money on favourite games such as Galaxian, Galaga, Bosconian, Bump and Jump, Gyruss and Moon Patrol, just to name a few.

I grew up in a city called Ballarat. We had two main arcades. The bowling alley also had a fairly large selection of games. Almost every weekend a few friends and I would spend just about the whole afternoon at one of the arcades. My favourite arcade was an independent arcade that was directly across the road from the Cinema. They had a great selection of games as well as a few 8-ball tables. A perfect day was going to movies to see the latest block-buster, followed by a few hours playing our favourite games.

In Australia during the early 80's, most games cost 20 cents to play. Doesn't sound like much now does it? But at the time I only earned \$1 a week pocket money, so 20 cents was in actual fact a lot of money. So I had to come up with some alternative ways to get money. Coincidentally at the time, soft drink (soda pop) bottles could be returned to the local milk bar and you would receive 20 cents for each bottle. Near my home was a popular caravan park where lots of tourists would stay. Before riding our bikes to the arcade, we would make a detour to the caravan park, collect as many bottles as we could carry, and collect the 20 cents on each bottle. This would give us plenty of money to play all afternoon.

Arcade games in my home town rarely came in their dedicated cabinets. Both of our arcades had rows of generic cabinets where just the game board would be changed. Some games had their own marquee, while many just had "Latest Game" printed. Some exceptions to this was Battlezone, Gauntlet and some driving games such as Turbo and Outrun.

We had a certain etiquette in our arcades. The main one was how to reserve your turn at a particular game. The most popular games would always attract a large queue of people waiting to have their go. No one wanted to stand in line. Everyone wanted to crowd around the cabinet to watch the person playing, hoping you could pick up some tips or just watch a master at work. So to reserve your turn you would simply place a 20 cent coin on the cabinet. For some reason this always worked. Sometimes there could be six or seven coins lined up on the cabinet, but somehow everyone knew whose coin belonged to who and this ensured everyone got a go in a nice orderly fashion. Also the coins were never (or at least very rarely) stolen. You could even place your coin on the cabinet, go and play some other game and come back and find your coin still there in the same position. I remember one day someone trying to have a second go at Galaga when other gamers had already reserved their go. Well, world war 3 nearly broke out and the perpetrator was banned from the arcade for a week.

Another place to go and play games was the local take away. In my home town the most popular take away was fish and chips and there were many fish and chip shops that had a few arcade machines. The fish and chip shop closest to my house had two machines, and the place was always full of teenagers playing the games. At one stage the shop had Gyruss and Bomb Jack, two of my favourites. I spent hours in there eating potato cakes and dim-sims and desperately trying to get to Earth. Another take away shop with a few arcade machines was just down the road from my high school. Often a few of us would ride our bikes down to the take away at lunch time and end up spending the rest of the afternoon there. That was until the school found out and asked the shop owner to ring the school if there were any students there after lunch hours.

But for any hard-core arcade fan, Melbourne was the place to go. Melbourne is the second largest city in Australia. The first time I remember visiting a video-game arcade in Melbourne I was totally blown away. It seemed like every video game known to man was in these monstrous arcades. And just about everyone of them was in its own dedicated cabinet. I remember one particular arcade in the Melbourne city centre. It was three stories of all the latest and greatest arcade machines. It was at this particular arcade that I saw Dragon's Lair for the very first time. A huge crowd of people were bunched around the machine. I fought my way to the front of the crowd and when I saw that game in action my jaw just about hit the floor. A few friends and I saved and saved and would try to make a couple of trips to Melbourne on the train during school holidays, just to check out these awesome arcades. It is kind of sad to go to Melbourne these days and find the really good arcades either gone or filled with ticket machines and dancing games.

Arcades seem to be disappearing here in Australia. My home town now has no arcade and very few machines can be found anywhere. The town I live in now only has a few machines at the bowling alley and the mini-golf centre, and they are all older machines such as Daytona and Street Fighter 2. Arcades certainly are not like they were during the 1980's. Perhaps people would rather stay home

with their X-Box or PC. I suppose those of us who were teenagers in the 1980's can just be grateful for the memories we have of our favourite arcades.

Video Game Costumes R Us

by Alan Hewston

Video game costumes. You've seen them at the video game shows, and even here in this magazine. Most of them are made from scratch, as there is not much of a market for them nowadays -whereas 20 years ago kids would wear a Pac Man costume for Halloween and everyone knew what they were.

We'd like to compile some pictures of such costumes for our next issue. RTM06 should go online right around Halloween, or a day afterwards. So if you have a digital picture of you and/or your friends and family dressed up in any video game costume(s), we'll post them here. They can be old costumes from years ago or home made creations.

Please send us a digital picture, include the name or names (or alias) of everyone in the photo, plus include the name of the video game, the character's name or names of every costume. If you get them to us by the 15th, we should have them in next month. Any latecomers we'll still put them in the issue after that. Sorry, not a contest, just for fun.

Please send any photos to: hewston95REMOVE@THISstratos.net

Retrogaming Commercial Vault

by Adam King

For this Halloween-themed issue, I though I'd do a commercial with a Halloween-like setting. Thus this month I have the commercial for the Atari 2600 title Tutankham, by Parker Brothers, which is a port of the arcade game.

In this spot two explorers are searching an Egyptian tomb when they come upon a sleeping mummy (King Tut) and an Atari system playing Tutankham. So they decide to take a moment and enjoy the game without asking King Tut, who presumably owns the game. They continue on, not noticing the mummy waking up. The mummy asks if he can play, and he enjoys the system as the explorers try to escape, only to get sealed in.

PICTURES:



"Hey, Tut left his Atari on."



"I'm sure he won't mind if we play "Say what?!" it."



"Shouldn't we be worrying about the sleeping mummy?"



King Tut always has "next".

The moral of this story: ALWAYS ask King Tut to play his games.

Now for an announcement, On January 1, 2005, I'm going to stop selling the Commercial Vault CD. So If you still want one, e-mail me at Hal_3000@rocketmail.com. Hurry because once January 2nd rolls around, it's gone.

Don't forget you can find Nintendo commercials at my website, NES Times, which can found at come.to/nestimes.

•Get ready classicgamers, because Atari Inc. (the current Atari) has announced two big products that reach back into their massive classicgaming library, both of which bring back some classic Atari action. First up is the Atari Flashback, a plug-and-play system that resembles a 7800 ProSystem. The unit comes with two 7800-style controllers and has 20 games built-in. You simply hook it up to the TV and start playing. The system does require a power supply instead of batteries.

The 20 games feature five 7800 titles and 15 2600 games. The 7800 games are: Asteroids, Centipede, Desert Falcon, Food Fight, and Planet Smashers.

The 2600 games are: Adventure, Air-Sea Battle, Breakout, Canyon Bomber, Crystal Castles, Gravitar, Haunted House, Millipede, Sky Diver, Solaris, Sprintmaster, Warlords, Yar's Revenge, and the unreleased Saboteur.

The systems is set to be released this fall and will go for \$45.

Credit: Good Deal Games (<http://www.gooddealgames.com/>)

•If that wasn't enough, Atari is also going to release a classic gaming compilation called Atari Anthology for the PlayStation 2 and XBox. This will be the largest game collection ever, because the disc will contain 85 titles! You'll get 18 arcade classics and 67 Atari 2600 favorites. If that's not enough, the disc will also feature new challenge modes such as Time Challenges, Trippy Mode and Double Speed.

The 18 Arcade games are: Asteroids, AsteroidsDeluxe, Battlezone, Black Widow, Centipede, Crystal Castles, Gravitar, Liberator, Lunar Lander, Major Havoc, Millipede, Missile Command, Pong, Red Baron, Super Breakout, Space Duel, Tempest, and Warlords.

The 67 Atari 2600 games are: 3D Tic-Tac-Toe, A Game of Concentration, Adventure, Air-Sea Battle, Asteroids, Basic Programming, Battlezone, Blackjack, Bowling, Breakout, Canyon Bomber, Casino, Centipede, Circus Atari, Codebreaker, Combat, Crystal Castles, Demons to Diamonds, Desert Falcon, Dodge 'Em, Double Dunk, Flag Capture, Football, Fun With Numbers, Golf, Gravitar, Haunted House, Home Run, Human Cannonball, Math Gran Prix, Maze Craze, Millipede, Miniature Golf, Missile Command, Night Driver, Off the Wall, Outlaw, Quadrun, Radar Lock, RealsportsBaseball, Realsports Football, Realsports Tennis, RealsportsVolleyball, Sky Diver, Slot Machine, Slot Racers, Space War, Sprintmaster, Star Raiders, Star Ship, Stellar Track, Street Racer, Steeplechase, Submarine Commander, Super Baseball, Super Breakout, Super Football, Surround, Swordquest: Earthworld, Swordquest: Fireworld, Swordquest: Waterworld, Video Checkers, Video Chess, Video Olympics, Video Pinball, Warlords and Yars' Revenge.

So basically you get almost the entire Atari catalog, including some rare titles, on one disc. The best part is this collection will retail for only \$19.95, so this could be a must-buy for all Atari fans. The collection is scheduled to be released this November.

Credit: GamerFeed (gamerfeed.com)

You can find more information on both products by visiting the Atari website at <http://www.atari.com/>.

The Many Faces of . . . Galaxian

by Alan Hewston

This review brought to you by the rather unofficial home page of Galaxian found at: www.galaxian.dds.nl/index.html.

Did you know that Galaxian was the very first color (or rather multi-colored) video game ever? Being similar to "Space Invaders" but still adding some new twists probably helped to give this game some instant fans. Bally-Midway capitalized on the game's early success and quickly mass produced and distributed these machines everywhere. Some feel that the timing was just right to make it a hit as there was not much competition out there at the time. Still, it finished number 2 in sales for '79, trailing "Asteroids", yet ahead of "Missile Command".

This game has been given the moniker by some as the worst "highly successful" coin-op game of all time. I disagree and would much rather play Galaxian than either "Space Invaders", "Pong", "Asteroids" or "Missile Command". Granted it was a rip-off to Space Invaders. But it is quite an upgrade to a game that only had enemies moving L/R in formation dropping bombs on you. There is considerably more gameplay and action in Galaxian and let's not forget that this "death-from-above" experience is much more personal. These invaders aren't just attacking the Earth or a planet or some ground defenses. The Galaxians are attacking YOU! They have different and varied attack patterns and drop down a spread of bombs, but their primary and most successful means to get you is to ram you - the kamikaze. Their number of attackers, bombs dropped and fierceness increases gradually for

many waves. Their attack and defense both get enhanced by the ever increasing horizontal motion of their descent pattern. They sweep further left/right across the screen eventually moving off the screen and then back to confuse you - and make them nearly impossible to hit. You must track multiple bogies and always have an escape route. You desire to blast them away rapidly, but alas, like Space Invaders, you have to play defensively as you are only given one shot at a time - until it hits the enemy or clears the screen.

Arcade: 1979, by Namco, distributed by Bally-Midway in the US.

Home systems: unless noted, all by Atari/Atarisoft licensed from Namco-America

- Apple II (84, unknown programmer)
- Atari 2600 (83, GCC/Atari, unknown programmer)
- Atari 5200 (82, Joe Tung)
- Atari 8 bit (82, Dave Getreu)
- Bally Professional Arcade (81, Bally, unknown programmer)
- Commodore 64 (84, Bill Bogenreif)
- Colecovision (83, James Eisenstein)
- Vic 20 (84, Alan Pavlish? and Bill Bogenreif who's name is in the source code)
- Sinclair Spectrum (84, David Aubrey Jones)
- MSX (1984 Namcot, unknown programmer)



Here is the usual collage of bad guys.

Rumor Mill: TI-99 (Sega) & Intellivision (Atarisoft) were announced but never released

Arcade Sequels: Galaga, Gaplus, Galaga '88, Galaxian 3, Attack of the Zolgear

Home Version Similarities: Except those in <> all home versions have: a choice of starting at the basic level, or as high as level (wave) 9; the start level and wave numbers coincide <Atari 8 bit & 5200 (have game variation numbers & wave numbers - not the same)>; the number of flags displayed or a number indicates the wave number; there are several waves of increased difficulty beyond wave 9; the game uses a starry backdrop <C64, Vic 20, 2600> and some of which even move or twinkle; your ship is larger than the Galaxians (making it a bigger target) and when visible atop your ship - the next shot is ready to go <Vic 20, Bally not visible>, and if a Galaxian hits this shot (straight on) you are not destroyed <CV, C64, Bally, C64, 2600 you are destroyed>; every wave of Galaxians has the exact same formation and numbers; most versions number between 35 and 46 (arcade) Galaxians <Bally (only 18), Vic (only 30)>; the scoring of enemies is identical to the arcade <Bally scores are exactly 10%>; enemies in convoy formation are worth more points ascending in rank, 30, 40, 50 & then 60 for the Flagship; ranks of Galaxians may have a different look or color pattern, most are multi-colored, and some take on different appearances when they are attacking; enemies in formation move all the way to the left, then all the way to the right edge, and only fire when they make an attack run - descending downward; initially dropping 1 or 2 bombs, but eventually up to 3 bombs, however, the Flagship and in some cases the final Galaxian can drop up to 7 <all versions different>; several can attack at the same time but typically none are in formation, other than the Flagship which may have 1 or 2 escorts remain in formation for the entire attack run; all enemies are worth twice their point value when they are chargers (descending); the Galaxian Flagship is worth even more if escorted and still more if there are 2 escorts, and yet more (up to max 800) if the escort(s) are shot down first; the Flagship value is displayed somewhere on screen <2600>; when hit for the max points, the Flagship lets out a unique cry/chirp <Vic 20, Bally, C64, AP2> - which is the sound you most want to hear, as you just scored the maximum, plus afterwards all Galaxians cease to attack for 5 to 12 seconds - as if mourning their loss; Flagships only make 2 passes and then head off to join the next wave <AP2, Vic 20, C64, 2600, 5200, Atari 8 bit - in all these versions, they continue to attack until destroyed>; there are either 2 or 3 Flagships per wave, plus up to 5 total on those versions where they escaped in the prior wave; a maximum of about 7 enemies can attack simultaneously <Bally (only 5), C64 (up to 9!)>; the basic attack pattern appears to be a straight or slightly sloped line, but the path will curve and continue to widen left/right (wave after wave) so that its pattern resembles a letter "C" (banks out and back) or an "S" (banks out and back and away, and back) <C64>; likewise the "C" and "S" paths can be symmetrically flipped; ultimately, these patterns will take some Galaxians off the screen completely, and some will actually come back <only 2600 & CV do this correctly> making avoiding them much more difficult; you must remain flexible in your defense and take note that the patterns can be mixed so that every attacker has a different style, symmetry, or slope (and combinations) in their patterns; when hit, there is a cool explosion, and of course a bigger, multi-colored explosion when you are hit; any Galaxian not destroyed in their attack run will go past you (below the bottom of the screen) or goes off the L/R edge of the screen and then re-emerge from the top and settles back into its proper rank; when there is only one, or two Galaxians remaining, they will not return to formation but will keep dropping continuously, sometimes having improved attack and defense skills - taunting you and dancing about; only one extra life can be earned, which is typically between 5K and 10K points <C64 & Bally (unsure)>; there are many sounds in the game, the ever present background sound - revving & pulsating <C64, Bally>, and unique sounds for your shots being fired, their bombs dropping and any

hits and explosions <C64 & Vic 20 (most of these sounds are the same)>; the most distinct/memorable sound from Galaxian is when they scream out with excitement during their attack run. Finally, when you need a break there is a pause on most versions <2600, Bally, Vic 20>.

MASCOT

Namco made the Galaxian Flagship their unofficial mascot, giving it cameo appearances in these games and maybe more: Galaga (round 5 and up, once per round red alien splits into 2, then 3 flagships); Gorf (as the Flagship of the Galaxian stage); Pac-Man (the bonus on 9th and 10th screens); Dig Dug (Flagship as a bonus veggie in rounds 16 & 17); Super Pac-Man (all edible items were flagships one round); Pac & Pal (Galaxian flagship bonus gives you super shout - stun power); Pac-Land (early bonus in round 1); Pacmania (3-D Flagship in the maze); Space Zap (all enemies you shoot look like Galaxian Flagships).

Disqualified: Sinclair Spectrum and MSX

DQ only because I do not have these systems. I don't know much about the MSX, but the Spectrum fans really enjoy Galaxian, and consider it to be very complete and matching the arcade in gameplay. The sounds are a bit lackluster and the Galaxians are mono colored, but the detail is OK and the animation and attack patterns are spot on.

Have Nots: Bally Astrocade (38)

My first reaction was where is the full Galaxian fleet? They are so close to the ground and so large. This makes them so much better at kamikaze attacks - so you'd better be quick to defend or escape every attack; reactionary games are not nearly as fun as those that let you sit back and plan your shots and where your escape route is. This version is hard right off the bat, and not easy to have a marathon game. The Gameplay is pretty good (7), albeit a bit simplified & accelerated. One glitch is that the Flagship can be worth the max value even if you missed it on the first pass. Some other differences are that some Galaxians will join together and make a formation, and the final Galaxian will put on a quite a defensive show - even looping. Despite this different and hyperactive gameplay speed, the Addictiveness is still fun to play (7), but then it gets really hard. About the sixth wave, they really start packing in the ammo. Once they decide to drop bombs, they unload a dozen per second and litter the playfield with a wake that is nearly impossible to slip past. Factor in that they now move faster L/R than you do and it's pretty much kill or be killed. No running away, unless you were on the other side of the screen to begin with. Seeing them squeeze out a tightly packed "wall" of bombs may seem cool at first, but it puts a chill down my spine and makes me want to cry and "run away". The increased difficulty means you'll play more games faster than on any other version, but then the frustration will set in as well. Another setback is that there is no pause, and you cannot quickly reset the game. Instead, you must punch in the buttons manually each and every game. Reset, Attack wave #, # of your bases, # of players - then finally begin. What if you forgot what settings you had and wasn't to play it again. I prefer quickly punching in 1,1,1,1 and just get it over with. Graphics are crisp (8) and very colorful. The stars look nice and the Galaxians move quickly and very smoothly. They are fairly colorful and detailed and the action is never slowed. Sound is cool (7) with nearly all the effects in place but most of them sound odd. The missing ingredients are NO background noise and no bonus point effects. Controls are outstanding (9) most for the time. In general the Bally sticks are hard to keep going precisely when you need to move, so test & clean them often. This game is incredibly fast, so it will cost you.

Overall - worst score. But let's not forget that this was the first home version of the game in 1981. Is it an official licensed version? Maybe not. But Bally made the Astrocade and their sister company Bally-Midway had the arcade rights to Galaxian, so they probably figured that they could program whatever they wanted at the time - and they slapped the "Galaxian" name on it. At some point lawsuits sprang up for various games and arcade rights became different than home version rights. After Bally sold the rights to making the system to Astrovision - then new company released the game with a change of name to "Galactic Invasion". But as far as I could find, there was no law suit involved. Both versions are fairly hard to find but they are in fact identical games.

Have Nots: Vic 20 (39)

My first reaction was this game is the rarest of all arcade/popular titles that came out for the Vic. Since I don't have it, but fellow staff writer Andrew Tonkin does, we've combined forces for the Vic 20 review. Neither Andrew nor I can stand by these scores alone, but he played it quite a bit and factored in about 40 detailed questions that I asked him about every facet of the game. Comparing them with other versions strengths and weaknesses established the scores. I am confident that every score is accurate, but I bet that Andrew wishes they were a little higher. Gameplay is impressive (8), its best attribute, having pretty much every element in place save for the number of (only 30) Galaxians. Addictiveness is enjoyable (8), and has no significant drawbacks other than it has no pause. Graphics scores the worst of all versions, but they're still effective (7). Despite the somewhat blocky appearance, they are colorful and smooth moving sprites. Several bombs and attackers can be in motion at the same time, but unfortunately this slows down the action . . . until you vanquish some enemies . . . and then it speeds back up - yecch. Sound is the weakest link, but still respectable (6), including the background drone, and the screaming of attacking Galaxians. The effects for all bombs, shots and explosions are complete, but most of them are like white noise and not very distinct. Controls are perfect and responsive (10).



Vic 20 screen shot courtesy of Tonks.

Special thanks to Vic 20 fan Andrew Tonkin and also Ward Shrake, and his Cartzilla reviews, www.funet.fi/pub/cbm/vic20/Cartzilla.html who has a theory on the extreme rarity of Galaxian. Andrew and Ward both agree that a perfect blend of Vic 20 Star Battle and Galaxian would add a few points to this score.

Have Nots: Commodore 64 (39)

My first reaction was how this pales from what it could be. The Gameplay is worth while (7) as most elements are included. But the Galaxians don't have the arcade's attack patterns, numbers, and do not even go off the L/R edge of the screen. The Addictiveness is very fun (8) with a pause <space bar> but annoying graphics problems hold this score back. Instead of the Galaxians being sprites, they are made from character graphics with black space as part of the character, corrupting the collision detection very badly and also hiding other Galaxians and their bombs behind it. Graphics are very nice (8) with good color and variety, some detail and plenty of objects in motion. But similar to the Vic 20 the game speed slows down in proportion to how many objects are in motion. Sure there may be more attacking enemies, 9+, than other versions, but the action nearly screeches to a halt. Yep, characters graphics and maybe too much coding in BASIC. Another poor choice is the flags on the screen pile up, 10 and up, making it hard to tell at a glance what wave you are on. Sound is not bad (6), with most effects in place, but none are distinct or very good. Missing completely is the background effect and the Flagship death sound. Controls are perfect (10). Cart is not too hard to find but not likely to see much action.

Have Nots: Atari 5200 (41)

My first reaction was that this version was then ported onto the 8 bit computer. There do not appear to be any differences, so all comments and scores are the same. There is a demo mode so you can watch the action play out silently. Gameplay is effective (7), but the game itself is the most different from the arcade. The attack patterns are incredibly varied, which is good, but bad news is there are no "C" or "S" patterns to be seen. They move left and right, but jump all over the place and dodge and juke and bob and weave and stop in mid air and tease you. Instead of a constant descend, you have to deal with a frenzy of activity and lots more bombs dropping. They only release 5 bombs, but they sometimes bluff when they are out of ammo, and if you do not know if they have one more to go, and they are right on top of you, you may think twice. The most glaring problem is that despite all this frenzy of activity (15+ bombs and 7+ attackers) and irregular attack modes, they do not attempt to kamikaze at all. Well almost - as there is one form of attack where they stop at the goal line (at your height) and don't move, hoping that you'll ram them by accident. They are quite happy to bomb the snot out of you, stay alive and make yet another pass. Add in the fact that your ship is too large in proportion and you're busy avoiding everything in sight, like playing "Kaboom" but trying to dodge the bombs. You must play defensively and restrain your shots, making each wave take quite a long time. Now then, the sounds of all of this bombing away would never lead you to believe you were hearing Galaxian being played. The Sound is unique and exciting (7), but just off from the rest - across the board. The background revving noise is poor. The Addictiveness is fantastic (9), and as this game gradually builds up in difficulty, and has no setbacks, you will have a blast. The pause is the <pause>. The Graphics are superb (9) with the background stars, loads of action, great multi-color, detail and variety. Controls are super (9) but only seem to work perfectly when you have a Masterplay Interface, and set up the correct way. Any other controllers (trackball, Wico, standard) had problems so I docked this a point. The game cart is fairly easy to find, as well as its overlay.

Bronze Medal: Apple II & Atari 8 bit (tie at 42)

Apple II

My first reaction was your L/R motion is too slow, but not the Galaxians - so you're at a disadvantage here. The Gameplay is impressive (8) lacking only a starting wave option and failing to have the arcade's "C" and "S" attack paths. Unlike other versions, the escorts will break off from the Flagship and do their own thing. The Addictiveness is outstanding (9) with a gradual increase in difficulty and a

pause <Esc>. The only drawback is that this version is a bit too hard to begin with. Despite what appears to be character graphics for the Galaxians, the Graphics are still sharp (8) with good color, variety and fair detail. There is poor character overlap, but not as bad as the C64. Sound is very good (7) with all effects in place but not sounding too great. The background noise is the worst of the lot and the internal apple speakers do not help. You can toggle the Sound <S>. Controls are perfect (10) and can be played via keyboard or joystick. Available only on disk - a bit uncommon.

Atari 8 bit

My first reaction was yes this is the same game as the 5200. Programming credits list a different programmer than the 5200, but I doubt that he changed much. All scores and comments are the same except for Controls, which are perfect (10), and the pause is the <Space Bar>. The cart is fairly easy to find & I think this also shows up on the disk list as well.

Silver Medal: Atari 2600 (43)

My first reaction was the arcade game was extremely well researched for a 2600 game, and the best parts were included and well programmed. The Gameplay is outstanding (9), second only to the CV. There is a demo mode here as well and this only lacks the correct quantity of Galaxians. 35 instead of 46. Addictiveness is enjoyable (8) with no drawbacks but no pause either. The gradual increase in difficulty is extremely well done & will keep you coming back for more. Graphics are beautiful (8) for the 2600 with multi-color, variety, and some detail. The action is smooth flowing with different color and detail when they're attacking. Only missing minor features like an on-screen display of the bonus points and the (sometimes distracting) stars. The title screen is among the coolest on the 2600. Sound is quite pleasant (8), and nearly as good and well-done as the CV. Controls are perfect (10). This great 2600 game is very easy to find.

Gold Medal: Colecovision (47)

My first reaction was I knew this version would win - it is awesome! Quite possibly the most accurate arcade conversion from the classic era. The only element I found missing is a minor one - you must fire to destroy every Galaxian, you cannot destroy a Galaxian by letting it hit you while your shot is attached. Of course, only a couple versions did that correctly anyhow. The Gameplay is the best (9) great. It is very accurate and complete & includes a demo mode. The Addictiveness is fantastic (9) with the pause <#> and a gradual increase in difficulty. The Graphics are the best, awesome (10) with loads of detail, multi-color, variety, and action. The Galaxians even begin their assault with a dramatic swirling motion - out of the formation. Sound is easily the best (9), remarkable as the audio effects are all there and well-done. It would be a challenge to identify everything that is included. Controls are flawless (10). But, if you are not a CV player, you may need practice to get that perfect feel of the standard controls. The Amiga stick and Super Action Controller work well. The cart is not quite so common, but well worth the price.

Come back next month where I take on a much easier task, but one that must be done now that the gauntlet has been thrown down. We take on the Many (oops) Few Faces of "Space Invaders" on the Atari 2600, Atari 5200, 8 bit computers & maybe also the unofficial Bally Astrocade version. If I can find time, maybe I'll also tackle "Impossible Mission" on the Apple II, Atari 8 Bit Computer, C64 and the never possible to complete version on the Atari 7800. Contact Alan Hewston at: Hewston95@NOSPAMstratos.net or visit the Many Faces of site: <http://my.stratos.net/~hewston95/RT/ManyFacesHome.htm>

8-bit Face-Off

by Adam King

The NES and Sega systems prepare to do battle once again on who has the best arcade port. Since many people spend Halloween watching old monster movies, I'd though this month I'd feature a game about monsters destroying a city. Of course I'm talking about the hit arcade title Rampage, which was released in 1986 by Midway.

This game stars three different monsters: George the Ape, Lizzie the Lizard and Ralph the Wolf. All three used to be normal humans, until a lab accident transforms them into gargantuan mutants, who immediately go on a rampage destroying several cities. The object of the game is just that: destroy all the buildings in each level. You do this by climbing the buildings and punching them until they collapse. However the citizens of each cities will try to stop you with several weapons, jets, and tanks. You can attack the jets and tanks, and you can even eat the people who try to run from you to recover lost enegery. After each screen is cleared of buildings, you move to the next screen for more mayhem. However your monster can only sustain so much damage, and if you run out of energy, you turn back into a normal human and your game ends. When you turn into a human during a two or three-player game, your "partner" can actually eat you. How's that for Game Over?

This game was a huge hit in the arcades, and was one of the few titles to have been ported over to all four major consoles of 1987. It was brought to the NES, the Sega Master System, the Atari 2600 AND Atari 7800. Of course this article will focus on the NES and Sega carts.

Rampage NES (1988 Data East)

The first thing you'll notice when you power up the game is that Ralph the Wolf is nowhere to be found. It's just George and Lizzie here. You still get two player action that's close to the arcade. The graphis look close to the original coin-op, but George and Lizzie look small and weird and not as detailed. This version adds a background theme that plays during each level, which is nice and doesn't get annoying. The sound effects are good, but when the monsters hit each other, an annoying sound plays as they fly backward. The controls work okay, but they put Jump on the B Button, which is a sin in the eyes of many NES gamers. In this version you have virtually unlimited continues. If you turn into a human, push the buttons and you transform back into a monster, with your score intact. This does diminish the challenge somewhat.

Rampage SMS (1989 Activison)

Unlike the NES cart, this version has all three monsters present and ready for mayhem. The game is still limited to two players, but you get to choose from George, Lizzie, and Ralph. The graphics here are tons better than the NES. The monsters are very detailed and look just like the coin-op. The sounds don't fare as well. This version also features a background tune which DOES get repetitive after a while, and the sound effects sound a little muted. When you life gets really low, an annoying warning sound starts playing. The controls work okay, though sometimes climbing up buildings can get a little tricky. This game gives you three lives to start with. Every time you lose all your energy and turn back into a human, you can use one of your lives to get back into the game with your score intact. Once you lose all your lives, the game is over. However, you can push the buttons to continue you game from that stage, it's just your score resets to 0. So if you're competing for high scores, let game over be Game Over.

Analysis

After many weeks we finally have a victory on the Sega side. While the NES version is a decent translation, with better sound, the Sega version has better graphics and all three characters (some of us *want* to play as Ralph). Therefore I'm going with the Sega version here.

Winner: Sega

Galaxian vs. Space Invaders

by Alan Hewston

OK, it's time to cast your votes for or against Space Invaders & Galaxian

Vote only once in each of the three categories 1, 2 and 3.

1) Arcade version or MAME

- 1A) I prefer the Galaxian arcade game to the Space Invaders arcade game.
- 1B) I prefer the Space Invaders arcade game to the Galaxian arcade game.
- 1C) I like both arcade games about the same.
- 1D) I do not like either arcade game.

2) Any home versions on any platform (not MAME)

- 2A) I prefer any home version of Galaxian over Space Invaders.
- 2B) I prefer any home version of Space Invaders over Galaxian
- 2C) I like both games about the same.
- 2D) I prefer a home version of Galaga over them both. (Hey! Who put that in there)
- 2E) I do not like any classic home game from the "Death-from-above" genre.

3) Which official home version have you played the most:

- 3A) Apple II Galaxian
- 3B) Astrocade Galaxian (aka Galactic Invasion)
- 3C) Atari 2600 Galaxian
- 3D) Atari 2600 Space Invaders
- 3E) Atari 400/800/XL Galaxian
- 3F) Atari 400/800/XL Space Invaders
- 3G) Atari 5200 Space Invaders
- 3H) Atari 5200 Galaxian
- 3I) Colecovision Galaxian
- 3J) Commodore 64 Galaxian
- 3K) Commodore Vic 20 Galaxian

Please send in your 3 votes to: hewston95REMOVE@THISstratos.net

We post the results next issue which will feature Space Invaders. Thanks

Great CoCo Games For Free (On Your Web Browser)

Forget the whole "who did what during Vietnam" debate. The important question is how many fulfilled their duty to battle outhouse-destroying aliens from outer space?

Well, they're back. So are the toilet paper-stealing squatters who ought to be on Earth's side.

Fortunately, enlistment is much simpler than during the initial raid 20 years ago, requiring no more than a couple of mouse clicks and a web browser. Dispose of the aliens and additional tours of duty against killer roller skates and mutant donuts await.

Every old computer and video game system has its unique software gems, but most are largely lost to history because configuring emulators and finding worthwhile titles among generally huge software libraries takes more effort than many gamers unfamiliar with the platform are willing to invest. But both fans and those totally unfamiliar with the TRS-80 Color Computer can instantly access many of its best (and some of the worst) games, thanks to an amazing online emulator that comes complete with a large software collection.

Mocha, written by Brad Grier and posted at <http://members.cox.net/javacoco/>, is a Java emulator featuring more 100 titles that can be played without learning many of the system commands and other nuances that often make emulators intimidating for newcomers. Similar online emulator/library collections exist for various other platforms such as the Sinclair Spectrum, Colecovision and Nintendo Gameboy, but few are as easy to use, functional and feature as complete a library as Mocha.

Many people will probably never need it, but documentation for the emulator and many of the games are at the site. In addition, it's a fully functioning virtual machine that can load additional files on disk, tape or ROM images for those willing to learn a few simple extra steps.

Of course not everyone wants to spend vast amounts of time booting up various unfamiliar titles to find those that are worthwhile, so this article focuses on the best of the CoCo titles available through Mocha with no downloading that are unique (or mostly so, anyway) to the platform. For those unfamiliar with my previous columns ranking CoCo arcade clones, or who haven't tried them yet, a few of the very best are The King (Donkey Kong), Buzzard Bait (Joust), Sailor Man (Popeye) and Zaxxon.

Among the unique escapades that await are Mario's largely unknown adventures in an acid-drenched bat cave, a dungeon explorer's battle with a heart condition and a plain white line that stars in one of the most addictive minimalist games of all time.

The games and ratings below are largely from my CoCo games review site (<http://www.icepeople.net/coco/index.html>) and sort of listed by overall quality. The ones with middling or pitiful ratings are generally included because of some noteworthy programming aspect to CoCo programming or simply because they're so awful as to be amusing.

(Full disclosure: I did a redesign of the site and supplied some material for Brad, primarily because I was so impressed with his programming that when he mentioned he wanted an update I considered it an honor to be able to make the offer. So my raves about Brad, while legit, are obviously not completely impartial. My rating of the games below, however, are unaffected and appropriately cranky where due).

Dungeons of Daggorath (A)

Quite possibly the best and most popular game ever for the Color Computer. It certainly was the best sold by Radio Shack and best capable of running on a basic machine with 16K of RAM. This ROM pack was one of the many 3-D dungeon-exploring games for many machines back then, but features a number of novel twists. It still has an active users' group on the Web and has actually been ported to Windows - not a lot of CoCo games can make that claim to fame.

The goal is basic - explore a five-level dungeon in real-time, killing monsters and collecting items. The graphics are a standard 3-D "wire" format used a lot at the time. You type in various commands to move, pick up things and fight.

Probably the most unique feature of DOD is the heartbeat. Essentially this is your health meter. It starts normal, but speeds up every time you do something - a little bit for moving slowly, faster if you run, a lot if you attack and often by a fatal amount if a monster hits you even once (I always felt this was just a bit too harsh). To get under control you need to find someplace safe and move slowly, or not at all. Its ominous thump-thump sounds throughout the game, just one of many first-class effects that for once make this a superior CoCo audio experience. You start as a real weakling, unable to move much without overtaxing your heart, but get stronger as you kill more monsters.

The goal is to find and kill the wizard on the bottom level, but like the best of dungeon games even the seemingly simple elements has a bunch of nuisances. In combat, for instance, it turns out there is a

creature too weak to kill you. One key to defeating the game on later levels is to let him/her/it occupy your "space," therefore keeping other monsters at a safe arms' length, and then do some quick back-and-forth maneuvering to kill the nasty creatures.

Time Bandit (A)

Another nominee for the best all-time CoCo game. This is a relatively massive multiscreen exploration game based loosely on the arcade game Tutankham. There are more than 320 screens in three different worlds (fantasy, space and western) and they change depending on how often you've been there and the time era involved. I'm familiar with only the most basic elements of the game, having failed to progress far into it, but essentially you shoot enemies that emerge from Gauntlet-style generators, find keys and use teleporters to get between screens/worlds.

The graphics are about as good as anything I've ever seen on a CoCo; unfortunately the action is a bit slow and choppy when I'm running Mocha on my Mac. Actual mileage for other users may vary.

Doubleback (A)

Easily among the top original games offered by Radio Shack and probably among the top 10 CoCo games of all time. This is one of those rare gems that really belongs in the "something for everyone" category. Proof of its simplistic genius: It ran on the humblest of all CoCo's, those with a mere 4K of RAM.

The concept, a like a lot of classics, is amazingly simple: Use your joystick to guide a line as it snakes around the screen, circling objects that pop up along the way. If you circle them completely they disappear and you get points for them. Circle more than one and you get an increasingly high number of points (five objects, for example, would be the total of all the objects multiplied by five). You lose one of your lives if you touch any of the objects.

The objects are fun, colorful and act in interesting ways. Roller skates move back and forth, yo-yos up and down on strings, spiders that chase you, etc. And here's the real key to its success: This game is as difficult as you make it. An experienced player can wait until a bunch of objects are screen (there can be up to 20) and, by doing some careful planning to get most or all of them in a group, get megapoints almost immediately - touching off the program's nasty side in the process. Since point totals determine when certain enemies appear, your sudden high score means all sorts of bad guys start coming after you - frequently at very high speed - and some wicked stuff which NEVER disappears crops up.

Titles like this always made me wonder what original games I was missing out on for other platforms. I didn't think much of it when I first read reviews describing it as a perfect family game (sort of like recommending a "heartwarming film"), but this is one of the very few CoCo titles I'd recommend without hesitation to anyone. Pity no one's ever ported it to more modern machines.

Downland (A-)

Absolutely great platformer starring Mario in one of his lesser-known roles. The suspended one must navigate through 10 screens of caves, avoiding acid drops, bouncing balls and other pitfalls, while gathering keys that open doors to additional screens/caves. You need to get to another screen before a timer expires, otherwise a bat-out-of-hell comes after you and kills you - this is not some slow-bouncing Evil Otto, by the way; it runs you over instantly.

Ten screens is a bit limited by today's standards - even if it's better than Donkey Kong's four and equal to computer megahits like Miner 2049er - but the best feature of Downland is it isn't simply a matter of going from one level to the next: You often have to go back and forth between levels to get keys for higher levels, expanding the challenge significantly since doing a screen backwards is often a completely different challenge (imagine trying to get from the top of elevator screen in Donkey Kong to the bottom - yikes!). Make it through all 10 screens and the keys open different doors at the next level, so the challenge begins anew.

Skiing (B+)

A surprisingly good early effort from Radio Shack. You ski down a slalom course from a first-person perspective, trying to make it through all of the gates in the least amount of time. You have a choice of simple or complex control using the joystick, with more control and speed (and screw-ups) possible with the expert option. Miss any gates and your time doesn't count in the "official" record, so you really have to be diligent. The physics, sound and everything else is really well done, sort of like those tennis games that take the Pong concept to a whole new level of depth able to hold a player's interest for a decent length of time.

CoCo Max (B+)

Not a game, but worth mentioning because it's one of those "ultimate eye-candy" programs that got CoCo owners drooling. Basically this attempts to imitate the original MacPaint. On a surface level it looks and works OK, especially considering everything is squashed into 64K of memory. Most of the basics are there, if somewhat sluggish, and it certainly beats the clunky interface most drawing programs of the day were using - even if it's laughably primitive today.

Next, a couple of fairly "average" titles that offer an idea of the overall quality you could expect from most programs purchased:

Outhouse (B)

This isn't the best CoCo title ever, nor is it completely original to the platform (it debuted on the black-and-white TRS-80 Model I), but is a great example of the original thinking programmers engaged in before everything turned into fighter/platform/FPS imitators.

You're a member of some space patrol that got stuck in an Iowa farm field defending an outhouse aliens are bent on destroying. Meanwhile, squatters are trying to steal a limited supply of toilet paper from the facility. You get three lives, losing one anytime you hit something or run out of TP. Basically it's just a one-screen shooter, the goal being to hit everything moving toward the outhouse at the bottom center of the screen. Like a lot of games it starts simple and slow, then increases the speed, number and types of attacks during subsequent waves. I suspect this impressed Model I gamers more, given the limits of that machine, but this is worth at least a few plays.

Mega-Bug (B)

Included because it was a big hit due to its being sold through Radio Shack, and the amusement of reading programmer Steve Bjork say he hated Pac-Man games and couldn't stand playing his own creation. At first glance it looks sort of like Pac-Man in an enormous maze, with a scrolling window magnifying your location on-screen (the rest is rather tiny, due to the sheer size of the maze). Eight or 16 bugs, depending on the difficulty level selected, chase you around as you eat dots. Unlike Pac-Man, however, there's no energizers to bail you out and no bonuses to collect for extra points. And you have one life - you zip around until you're caught and that's it, with a catchy little bonus - a spoken "We Gotcha!" - a charming touch at the time. It's a good, not great, family game suitable for just about anyone. But it doesn't completely thrill because 1) it takes forever to clear a maze (one is a major achievement) and 2) the game feels slow-paced as a result.

Temple of ROM (B-)

A decent "explore the very large-maze, kill bad guys and collect treasures" game, except it doesn't seem to know where to end. It's great in the early stages, then gets increasingly frustrating as the ultimate quest, if there is one, never becomes apparent. After you've found the treasures and killed the monsters it seems a few new ones may appear in very scattered locations, but I was never completely sure because they were so infrequent I figured they might be strays I'd missed earlier. In any event, nothing in the instructions or anywhere else tells you what your goal is, so in the end you just turn off the machine and go do something more interesting.

Invader's Revenge (C+)

Turning familiar games inside out is one way to come up with something "original," and programmer Ken Kalish does the role-reversal thing on Space Invaders with this game on the "Kalish" disk. You're an invader, trying to shoot the base at the bottom of the screen that is targeting you. It's actually sort of a combination of Space Invaders and Frogger, as small lines of invaders stacked in vertical lines move horizontally across the screen and must be avoided (like the cars in Frogger). You choose the overall speed and number of shots you can have. It's a very simple game with very average graphics, but able to sustain interest for a few plays at a time. Maybe the perfect benchmark of average for early commercial CoCo games from third-party companies.

Shenanigans/Sea Search/Calixto Island/The Black Sanctum and Rakku-tu/Pyramid (No grade)

These two groups of programs represent opposite ends of the worthwhile adventure game spectrum for the CoCo. The first group are fairly high quality graphics adventures, the second a couple of cassette-based text-only quests that run on lesser computers due to simpler system requirements. Both were pretty decent in their own ways, but I can't grade them fairly since I never got beyond the initial stages of them. They are included here for adventure fans who might enjoy a new story in a retro gaming environment.

Onto a few that really made you feel bad about the \$20-\$30 just spent:

Bustout (D+)

This is one of those titles that sent real gamers fleeing to competing machines. I don't know how you can possibly screw up the game of Breakout, since any half-competent programmer can write a version in BASIC on a 4K machine (or a 1K ZX81, for that matter), but this is one of those early Radio Shack ROM carts you look at and feel sorry for any salesman using it to demo the CoCo's capabilities. You and up to three other players compete on a basic playfield, with an option for number of balls (1-20) and whether "gravity" exists, meaning you have to move your paddle upward as you strike the ball if it's going to rise high enough to knock out bricks. It's slow, the ball's physics are the worst imaginable and I find the whole thing totally unplayable.

Pinball (D-)

How bad can a commercial game be? If this is any indication, there seems to be few limits. A small dot moves slowly around a massive and largely empty playfield with almost no gameplay elements other than some bumpers. There is no sense of realistic physics, objective or fun. A design game

option is included - basically a crude drawing program where the "ball" bounces off whatever you put on the playfield - but this is more chore than anything else. I'm amazed programmers were able to call things like this finished products, that companies paid for them and that they actually then got sold in stores. Whoever wrote the ad copy to sell it must still hate looking at themselves in the mirror.

Finally, a taste of some "homebrew" programs, usually written in BASIC, that were floating by the thousands all over the place for various computers. Often these were listed in magazines, required hours to type in and debug, and very seldom were entertaining enough to justify the effort. Grades are on my "homebrew" scale, which is much more charitable than the commercial one.

Bus Jump (B)

This is part of a large collection of simple games written in BASIC on the "public domain" disc. There's a number of familiar games like hangman and othello, plus oddities such as this one where you type in the number of buses you want to try to jump, and your speed and angle of approach to the ramp. The program, after some cheesy sound effects, then tells you if you were successful or not and provides a list of all the body parts you broke if you failed. There's no guidance, of course, as to what speeds/angles are needed to jump the buses - you sort of figure it out by trial and error.

Slot machine (D-)

I don't care if it's a 1K BASIC program or a \$50 Windows program that perfectly duplicates the latest and greatest from Vegas - slot machine games on home computers are one of the stupidest concepts in gaming, yet there's no shortage of them. The reason for my disdain is simple: There's nothing to do except press whatever key/button spins the reels and watch your money total go up or down. No skill, reward, or anything else - it ranks right up there with lotto number generators. Anyhow, this CoCo version is as bad as they come - extremely primitive graphics, slow execution, annoying sound, little imagination in winning combinations, etc., etc. But it was the sort of thing that was easy to program, so magazines were littered with listings like this.

UPCOMING CLASSIC GAMING SHOWS

This is a listing of upcoming shows and their web address where you can find more information, including times, locations, and admission. If there's any I missed, e-mail me at Hal_3000@rocketmail.com.

•MAGFest M3 October 1-3, 2004 - Williamsburg, VA Website: http://www.magfest.org/	•North Carolina Atari and Classic Game Convention October 1-3, 2004 - Raleigh, NC Website: http://www.redlinelabs.com/ncacgc/
•Classic Computing and Gaming Show October 23, 2004 - Mentor, OH Website: http://www.ccagshow.com/	•Vintage Computer Festival November 6-7, 2004 - Mountain View, CA Website: http://www.vintage.org/

We are the Galaxians and We are Awesome!
by Alan Hewston

I have a recording of a radio special called "Tron, the Ultimate Video, Radio Special". Since I am reviewing the Many Faces of Galaxian this month, I figured it was time to share one segment with you - about the Galaxians. Actually they pronounce it as if spelled "Galax-I-ons". Hopefully I've typed it pretty well and did not miss anything. I do not know if any portion has been stripped or cut out or otherwise edited previously. I cannot locate the author or any information online to share with you. So here goes.

Narrator comes on after the song "Video Killed the Radio Star".

... "One radio star that video didn't kill is Boston disc jockey Jerry Goodwin (sic). He rose to the challenge of the game Galaxian with an intriguing scan through the looking glass of a picture tube in a parody he calls "The Galaxians".

... " I am surrounded by blackness. Everything else is meaningless except my fellow squadron members. 10 rows. 12 across of the finest warships the Academy of Intergalactic Science can provide. We are the Galaxians and we are awesome!

Alpha Squadron 1, 2 and 3 are psyched! They will be the first to attack - it is in the program - and nothing can go wrong. The programmers have assured us victory is in our hands. I get a chill feeling

down my spine when I spot that ground to air defense system they've got. I watch as Alpha Squadron moves out - my fingers are crossed. Alpha 1 commences firing & oh my God! It's been hit! . . . Alpha 2 . . . gone, 3 . . . no more.

Beta Squadron - right out there - right now. They look fine. They look fast. They look sleek and strong and . . . Lord! All three have been hit - just like that.

It's my turn now. We are the Delta Squadron and I am their leader. My hands are moist with sweat as I grasp my controls and move the ship into overdrive. The three of us ... the three of us arc around the body of our defense. We fire photon after photon on the enemy base as we careen toward it. It is us or them. Whooah . . . that was close! I'm getting closer. I'm actually going to win I can feel it. It's right on me. I can't bank it - it's too late. I see faces. Huge lily faces laughing at me from beyond the sky and . . . uh uh uh ooooh!

.....

Hey! Hey! Hey! I beat the Galaxians!

What!

I beat 'em. I beat 'em man! I beat this machine for the first time.

Well far out.

Give me another quarter Eddie!

Aw c'mon, c'mon Al. Let's play Space Invaders.

Hey! This is the first I ever beat the Galaxians machine. I mean, it's the toughest machine in the whole parlor.

C'mon man. I'm getting tired.

Ahhh we always play Space Invaders I'm sick of that one.

Alan Hewston can be reached at Hewston95@NOSPAMstratos.net Let him know if you too like the Galaxians better than Space Invaders.

The Many Faces of . . . The ZX81

by [Mark Sabbatini](#)

Forget the knife - this is like bringing a rubber chicken to a gunfight.

Comparing Sinclair ZX81 games to other computers and consoles offers little beyond amusement value (and in fact can't be officially compared for "Many Faces Of..." purposes - see below for details). But never-say-die programmers made valiant efforts at replicating some of the most complex of titles despite the ZX81's complete lack of sound and color, not to mention extreme deficiencies in graphics, controls, speed and memory. One guy even wrote an interpretation of the animated laser disc hit "Dragon's Lair" - in the ZX81's all-time slowest version of BASIC no less.

It's programming history that shouldn't be overlooked.

One may applaud such efforts or laugh at them, but either way it's worth sampling these programs that try to make so much out of so little. Amazingly, some programmers actually managed to implement - or at least claim they did - sound, hi-res graphics and color into certain programs (the color claim baffles me since the Sinclair is a black-and-white computer and I haven't actually seen anything that uses it).

Plus some of these games are (gasp) actually fun.

Proper perspective requires a few notes about the ZX81 for those not familiar with it, including some mention of just how awful and pathetic some of the games are. One so-called space shooter, for example, is actually a text-only game where you type in an option like "move" or "fire" and the computer tells if you've hit an enemy, it hit you or some other result.

The ZX81 has 1K of built-in memory, expandable to 16K via a RAM pack attached to the back (more is possible but not practical for technical reasons not worth the space to explain here). One of the computer's worst features is the connection between the RAM pack and computer, which is so precarious even bumping the desk hard can disrupt it and crash the machine. Companies sold everything from velcro strips to expensive cases in an effort to overcome this.

The ZX81 uses cassettes to save and load files, as many machines of the era do, but is probably the slowest and most unreliable such system ever. Loading a 16K program can take the better part of 10 minutes and multiple attempts are often required. The loading system is so quirky the position of a TV antenna (remember the old rabbit ears?) can affect its reliability.

The display is 32 characters across by 24 down, black-and-white only, with graphics possible on a 64X48 grid. Games tend to use letters than graphics - the ship in a version of Asteroids, for example, is represented by the numbers 1-8 depending on what direction its facing. Speed is listed as 3.5mhz on a Z80 processor, but for whatever reason its actual speed appears to be by far the slowest ever for a home computer selling in any measurable quantity.

Thousands of games, usually selling for \$3-\$10, were made. This may seem like a bargain compared to a \$60 PC title, but only a few of the very best might come close to pedestrian freeware such as Minesweeper or all those clones of Tetris. A sizable percentage of ZX81 programs crash, lack instructions or ask the user to modify the program in order to determine certain settings. Control is often difficult or impossible due to a number of oddities about the ZX81 keyboard - which is a tiny flat membrane surface with only 40 keys and no spacebar. The cursor control keys, for example, are 5, 6, 7 and 8 (the user presses a function-shift key to activate them) and therefore became the default direction controls for most games.

OK, time for the reviews, with an important disclaimer first. These are all in the spirit of fun because, officially, the ZX81 doesn't have any licensed titles to pit against games featured in the "Many Faces Of" articles to date. In fact, I believe Frogger is the only officially licensed arcade conversion for the humble Sinclair. So this looks at the best, or at least best-selling, unofficial conversion and pits them against the competition in a "best-guess" sort of way.

Finally, a comparison isn't any fun unless the ZX81's efforts get a straight score on the 50-point scale, even if it's scoring in the teens while consistent winners such as the Atari 800 and Commodore 64 are well into the 40s. But there also isn't much value in a bunch of "Have Not" finishes and pathetic scores for someone wondering which titles are decent (or horrific) enough to fire up an emulator for. So all ZX81 titles get two rankings, a straight-up "Many Faces Of" score as well as a letter grade comparing it to other titles on the tiny humble black box.

Frogger

MFO score: **26** (no official competition); ZX81 grade: **A-**

This is it - the only licensed arcade game I'm aware of for the ZX81. And there hasn't been a "Many Faces Of" Frogger contest yet - sheesh. But we'll proceed anyhow, as we will with some other titles, based on a rough assumption of how it compares to the competition since I've played the game on many of those machines.

This version is actually not bad, programmed by the same company that wrote a popular conversion for the equally colorless and soundless TRS-80 Model I. There is one major element to gameplay (6) likely to draw either sharp scorn or praise: action takes place on two screens, one for cars and one for the river creatures. When you reach the top of the highway things shift to the alternate view. I actually prefer this method to the single-screen unlicensed ZX81 conversions - the coin-op's screen is vertically oriented and two horizontal screens on the ZX81 does a better job of capturing that feel. It also allows for actual graphics (3), rather than having letters represent the frog, cars and other elements. And hugely to the ZX81's credit I believe this version has everything from the arcade - alligators, snakes, lady frogs, otters, etc. - when many other versions are lacking or more of those.

There is no sound (1), but everything else holds up better than you might expect. The game allows one or two players. There are five levels of difficulty to choose from, which also serves as sort of a "continue" function since they're based on the number of waves completed, adding enormously to the game's addictiveness (7). Control (9) is great, thanks to the use of the A, Z, N and M keys instead of the 5-6-7-8 cursor combination.

Qbert

MFO score: **13** (last among 10 platforms; others score between 20 and 43). ZX81 grade: **C+**

We'll give this one near-top billing only because the author took the obvious unlicensed freedom to call his game "Qbert." It's actually possible to believe a licensed version might be close to this. It's also just as accurate to say that either way it's basically a confusing unplayable mess.

The gameplay (3) is slow and has everything "transporting" on the 15-square pyramid the way the would on an LCD handheld game. No sound (1), of course, and the controls (4) are not very responsive - although thankfully there's a logical set of keys.

The title screen featuring our hero is probably the most impressive part, but once in action he and everything else is a terrible mess when it comes to graphics (2). If you think the Atari 2600 is terrible when it comes to diagonal graphics, well...let's just say it looks like a Playstation 2 compared to the ZX81.

Addictiveness (3) avoids a bottom-rung score only because Qbert itself is such a great game that it's at least somewhat tempting to see what elements are squeezed in here.

Pac-Man (Zuckman)

MFO rating: **20** (no official competition); ZX81 grade: **B** This program, which claims to be the first ZX81 version of Pac-Man, still appears to be one of the best. In fact, the reason it makes the MFO competition is apparently Atari made inquiries and contemplated a lawsuit for doing an unlicensed title (remember "K.C. Munchkin" for the Odyssey 2?), which I were the programmer of this I would consider a badge of honor.

Zuckman opens with a title screen complete with an arcade-like demonstration of your pac guy eating monsters and an optional set of built-in instructions. Watching the demo and reading the instructions is when you start to notice a few differences - all monsters are worth 800 points when eaten and they turn "grey" every 30 seconds whether you've eaten a pill or not. But for the most part this is the game you know and love.

The maze is actually something akin to the arcade layout and the so-called graphics (4) are chosen well (the monsters are inverse quote marks, which believe it or not is as close to an authentic look as I've seen on the various ZX conversions). Gameplay (6) is at a good speed, and the monsters act with reasonable intelligence and aggressiveness.

There's also plenty of quirks. No bonus prizes in the center. No sound (another score of 1). Eating an energizer speeds you up as well as turning the monsters grey. I do not believe the "grey time" shortens over time, a real bummer in terms of having the game get more difficult as you go. That combined with getting an extra guy after every wave might make this too easy for good players. And it's great there's an alternate set of controls (4) beyond the standard 5-6-7-8 combination, but the choice of keys is horrible - "Q" and "P" is fine for left and right, but "X" for down and "M" for up?

There's a few pac-maze games I'd probably prefer to this one, but all differ so much from arcade Pac-Man (shooting enemies instead of eating them, etc.) they can't be considered here. The best you could probably squeeze out of a ZX81 wouldn't be light years ahead of this game anyhow and it has enough addictiveness (5) that it's worth booting up and playing a few games' worth to see how Pac lives in the world of ASCII.

Asteroids (QS Asteroids)

"MFO" score: **13** (last among four platforms - others score 37 to 46). ZX81 score: **B-** This is about average for a ZX81 title - utterly ridiculous compared to anything else on the market, but decent enough gamers could sort of convince themselves they had a legitimate version of this shooter.

Graphics (2) are ultra chunky, with the most amusing part being your ship - it's a number from 1 to 8, indicating what direction you're facing. Gameplay (3) isn't bad, but suffers from two major problems: 1) the game doesn't wait for an opening in the asteroids after you die, which means a single collision can wipe out all your ships at once and 2) hitting keys not programmed as controls (3) can crash the game. As always, no sound (1).

Addictiveness (4) gets a passing score for capturing the gameplay well and keeping things moving at a normal speed - and once you know the keys to avoid crashing is reduced greatly. Modern retrogamers will find this more interesting as a study in how shooters were programmed on ultra-primitive platforms, but that is excuse enough make it worth playing a few times.

Robotron (Possessed)

MFO score: **23** (last among seven platforms - others score 40 to 47); ZX81 rating: **B+** My first reaction to this was "Robotron on the ZX81? You gotta be kidding." Well, yes and no. Possessed is indeed something of a Robotron clone and a great shoot-'em-up, but a lot is left by the roadside.

All those different enemies? Forgot it, Possessed offers just the equivalent of grunts. Humanoids to rescue? Nope, unless you want to pretend mommy, daddy and Mikey are hiding somewhere off-screen and the bad guys will deal with them once they've disposed of you. That unique two-joystick, move-and-fire-in-different-directions-at-once thing? Negative, as you can move only in four directions and firing in that direction is automatic as you go.

Yet - incredibly, impossibly - I had more fun with this version than some licensed titles I've played on other systems, especially at first. The main reason is the crazy variety of control schemes other machines use, from requiring as many as 20 keys to be used to poorly implemented joystick options. Possessed strips everything down to such simplicity anyone can get into the spirit of things from the first game. This makes things much more monotonous later, but in the relative spirit of ZX gaming this still holds up better than most.

Your guy (an "O" - think of him as a pixel-perfect overhead rendition of a bald gunman with a really

large head) moves around the arena shooting periods at the robots (which have cleverly disguised themselves so they look like the letter "X"). Their artificial intelligence is properly grunt-like; all they do is move toward you, thus setting themselves up to get picked off in a row with a bit of planning on your part. But more and more of them come every wave, they get faster and eventually you die.

Gameplay (4) gets a lower score than I'd like to give it because so many elements are missing. Graphics (3) are, of course, pitiful compared to anything else, but for a ZX81 the various effects such as the end-of-wave wipeout sequences are actually very impressive. Sound (1) gets the usual lowest possible score. A surprisingly strong score is the controls (8), which are not the usual 5-6-7-8 cursor key arrangement.

Which brings us to another surprising score -addictiveness (7). No this isn't anywhere near the game even the worst versions on other platforms offer, but it achieves something I would consider darn near impossible, which is capture the frenzied spirit of the game and "gotta play once more" mentality. This is a case where leaving out a lot of stuff actually turns out to be a plus.

Pongy (Pengo)

"MFO" score: **5** (last among five platforms. Scores range from 35 to 41). ZX81 score **F+**
Crashes after the title screen asks you to press a key. The "plus" in the ZX81 grade is at least getting to see that screen, which is OK. Plenty of games simply crash the computer.

Well, that's it (more than enough, probably). Stay tuned for future issues, when some of the best and worst ZX81 titles are reviewed. Believe it or not, even today some of the good titles are novel and interesting enough to hold your attention longer than you'd expect.

Game Over

Is time to close the coffin on this issue of RTM, as the dawn is breaking and it's time for the spirits to go to sleep (or something like that). Thanks for continuing to support us as we keep bringing you the retrogaming goodness every month. Keep gaming, and try to take it easy on the Halloween candy.

- [Adam King](#), Chief Editor

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