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Press Fire to Start

by Adam King

Here we go again with another issue of Retrogaming Times Monthly. The holidays are once again upon us, so that means lots of trips to the crowded shopping malls. What better way to unwind from the chaos than to immerse yourself in this extra-long issue of the Times. Many of the articles have winter themes. We have hockey, we have penguins, and much more, including a holiday album made with classic game systems. Who knows, you may get some gift ideas for the retrogamer in your life.

By the way, you'll notice some new names in this issue. Many new writers have come on board the newsletter, each with some excellent new articles. We wish to welcome all the new writers and hope they will stick with us for at least the near future.

8-Bit Hockey Havoc

by Adam King

The arrival of winter brings us winter sports, and one of the biggest winter sports is ice hockey. Now I know there are many readers out there who are still crying over the fact that the NHL season will not happen due to the lock-outs. But cheer up! Don't forget that you can easily fill the void with a video hockey game. Here's a look at some classic hockey carts for the NES, Sega and 7800 systems.

NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM

Blades of Steel (1988 Konami)

Ice Hockey in its finest form. One or two players can play this game, and one player can choose either Exhibition or Tournament. You choose from eight teams (not NHL teams, just the cities), each having their own strengths and weaknesses. You view the action from a slightly overhead perspective. Games last three 20-minute periods, and once the puck is dropped, you must take it and get it to the goal. You have to follow the standard rules of hockey, and that includes passing, icing, face-offs, and so on. Be careful if you repeately bump against another player; a fight between the two might break out, and the one who gets punched out gets sent to the penalty box. While this game can get rough, too much roughness may result in a penalty shot. At the end of three periods the team with the most goals wins, but if the game is tied, a shoot out will occur to decide the match. The Tournament has three levels: Junior, College, and Pro, each in a single-eliminiation tier. Once you beat three consecutive games, you win the Cup.

In a rink of NES hockey titles this one is the true champion. The graphics are very good with detailed players that have fluid animation, plus the arnea looks great as well, even though it's a little on the

dark side. The music tunes are few, with the only ones being the menu music, the intro before each period, and the organ music when a shot is made, but they're done pretty well. There's plenty of great sound effects, with grunts, groans, and decent crowd noise. Plus the voices are also good and clear. The controls work well, enabling you to keep up with the fast action and mayhem. Each of the three skill levels provide a decent challenge, but you may have to play at least the College level for a good game. This game is an excellent hockey game, and a great two-player contest as well. *Blades of Steel* definetly wins the NES Stanley Cup.
SCORE: 9/10

Ice Hockey (1988 Nintendo)

This early NES hockey cart presents a kinder, gentler take on the sport (that still has a lot of fighting). One or two players can choose from six international teams, however there's no difference in them except for the colors. You do get to customize your team with one of three types of players: thin man, medium man, and big man, each one with strengths and weaknesses. Once all the options are set both teams hit the ice for three peroids of hard-hitting hockey action. This game is light on penalties (only icing is called) which means plenty of checking, sticking, and knocking each other down. When you have the puck, an opposing player can come along and brawl with you for control. If the fight isn't settled soon, the whole team gets involved and the person who started the puck battle gets sent to the penalty box. This can leave one team at a disadvantage. Once the third period ends, the team with the most goals is the winner.

Nintendo's entry into the NES hockey rink does a good job representing the sport. The graphics are a little cartoonish but still good, with fluid movement from each of the players. The music that plays throughout the game is pretty good as well, and doesn't get old. The familiar-sounding sound effects do their job as well. The controls are no problem to use; passing and shooting are easy to do. The gameplay itself is exciting and fast-paced. Beware if you're playing solo because the computer opponent will put up a tough fight. The main negative is the game is too light on options, just two players and six teams. A season mode would have been nice. But overall *Ice Hockey* is an excellent sports game, a very close second to *Blades of Steel*. If you pick up this game, you won't be disapointed.
SCORE: 8/10

Wayne Gretzky Hockey (1990 T*HQ)

The Great One of Hockey takes center stage in this hockey cart. Here you get 10 teams based in real NHL cities. One or two players can play, and two players can choose whether to play on the same team or on opposite teams. You can play a practice game, a normal game, or a playoff mode. Other options include period lenght and skill level. The action on the ice is pretty standard hockey fare; try to get the puck into the goal. You can pass, shoot, and when you're on defense, you can check the other team's players to get the puck. Try not to get too rough, though; penalties will be called. At the end of three periods, the team with the most goals wins. If the game ends in a tie, a sudden death overtime period will be played. If you're in playoff mode, the game will not end in a tie; sudden death will continue for an unlimited period of time until one team scores and wins.

A great hockey player doesn't always make a great hockey game. The graphics are below average. The players are very tiny and their movements are choppy. Plus there's a LOT of blue. Even the referee's faces are blue. The sounds are worse, with VERY annoying music and blah sound effects. At least the voice clips are decent. The controls are a little difficult to use. You have to push SELECT to switch players, and control doesn't automatically switch over to whoever has the puck. But the overall gameplay is ice cold. Your teammates don't always do what you want them to. If you're not familiar with all the rules, such as offsides and such, you're going to have a hard time getting through this cart. Bottom line is this is teh worst hockey game I ever played.
SCORE: 1/10

Pro Sport Hockey (1993 Jaleco)

This is the only NES game to be licensed by the NHL Players' Association, which means you get real NHL players, but not the real NHL teams. Each player is modeled after his real-life counterpart, down to their playing strengths. You'll find quite a few gameplay options in this cart. You can choose from Exhibition, Super Cup, and Training modes, and you can choose from other options, such as no penalties and length of each period. Once you choose your team, you can change the rosters if you wish. After that's done, it's time for three periods of hockey. All the hard-hitting action is here, but be careful. The referees will call penalties, and you may find yourself in the

penalty box if you get too rough. The Super Cup mode is the tournament mode, and it divides the teams into six groups of four teams each. You first play against each of the other teams in your group in order to qualify for the main tournament, which will feature 16 teams. A password tracks your progress, and if you make it to the tournament, you'll get a shot at winning the USA Championship.

You'd figure the company that made the excellent *Bases Loaded* games could put together a halfway decent hocky cart. The graphics are slightly above-average, with slightly drab colors. The players are large and have decent animation, but a lot of flicker will pop up if too many of them occupy the same area. Plus you only see one portion of the rink, and the game scrolls in every direction to keep up. All that frequent choppy scrolling can be disorienting. For most of time on the ice the game is quiet, except for a few sound effects. Those sounds effects are nothing special, and there's this really annoying horn that plays when a goal is scored, followed by terrible crowd noise. The controls are adequate, and you shouldn't have too much trouble. The main problem is the gameplay is boring and often frustrating. Without any exciting music or sound effects, it's hard to get into this game. Not only that, the computer can be too difficult to beat, or even score against. This game may be good for those of you looking for a challenge, and it has it's moments, but for the most part *Pro Sport Hockey* barely reaches rookie status.
SCORE: 4/10

SEGA MASTER SYSTEM

Great Ice Hockey (1987 Sega)

This early hockey game requires the Sega Sports Pad trackball. one or two players can take to the ice. In the 1P mode you always play the USA team, but in the 2P mode you can choose from eight teams from different countries. You can also select the difficulty level and the lenght of the periods. Once to get to the hockey action, you view the game from overhead. You can pass, shoot, steal the puck and more.

Once again another "Great" sports game gets iced. The game's graphics are okay. The players are a little small but they look good and have nice animation. The music is upbeat but is also good as well. The gameplay is where this game slips and falls on its face, thatnks to being forced to use the Sports Pad. It's extremely difficult to move around and aim your passes and shots, plus your players move slowly, no matter how much you roll the ball. Plus on defense you can't select your players; the game does it *for* you, and it switches frequently. What's sad is that this cart had the makings of a decent hockey title. Had Sega just let us use the regular controllers, then *Great Ice Hockey* could have at least been a respectiable title. But the controls and gameplay send this game to the penalty box.
SCORE: 2/10

Slap Shot (1989 Sega)

This game lets one or two players go at it, and 1P mode features an exhibition mode and a tournamnet mode. You have a choice of three team pools, each one containing eight international teams with differnet strenghts and weaknesses. Once you pick the two teams, it's time to hit the ice. The game lasts three periods, each period having 20 minutes of standard hockey action including passes, shots, and knocking each other down to get the puck. When you score, you get a close-up replay of the shot, as well as the team celebrating (you can skip this if you wish). There's plenty of rough hockey action, and if you bump into an opponent too many times, you might find youself duking it out with him, with the loser going to the penalty box. If that happens your team is short-handed for several minutes. At the end of three period the team with the most goals is the winner, but if the game ends in a tie, a shoot-out wil determine the winner. The tournament mode pits your team against the others of your pool league in single-elimination brackets. If you can survive three rounds, your team wins the championship.

You might notice this game play a lot like *Blades of Steel*, and that's a good thing. The graphics are pretty good. The players are small but they move fluidly. The close-ups that occur are pretty good as well. However the game falls victim to the Master System's bad sounds. The in-game music is okay, but some of the sound effects, especially the crowd nosie, sound terrible. The controls work pretty well, making it easy to pass and shoot. Switching players on defense is also no problem. When playing solo the computer puts up a good fight, though it can be a tad too difficult to beat. Naturally when two players play the fun factor multiplies. In between the second and third periods, you get a shot of each team's lockerroom as their coach rallies them on. Nice touch. Overall this game is MUCH better than *Great Ice Hockey*, and does an excellent job of bringing hard-hitting hockey action to the SMS.
SCORE: 9/10

ATARI 7800

Hat Trick (1986 Atari)

This lone hockey title on the 7800 is a port of the Bally/Sente arcade game. From an overhead view you and a friend play a game of 2-on-2 hockey. Each team has one player and a goalie, and they switch back and forth. Basically you just play for two minutes, seeing who can score the most points in that time. If the puck is coming your way, you take control of you goalie to attempt a save. At the end of two minutes the game is over and whoever has to most points wins.

While this game is a decent arcade port, overall it's not very good. The graphics are pretty choppy and the players movements are jerky. The sounds aren't so great either. Again the music is lacking, and what is there is hard on your ears, and the sound effects are silly. The controls are easy to use yet unresponsive at time. The main problem is you just don't have much to do, just get the puck into the goal or make saves. Because games are only two minutes long, that seriously hurts the replay factor. Bottom line is this game feels more like air hockey than ice hockey. This game isn't a total waste though; it has its moments. If you've played the arcade game, you might enjoy it with another player, but this hockey game should be thrown into the box. You'd have more fun using your 7800 to play 2600 *Ice Hockey*.
SCORE: 5/10

Collecting in Australia - PAL VS NTSC Part 2

by Tonks

In the last issue of RTM I did an article about the difference between PAL and NTSC. No other article that I have written has ever received so much feedback. I usually receive 5 or 6 emails, but this past month I receieved 22 emails commenting on my article. Most of the articles actually included corrections. I truly thank these readers for pointing out a few important things. I certainly don't consider myself an expert. I am just a regular collector and the comments I make are simply from my own experience. So I am more than happy for people to email me with their corrections or other points of view. In fact I welcome you comments about anything I ever write.

Anyway, I thought I would share with you one particular reply I received that really clarifies the PAL Vs NTSC issue for the Intellivision. This email came from Steve Orth.

The latest RTM has an inaccuracy regarding NTSC / PAL compatibility for the Intellivision. Unlike the Atari 2600, Intellivision carts were NOT responsible for generating line sync pulses. The Inty had a STIC (Standard Television Interface Chip) built into the console for the different markets. It, along with the color chip, were responsible for generating the TV signals and clock for the bus in the system (processor clocks, memory clock, etc). The result was that PAL Intellivision systems actually run a little bit faster than NTSC consoles!!

In almost all cases, there were absolutely no differences in the cartridges sold in PAL markets. There are only a handful of exceptions that I know of out of the 125 released games. To my knowledge, none of the Mattel games sold in PAL markets differed from those in the U.S. - only the packaging changed. I have heard (from one source) that Motocross may not work on PAL consoles, but the story is (so far) that some copies do and some don't.

Activision's The Dreadnaught Factor will not work on PAL systems. This is due to timing issues - i.e. the PAL console runs faster, and some snippet of code in the game causes a hang on the faster system. Also, I believe that when CBS released the Coleco games in the PAL market in Europe, their ROMs were tweaked, as the CBS versions of the Coleco titles that don't work on an Intellivision II actually DO seem to work. It's unclear to me if the changes to the ROMs were to address the Intellivision II compatibility problem, or were necessary due to PAL vs. NTSC. I've bought, sold, and traded games with others in the U.K., Sweden, Germany, France, Finland, Australia, Japan, and probably a few other places. I've never had any trouble playing any of the carts on my NTSC system, nor have I had any complaints about malfunctioning games that I've sent out to others. All in all, another fine issue of RTM, but I think this is an important item to clarify.

A big thanks to Steve.

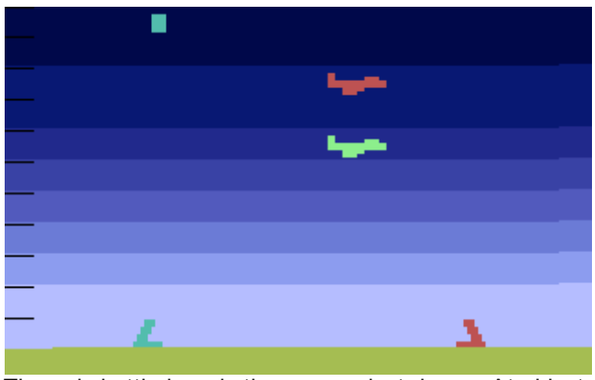
Atari 2600 "Launch 20"

by Ian Huntley

Kicking off my series on the Atari 2600 "Launch 20", we lead with *Air-Sea Battle*. Now, in order to be objective when reviewing Atari 2600 titles, you have to become somewhat of a time traveler. That is to say that it's not fair to compare *Air-Sea Battle* to *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*. It's not even fair to compare *Air-Sea Battle* to *Freeway*. (Interestingly, it would be fair to compare *Freeway* and GTA: SA to *Air-Sea Battle*). So, what you end up having to do is examine competitive products from that particular moment in time. Being that the level of internet-driven obsession over all aspects of the

gaming world didn't exist during the 2600s initial run, you have to do the equivalent of carbon-14 dating to determine exactly when a game was released and what else was available at the time. This is the only method by which one can do a fair evaluation of any classic (Golden Age) game.

Having said that, *Air-Sea Battle* sucks. It's only real competition were the other 19 members of the "Launch 20", and while it isn't the worst of the lot, it is number 18. Why? Let's take a look.



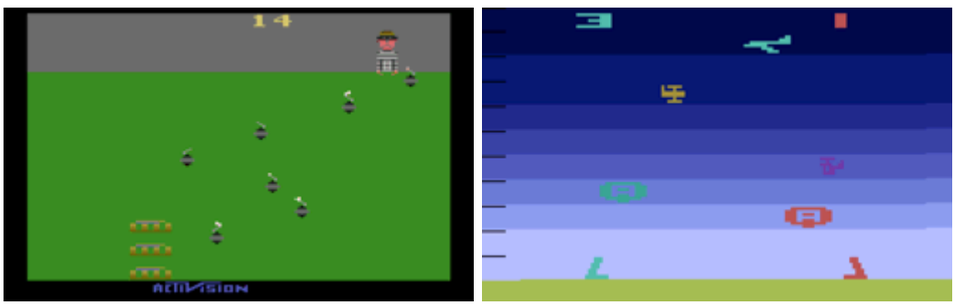
The only battle here is the one against drugs...Atari lost.

Mama Dodge always said, "If you can't say something nice, say nothing." Well, I'll try. Air-Sea Battle's strongest point is the graphics. (They'd have to be, considering the gameplay...more on that later.) Reasonable first-gen representations of ships, helicopters, airplanes, sea mines, and other assorted goodies. The only graphical representation that sent me to the manual was the smiley face. It turns out that, according to the manual, it wasn't a smiley face at all, but an "observer blimp". Well, have a nice day, observer.

There are 27 game varieties of *Air-Sea Battle* for you to enjoy. In reality this boils down to whether or not your cannon moves, whether or not there are dummy targets (smiley faces), and the style of targets you shoot at. All modes of *Air-Sea Battle* involve you firing at targets. The targets do not return fire. You have the option of playing against the computer, but the computer simply fires constantly, hoping it might hit something.

Picking on the sound in an Atari 2600 game is like beating up the fat kid in gym class. It's easy to do, and it's not very nice. So, I'll simply say this. There are two sounds in *Air-Sea Battle*: A firing sound, and a "target destroyed" sound. I'm actually pretty relieved they didn't aspire to more there.

Now, for the "believe it or not" portion of this diatribe... Do you know who programmed this second-rate salad of slop? Larry Kaplan! Yes! Larry "Kaboom" Kaplan of Activision. The man who created what could be in contention for best Activision game ever also programmed the horrible *Air-Sea Battle*.



I guess he got better at game programming as time went on.

If the "Launch 20" contained a bunch of games like *Air-Sea Battle*, Atari would not have enjoyed the success it did. Fortunately, there were some gems hidden in there. *Air-Sea Battle* failed as an entertaining game, and even worse, failed to contribute to the legacy of video gaming by providing no innovation.

(As a parenthetical aside, if you are looking for a good game in this genre, I strongly recommend Coleco's excellent 1983 release, "Carnival". I did not include this in the body of the review, as it would be unfair to compare *Air-Sea Battle* to *Carnival*, which was released nearly 6 years later.)

More Arcade Treasures

by Adam King

If you remember, last year Midway released *Midway's Arcade Treausres*, a compilation disc featuring 24 arcade hits. And while that disc was good, it just seemed to have mostly games that appeared on the *Arcade's Greatest Hits* series on the PlayStation, with a few exceptions. This year Midway has unleashed a new collect of arcade greats called *Midway's Arcade Treasures 2*, featuring 20 games never before released on any compilation. While the disc doesn't score a perfect A+, it still manages

to be a good trip down memory lane. Note that this review is based on the PlayStation 2 version, but it is also available for the X-Box and GameCube, and all three are pretty much the same.

This collection is a mix of old and newer stuff, from the early 80s to the late 90s, which should appeal to most of you readers. Here's a quick look at the titles.

A.P.B.: A driving game that lets you play as a cop who's out to bust criminals, pull over litterbugs and collect doughnuts.
Arch Rivals: A basketball game without the fouls. You can actually punch your opponent as you shoot some hoops. Basically the predecessor to *NBA Jam*.
Championship Sprint: This game is supposed to be the follow-up to *Super Sprint*, but it's almost the same game. The only differences are different tracks, a new car upgrade, and only two human players can race, instead of three.
Cyberball 2072: Football with robots. The ball is a bomb and you have to kepp getting first downs to keep it from exploding.
Gauntlet II: This sequel has 100 new levels and some new options. Plus you actually get to choose to be the Warrior, Valkerye, Elf or Wizard, regardless of which player you are. Up to four players can play as well.
Hard Drivin': A driving game with polygon graphics.
Kozmik Krooz'r: This obscure space game is kind of like *Frogger*. You have to guide an alien to a spinning saucer, but you can shoot enemy creatures that block your path.
Mortal Kombat II: No introduction necessary for this fighting game classic.
Mortal Kombat 3: Ditto.
NARC: This ultraviolent shooter casts you as a narcotics officer who blows up drug pushers and addicts, all to win the war on drugs.
Primal Rage: *Mortal Kombat*, only with dinosaurs and other monsters.
Pit Fighter: The infamous three-player fighting game which was the first game to use digitalized graphics of real actors.
Rampage World Tour:
Spy Hunter 2: This sequel is like the original, but instead of an overhead view, you have a behind-the-car view, plus it has a split-screen for two player action.
Total Carnage: The follow-up to *Smash TV*, with a Gulf War-like theme instead of a game show.
Timber: In this game, one or two players try to cut down enough trees before time is up, while avoiding a beehive-throwing bear.
Wacko: You play as the alien from *Kosmik Krooz'r*, and you have to eliminate monsters by matching them up.
Wizard of Wor: Hunt monsters in a maze.
Xenophobe: Hunt aliens on a space station before it becomes completely infested.
Xybots: You try to destry robots in a 3D maze. This game uses a third-person behind-the-player view.

Right from when you pop this into your system you can see the improvements in this second compilation. The Egyptian interface from the first Arcade Treasures is history, replaced with a much nicer DNA-style menu. The games' marquees act as the DNA strands, allowing you to select your game with ease, plus you get some gameplay footage. Before you start each game, you can check out each game's extra features, such as the history of the game, and some bonus videos. You can also choose various options for each game, including difficulty level and staring number of lives. One big concern in the previous disc was that some of the games had unliminted continues. That problem is fixed here; you can actually select NO continues for a true challenge. Plus some games, such as *Gauntlet II* and *Xenophobe*, had an option where you can increase your health by adding credits. You can thankfully turn this feature off. The game uses a memory card to save high scores and options. The cool thing is different high score boards are created for playing in normal mode or custom modes, making the challenge more even.

So how does the emulation compare to the originals? For the most part the games hold up pretty well. The graphics match the arcade coin-ops almost perfectly, despite a few glitches here and there. Also in *Kozmik Krooz'r*, Digital Eclipse did a nice job with the spinning saucer (the original game reflected the saucer on the game monitor). The sounds also hold up well, though some voices and sound effects are a little muffled. As far as the controls work, for most of the games it's no problem. However playing *APB* and *Hard Drivin'* can be tricky, since they used a steering wheel to control the action. Midway could have added the option to use steering wheel controllers with these titles. Plus it looks like the cast of *Wizard of Wor* overdosed on coffee, because the game moves super-fast, too fast to really be playable. This will disappoint those of you who dreamed of getting this game just to play Wizard of Wor on your living room TV.

As far as the lineup itself goes, it's a good group, but some will be disappointed that *Wacko* and *Kozmik Krooz'r* were included instead of *Steel Talons* and *STUN Runner*, two titles that were slated to be featured but were cut for some reason. (Not to say that Krooz'r isn't a fun game, which it is.) Also why include *Mortal Kombat 3* when Midway could have instead gave us the superior Ultimate MK3. We probably could have also done without *Spy Hunter 2* and *Rampage World Tour*, which isn's fun as the others. Finally there's *Pit Fighter*, a game so laughibly bad that everyone's asking why it was

resurrected at all.

These negatives aside, overall *Arcade Treasures 2* is another great arcade compilation. Not everyone is going to be satisfied with it, but for most of us this game will provide hours of enjoyment for fans of the featured games.

Just remember one thing. This game is rated M for MATURE for a reason. There's a lot of blood, gore, and some other questionable content. You might not want to play this with your kids.

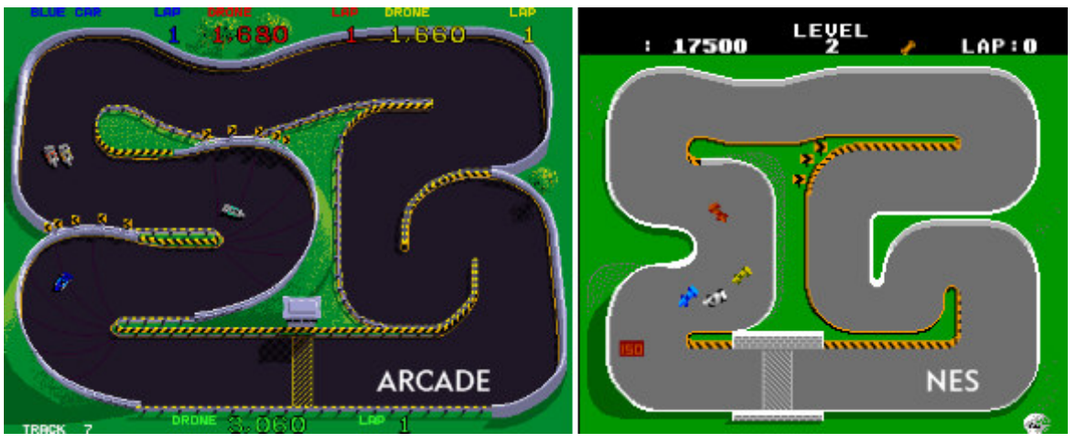
The Titles of Tengen - Super Sprint

by David Lundin, Jr.

To an NES gamer Tengen was synonymous with good quality ports of popular arcade games. For as long as the readers can tolerate me I'm going to provide them with comparative reviews of NES titles released by Tengen. Let's kick things off with one of my favorite Tengen NES ports, Super Sprint, but maybe it would be prudent to give just a tiny bit of information on who Tengen was.

Nintendo in all of its glory revived the home video game market to its previous luster by around 1985, and for the previous generation juggernaut Atari, there was still a good deal of money to be made in the home gaming market. When Warner Communications sold the consumer side of Atari, Inc. to Jack Tramiel it resulted in Atari being split into two separate companies: Atari Corp. and Atari Games. Atari Corp. would continue to sell the redesigned 2600, 7800, and whatever other consumer products were still being warehoused, while Atari Games would begin new game development. To avoid confusion with the consumer division, Atari Games would rebrand themselves as Tengen. Much in the same way Atari meant "only having one liberty remaining" in the traditional Japanese game of Go, Tengen was the term for the center point of the Go board. Tengen would develop games for the Nintendo Entertainment System, which was logical since the world was in love with Nintendo at the time.

However Nintendo's NES-era licensing agreement only allowed third party developers to release no more than five games per year and every title released must remain exclusive to the NES lineup for at least two years. Tengen wanted cross-platform development rights but was unsuccessful in swaying Nintendo and eventually agreed to their terms. However Tengen worked on bypassing the NES lockout circuitry that would allow their unlicensed games to run by reverse engineering the lockout chip and cracking its program code, a cunning piece of engineering strategy, that ended in failure. Tengen then contacted the US copyright office requesting a copy of the lockout program for litigation against Nintendo, once the program code was theirs they created their own version of an NES lockout chip and the floodgates were opened on unlicensed Tengen NES development. Nintendo wouldn't take this sitting down and sued Tengen for breach of contract, eventually winning. Continual lawsuits over copyright issues eventually led to Tengen falling apart in the late 1990's however their games continue to be popular among NES gamers and collectors alike. Now on with the first Tengen game review.



Synopsis: Super Sprint is an NES port of the 1986 arcade game of the same name, which was the continuation of the classic Sprint series from the late 1970's. Gameplay in Super Sprint revolves around indy-style racing from a bird's eye perspective. No matter the number of human players there are always four cars in each four-lap race with player one controlling the yellow car and player two taking the wheel of the blue machine. If there is only one player the blue car is computer controlled as well as the white and red cars, which are always CPU drones. This is slightly different than the arcade version in which up to three people can play controlling a blue, red, or yellow car while a green car remains the permanent CPU drone. As the race progresses the cars can pick up randomly appearing bonus flags and randomly appearing wrenches. Picking up two wrenches (three in the arcade) allows you to upgrade either your car's top speed, acceleration, or traction. Additionally you can trade your wrenches for 3000 bonus points, in the arcade version this option gives you 1500 bonus points, 500 for each wrench. To progress to the next track you must finish in first place in a one player game or a human player must finish first in a two player game. Even if you do not finish first you may continue (you lose your wrenches and points but keep performance upgrades) and try your hand at the same

track again, you can continue twice and then it's game over.

Graphics: Not bad at all, Tengen made a valiant effort to port over as much of the arcade version as possible. The title screen is similar to its arcade counterpart using much the same artwork albeit dumbed down slightly to meet the NES hardware specs. The cars rotate smoothly when turning and track obstacles such as oil slicks and the tornado are what you would expect of an 8-bit version of an arcade title of this era. The green drone from the arcade version is replaced by a white drone but other than that everything is faithfully recreated keeping in mind the limitations of the NES color palette.

The screen that lets you select your starting track is nonexistent on the NES, which isn't a big deal since most people start on the easiest track in the arcade anyway. Of the eight original arcade tracks five make the jump over to the NES along with two unique to the NES version for a grand total of seven. The circuits continue to loop in order, adding cones after level 6 and barriers that raise and lower after level 13 as new hazards to deal with as the AI cars get faster and faster. These additional road hazards are not present in the arcade version, which simply continues to loop through its eight circuits until game over. The tracks from the arcade version that make their way to the NES are recreated for the most part with the exception of things like banked turns or jumps. While the jump shortcut of one track remains in the NES version, the cars don't get airborne like they do in the arcade; they simply drive through and over the barrier.

The jump physics are also why my favorite track from the arcade version is not present on the NES, which would be the track with the large open jump in the center. Additionally the complex track from the arcade is left behind, as is any track heavily dependent on the opening and closing barrier shortcuts. (I've always called them accordion shortcuts) To make up for the missing tracks the NES version features a figure eight type track as well as a twisty circuit with a large shortcut through the middle. One of the tracks from the arcade version that featured an accordion shortcut makes its way to the NES however it is devoid of the shortcut all together. While diving through the accordion shortcuts just before they slammed shut was one of the things that made the arcade version exciting and satisfying, one surprisingly doesn't lose much on the NES without them. There are also a number of slight animation changes such as when your car explodes. In the arcade version when your car explodes a recovery helicopter flies by and drops off a new one, this is not present in the NES version, probably due to graphical limitations. Instead, when your car blows up the player is presented with a little red explosion and the replacement car appears right where the original was destroyed. The bonus flags that randomly appear on the track fold open in the arcade version while in the NES version their point values just appear instantly, the wrenches remain the same yet are missing their shadowing detail on the NES.

Lastly the post race animation has been changed from showing all four cars to simply showing the winning car with a "Tengen Vision" signboard in the background. The driver in the car turns and gives a thumbs up, very similar to what your driver does when you drop a coin in at the continue screen of the arcade version. Also in the arcade version if the player was to come in fourth place he would be shown working on the wreckage of his car, if you lose on the NES version your car is simply shown at the "race again" and / or "game over" screen which also takes place in front of the "Tengen Vision" signboard.

Sound: While the cars don't have the same deep wail they have in the arcade version, the NES engine sound is passable without becoming too annoying. The sound effects from spinning out or picking up items are recreated well and overall the sound effects are pretty accurate to the arcade original. However the little musical tunes that play during the winner's circle sequence have been replaced by the same music as the song that plays during the title screen. In fact the only music in the NES version is what plays during the title sequence. A small gripe at best but I've always enjoyed the music clips in the arcade version, even if the arcade version didn't have a title theme.

Play Control: A steering wheel and an accelerator pedal controlled the arcade machines so the transition to a control pad and a button is a little different feeling but still manages to be easy to control. While the finesse of spinning and catching the steering wheel to zoom around the track like Mario Andretti doesn't transfer over to the NES, after a couple minutes of adjusting to using the control pad you'll be cornering like a pro. Control is super smooth and weaving around an obstacle and cutting off your rivals to take the lead quickly becomes just as entertaining as it was in the arcade. Collision detection is pretty good although it is possible to get hung up with the AI drones every now and again as they attempt to stick to their path, but this was present in the arcade version as well.

Final Verdict: Until the recently released arcade compilations on the next-gen systems this was simply the best arcade port of Super Sprint you could get for a home console. It's still a great way to lose a couple hours with a friend and while arcade perfect home versions have been released since, the NES version of Super Sprint is still its own beast with its different tracks and road obstacles. This was always my favorite Tengen NES title and nearly every weekend I had my mom rent it from the local video store until I had my own copy. After all these years Super Sprint is still entertaining on the NES, I suppose that's due to it being a port of what was an entertaining arcade game to begin with. However it took Tengen to bring it home on the NES and they did an excellent job.

"InsaneDavid" also runs a slowly growing gaming site at http://www.classicplastic.net/dvgi

Holiday Album Review: The 8bits of Christmas

by Mark Sabbatini

If there's any such thing as a "must-have" holiday album in the world of retrogaming, this is it. Especially since it's free.

"The 8bits of Christmas" is collection of eight compositions by "dedicated chiptune maniacs" performed on machines such as the Atari 2600, Commodore 64 and Nintendo Entertainment System. It's an ingenious and often hilarious listen, and while it admittedly can get highly annoying in a hurry the entire thing is only 18 minutes long so it's over before true misery sets in.

Generally the quality of the songs match the sophistication of the machines they were composed on. "Silent Night" for the original Nintendo Entertainment System and "Let It Snow" for the Gameboy sound like the background for "Mario's Christmas World." Dedicated VCS fans may be the only ones to fully appreciate the (oh, so relative) quality of "Up On The Housetop" Analogue synthesizer fans will find joy, briefly at least, in the VIC-20 composition "When A Child Is Bored," but it's a rather muddy piece far too heavy on bass. Also slightly disappointing is "The First Blip Blip Noel" on the Atari ST, arguable the most musically sophisticated computer here, with a fairly muffled-sounding synth/dance track arrangement that a number of older machines could probably match.

Most of the songs are recognizable and, perhaps not surprisingly, usually rely on some kind of techno beat as a backdrop. It's hardly likely to become an annual or family tree-decorating staple, but it's hard to imagine at least a few people on most gamers' shopping lists who won't appreciate it or that most people will find at least one or two songs an amusing diversion.

The album, along with other works by the performers, can be found at www.8bitpeoples.com/discography_gfx.php.

Controller Review: The Centurion

by Tom Zjaba

There are people who take criticism and ignore it and some will take it personally and lash back. But Jim Krych takes it to heart and tries to overcome it. His arcade controller, the Devastator has received its share of praise and also some criticism. Most people would be happy with the large amount of praise and overlook the criticism. Not Jim, he is on a mission to create the ultimate home controller for MAME and his newly released Centurion is as close as one can get to having the ultimate arcade controller.

If you read past issues of Retrogaming Times, you will find reviews of both the early Devastator controller and its far superior sequ0el, the Devastator II. Being an owner of a Devastator II, I can attest to the quality of the controller. It is one of the best built pieces of equipment you can find. It is also one of the most versatile controllers out there. Jim did everything he could to give you the arcade experience, from two joysticks to a trackball to a spinner. And with six buttons per controller, you can play just about every game. Add a button to the joystick for Battlezone and Discs of Tron and a few pinball buttons on the side and you have one controller that can fufill all your needs. One would think this is enough for any one controller, but a few reviewers found some flaws in the Devastator II and once again Jim took it to heart and set out to improve the stick.

After about 5 months, he did come up with an improved stick. And based on past experiences you would believe it would be called the Devastator III right? No, he decided to go with a new name and forgo all the brand name he has built up. I am not sure this is the smartest move as the Devastator brand name has stood for quality and that is hard to ignore. But one thing I will say is the new logo is very snazzy and looks very professional on the controller (I learned to call them arcade controllers and not joysticks as they are so much more than just a mere joystick). You may be asking yourself what is new this time and is it really worth it. I can answer that in one word....YES!

Let's not beat around the bush. The biggest difference is easily the new four way/eight way adapter. What this does is allows you to switch joystick one from four way for maze games like Pacman and platform games like Donkey Kong and have precise movements. Then you can easily switch it to eight way and enjoy games that need eight way movement like Robotron and Space Harrier. This is probably the biggest complaint I have with the Devastator II. I have learned to play four way games with an eight way controller, but it is still not precise like a four way controller is. No matter how hard you tried you will still occassionaly hit the wrong way and lose a life. Not anymore!

Another complaint that people had about the Devastator II was that it only had six buttons per joystick. Personally, I have yet to find a game that needs seven buttons. Heck, I have yet to find one that uses all six, but then I am not a big Neo Geo fan. But Jim realizes there is a segment of the population that

needed one more button per side and so Jim was more than happy to oblige. Now you have seven buttons per joystick. No more complaints about missing the necessary button #7. He even layed them out like a Neo Geo controller.

For pinball fans, Jim did not forget you. With my input, he added two more pinball buttons. Now you may wonder why a controller needs two pinball buttons per side for a total of four buttons. That is easy to answer, so you can nudge the machine Visual Pinball and PinMAME both allow you to nudge the table, just like in real life. While this only allows two ways to nudge (as opposed to the three they offer which are right, left and forward), it does help add some strategy to the game. Just remember that you can tilt those tables so don't get carried away.

One of the best features and one that I completely overlooked is the addition of mouse buttons. The trackball or spinner always worked as a mouse but until now you never had buttons for them. And for the most part, you really did not need them. But then I found a few games that took advantage of this. On the Activision Anthology, I found that Kaboom worked with the mouse and you used the mouse buttons to start the game. I found that a wireless mouse took care of this but it was a bit cumbersome. Now with the mouse buttons, I can achieve what before took the controller and a wireless mouse. No more dropping the mouse or other problems that arose. And with the handful of games that use this configuration including Kaboom, Circus Atari, Video Olympics and others, it is a more useful feature than you can imagine.

One last feature that I personally think is overkill but something that Jim is very proud of is his spinner. The old spinner would go for over 45 seconds and sometimes more on one turn. Now the spinner can go for over two minutes. I personally say it is for lazy Tempest players. The kind that just want to spin it once and hold down the fire button and talk on the phone or eat lunch. To each his own. Jim also says that he got rid of the slight wobble that was in the old spinner. Personally, I never noticed this but it is fixed anyway.

The last thing is the design. As I said before, the new logo is very professional and quite eye catching. The controller has a new paint job that is sorta a black with white speckles. It is supposed to hide dirt better. I like the plain black design of the Devastator II but it is fine. To each his own. The new controller also has a clear bottom so you can see the insides. It is neat but since the controller is so bulky, I doubt you will be turning it over very often.

Once again Jim improved his arcade controller. There is nothing reasonable that I can think of to add. I really think that all bases are covered and this stick will give you an authentic arcade experience with 90% or more of the games out there. There will always be a game like Sinistar that used a special controller but overall it will give you more than your money worth. For less than the price of one arcade machine (it costs $450.00), you get a controller that will last a lifetime and give you countless hours of enjoyment. You can look at the controller for yourself at http://www.treyonics.com/.

Tom Zjaba (Who is very satisfied with his Devastator II, though he would like to add those extra pinball buttons.) Visit his website, Tomorrow's Heroes at http://www.tomheroes.com/

Syntax Era: Atari Age

by Scott Jacobi

I don't know when I started collecting video game magazines. I suppose I never officially began, as most of what I possess today can be attributed to a pack rat mentality that prevented me from parting with anything video game related. To me, the magazines were more than a source of news, they were a way of virtually experiencing the games that I didn't yet own. By glancing at the screen shots, and reading about the strategies over and over again, I thought I could milk the essence of the game from the pages. As I got older, I started to see the magazines in a new light; as a chronological depiction of the evolution of games. I can look back at magazines that are beyond ten or even twenty years old now, and see where the games of today came from, and where I had been. And so I began my quest to fill in the holes of the sets currently in my possession, and obtain sets of magazine titles I had yet to even lay eyes upon. And now today I take pride in my fairly complete video game literature collection.

Quantities of vintage video game literature mimics the health of the industry itself. In 1981, out of the primordial ooze of Video magazine, dedicated to TV and VHS technologies came Electronic Games, and soon a few other titles followed. By 1983, there around six different titles in publication in America. Then shortly after the crash occurred, by 1984 only two or three were hanging on, and the flame flickered out for good in 1985. Enter the dark ages, a time when Nintendo was attempting to repave a road that was cracked and worn and it would take time before anyone would recognize that the resurgence of video games had officially begun. In 1988, video game magazines would return to the stands, and although the look and feel of the content would transform from underground hobbyist to overdeveloped website, editors have never looked away since.

So when Retrogaming Times Monthly was looking for new authors, I decider to share with its readers some of the knowledge that I have gained about these publications, and share some of the features I

have enjoyed most about this aspect of video game culture. Each month, I will examine a different publication, and I'm going to start it all with Atari Age.

It is personally appropriate that I begin with Atari Age. Atari Age is a magazine of many firsts for me. My first video game magazine subscription for one. My first love of reading anything from cover to cover multiple times. And my first heartbreak when that ill-fated twelfth issue never arrived. I ran to the mailbox for six months before I gave up hope of ever seeing another issue (I was nine at the time.) My original copy of the first issue was worn thin, torn, and ragged from the attention that I paid to it.

Atari Age ran for eleven issues, and was published bi-monthly. The first issue was a lean 16 pages, while the final issue clocked in at 36, more than double the original. From the beginning, it was edited by a man name Steve Morgenstern who, from what I can tell, decided to start an Atari fan club from his home in Philadelphia with a small leaflet publication that garnered enough attention from Atari to go mainstream. Atari fully supported the publication of the magazine and gave Atari Age exclusive news bits and content that would never be found anywhere else until a few months later. Subscription offers were included with the purchase of Atari game systems and cartridges. And exclusive Atari merchandise were offered in its pages, but more about that in a moment. The leaflets that preceded Atari Age are very rare, and I have never had the opportunity to examine one.

Atari Age primarily covered the Atari 2600, or VCS as it was first known. While the Atari 5200 was represented after it was released in the market, it averaged only 2 pages of coverage per issue. Beyond that, the only other Atari system coverage were occasional news bytes about the Atari line of computers, and Atari produced arcade games. Everything else was cover to cover 2600. Ultimately, Atari Age was a glorified advertisement for Atari games that arrived in your mail box every two months. No coverage of third party games would ever be found in its pages. Fortunately, there was more than enough Atari brand excitement to read about in each issue.

There were features that you could be sure were included with each issue. Announcements of new games that were due out shortly were originally printed with a flyer style typical of industry expos. Later on the magazine switched to a review column format with an occasional two page spread for big titles. There would be news bits covering the latest Atari happenings in the States and abroad, with reviews of new Atari products or arcade games set to be released. Each issue would contain a contest that would be themed after one of the hotter games at the time, offering fantastic first, second, and third prizes of Atari loot, and were often quite challenging to solve. There would always be letters from fellow reader and gamers discussing the latest hot topics. Even the famous Adventure dot secret was revealed right in the very first issue. And lastly, Atari Age would offer great exclusive Atari merchandise from its Clubhouse Store with every imaginable item that ranged from posters, jackets, frisbees, watches, and inflatable kites, to practical items like cartridge and system storage devices, joystick replacements, and occasionally, an exclusive Atari 2600 game that could not be purchased in stores (at the time) such as Crazy Climber, Atari Video Cube, and Quadrun. Two issues in particular contained an extended Christmas catalog of items that could be purchased through Atari Age.

In addition to those regular features, each issue contained bonus material. Early issues contained detailed examinations of the inside hardware of Atari systems and products. Issue 4, heralding the release of much praised Raiders of the Lost Ark and much maligned E.T., contained an interview with Steven Spielberg. Issue 6 had a heavy focus on sports to celebrate the release of the Realsports series of games. And Issue 9 sparked the beginnings of Atari Age's Video Game Masters competition that ran through the final three issues. The competition consisted of players buying a particular game being hyped in that issue and submitting photos of their best performance, the three games being Gravitar, Quadrun, and Battlezone. Due to the magazines abrupt discontinuation, no mention was ever made about the contestants or possible winners. There was a 1984 calander, and a full sized Phoenix poster. And many other announcements were made, such as the first three out of four Swordquests, and the Atari Force comics books which began as small manual sized cartridge pack-ins, and later developed in to a full sized comic book series (which I plan to cover in a future article.)

Now, if you'd like to get your hands on a few copies of these pieces of history, or perhaps the whole set, then much like other video game collections, eBay is the easiest place to start looking. If you're new to magazine collecting, pricing on a series of magazines, like comic books, are very hyperbolic. That is, the first issue usually commands a higher price tag than the remaining issues of the series put together. Since Atari Age was not sold on news stands, it's off many collectors' radars, and so the demand is not quite as high as, say, Electronic Games or Joystik. The first issue will command around $10 for average condition to $20 for mint condition. Subsequent issues will range between $3 to $7. If by some rare chance you encounter the entire set on eBay, expect to pay in the ball park of $30 for magazines in average condition, to upwards of $50 for all eleven issues in mint condition. You can find complete sets four or five times a year. Look for the presence of the Christmas Catalogs in issues Volume 1 Number 3 and Volume 2 Number 3, and the Phoenix poster in Volume 1 Number 6, and they have a tendancy to be pulled out and lost before the issues are sold.

For those of you who would simply prefer to peruse the pages via the web, you won't find a better resource out there than the website that shares the magazine's namesake, http://www.atariage.com/ where you can click on the link to the magazine scans. Aside from the glaring omission of two pages

from the first issue, the scans are of great quality, and fairly complete.

In conclusion, while not deep in inside industry perspective, you won't find another source with as detailed a look at Atari made 2600 games, and exclusive Atari paraphernalia anywhere else. Between the great quality of the screen captures, and the imaginative use of the Breakout rainbow theme as section headers, no true fan of old school Atari should be without these issue. Tune in next month when I examine a magazine with the most original and thorough look at the classic gaming era of arcade games, Joystik.

NEWSBYTES

•In case you forgot, Nintendo released four more games in the NES Classics line for the Game Boy Advance. The four games are *Zelda II: The Adventure of Link*, *Dr. Mario*, *Metroid*, and the Konami classic *Castlevania*. Each game retails for $19.99.
•Speaking of Konami, it seems no arcade giant can escape the plug-n-play "TV Games" craze, as now Komani is getting into the mix, courtesy of Majesco. Two "TV Arcade" units were recently released, each on working just like Jakks' TV Games units: just plug it into the TV and play. The first "TV Arcade" unit has six Konami classics: *Frogger*, *Rush 'N Attack*, *Time Pilot*, *Gyruss*, *Scramble*, and *Yie-Ar Kung Fu*. The second unit just has *Frogger*. Both TV Arcades retail for $19.99 and Majesco has more on the way.

Retrogaming Commercial Vault

by Adam King

Welcome back to the Commercial Vault. (What can I say? I'm running out of intros.) This month we take another look at Coleco. If you remember when Coleco was producing the Colecovision, they actually made games for their system and the Atari 2600 and Intellivision. 85% of the time, though, the 2600 and INTV ports would pale in comparison to the Colecovision port. Anyway this ad will feature two games that were released (or slated to be released) on all three systems.

Turbo
Our first ad is for the Coleco arcade port Turbo. Here we find a group of your people who receive the Coleco steering wheel and the Turbo game. One young woman decides to take the first drive. Once the wheel is hooked up, she takes an exciting drive through the Turbo game, with the rest behind her. However when her car crashes because of a oil slick, everyone laughs at her.

PICTURES:

These kids are about to take a ride.

You can't drive a car without the steering wheel.

"Watch me display my driving prowess."

Nothign live a dirve through the city.

"Tunnel! Duck!"

"Dang it! I crashed!"

Only Colecovision footage is shown throughout the ad, with the Atari and Intellivision versions listed as COMING SOON. Ports for the two system were planned, but never released.

Carnival
In this ad we find a pair of rich hunters, who are complainign that theres no more game to hunt. That is until their niece shows up with the Carnival game. They watch in awe as she takes out the game characters, and they praise her prowess in the end.

PICTURES:

"I don't want to hunt Wumpus anymore."

"Hey, Uncles, watch me shoot stuff on my Coleco."

"Look at her go. She's a better shooter than we are."

"Thatagirl, Daphney, teach those ducks a lesson."

"Let's take this TV and frame it."

Again only Colecovision footage is shown, with only glimpses of Atari and Intellivision gameplay near the end.

Just a reminder that this is your last month to get the Commercial Vault CD. On January 1, 2005, I'm going to stop selling the 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.

The Many Faces of . . . Quest for Quintana Roo

by Alan Hewston

I intended this to be another 20th anniversary tribute. My research from a few years ago told me that all versions were released in 1984, which still may be correct, but the Colecovision title screen clearly says 1983. Regardless of the exact release date, it's been roughly 20 years, so let's put our hands together and welcome the Many Faces of the "Quest for Quintana Roo", by Sunrise. This title is not that well known & likewise has not been reviewed much either. This is one of those games that I forced myself to review, having only casually played it at best. At a glance, it seemed to be a pointless game - you have a 90 second timer and if you don't solve whatever you are supposed to, then you lose a life. Three lives later and the game is over. Fortunately the adventurer in me helped me to take a closer look, and I must admit, you could call this a lost gem that deserves more credit - especially for the 2600.

With random puzzle solutions, every game is a unique adventure. You can get lots of mileage out of this game, especially with the passwords for levels 2 & 3. But of course if you are looking for an action filled, shoot'em up challenge, then this is not the "quest" for you. This review will not reveal any significant secrets, and I must admit that I am neither good enough, nor have the time to explore this game to its limit, but perhaps you do. Since the difficulty of the puzzle's peaks at level 3, where you have to get all 5 Map Rocks in the correct sequence, there's no reason to think that the game has an ending, it probably just continues on until you quit or die. A password for level 4 can be found on online, "8963", but alas this did not work on any version. Perhaps this is enough to suggest that there is no ending, but yet no way to start at any higher level either. But maybe I'm wrong and there is some ending level to reach. If there is, my money says it is level 122, since there are 120 possible solutions to level 3. My review should help you to understand how the temple is laid out, so if you want a little greater challenge then skip the next paragraph - the one beginning with "The Map". But, if you struggle to make any progress, or the game seems confusing, then please read that section before you giver up and bury this one in your treasure vault.

As usual, AtariAge.com comes through again with both the 2600 and 5200 versions of these manuals available online. Use these, plus my handy "Summary of Actions" chart below to learn any version. http://www.atariage.com/manual_html_page.html?SoftwareLabelID=653

"The Map". There is no map provided, and it is not too hard to figure out. But . . . just in case you get frustrated or want to speed things up, reading this section should help. It will in NO way take away from the strategy or the challenges of the puzzles. . . . . Each round of action (level) uses the basic same temple layout. Outside, you begin at the bottom (ground) floor of the temple which has no points of entry. When you exit the temple, you always end up on the ground floor as well. The ground floor is

the only means to get from the left hand side to the right hand side of the pyramid. Each side is unique, they are NOT connected & there are no secret passages. Pick a side and begin exploring, ultimately searching for the Map Vault. Half the rooms are on the left and half the rooms are on the right, with the layout as follows. On each side of the pyramid, there is one entry point on each floor, 10 overall for the pyramid. Each of the 10 entry points leads to a unique sequence of chambers (rooms), making a total of 30 rooms for skill level one. The map layout is always the same where the top most, fifth floor entry leads to a series (noted as "columns of rooms" in the manual) of 5 connected rooms. The fourth floor up leads to a series of 4 rooms, third floor to 3 rooms etc. Once in a column, you must go through all the rooms in sequence and get out within 90 seconds. This becomes increasingly difficult in levels 2 (& 3) where one (& two) additional rooms are added to every column of rooms. Thus level one has a left and right hand set of columns that have 5 rooms, 4 rooms . . . 1 room = 30 total rooms. Level two has one more room on each of the 10 columns for a total of 40 rooms . . . and level three a total of 50 rooms. The 5200 box cover says "explore 50 rooms" which confirms my math. The passwords to begin game play at levels 2 & 3 are "1830" & "8817". Once you understand the layout, you can more easily keep track of where things are. Level one you should be able to play without using a map, but plan on making a map (of where every item is) if you go further.

OK, time to continue reading if you skipped the map info above. You are Yucatan Sam and must conquer one level of the game at a time, then try the next. If you do have many hours to play, then by all means see if you can conquer multiple levels all in the same game. But due to a programming error, scoring is irrelevant unless you're playing the CV version. They did that one first, and it was correct, but subsequent ports forgot to limit points earned for killing spiders and snakes. To impress your friends or the folks at Twingalaxies.com, don't send in a score, rather show them your VCR tape and how quickly you can complete a level, or at least capture a screen shot of the end of each level (where the password is displayed). For CV players, start at level one every time and fire away and uncover ALL those treasures to amass as high a score as possible. Another challenge between friends would be to play simultaneously on 2 machines, or use a timer to see who can beet a level the fastest.

Arcade: None
All home versions by Sunrise - with no programming credits found anywhere.

•Atari 2600 '84 (also later released by Telegames)
•Atari 5200 '84
•Atari 8 bit '84
•Colecovision '83
•Commodore 64 '84

Rumor Mill: 7800 by Telegames, and a cart version was planned for the Atari XE

Here's my limited collage of Quintana Roo Faces. Too bad I traded away my 2600 box.

Home Version Similarities: Except those in <> all home versions have: an unlimited pause; random puzzle solutions making every game unique; a choice of starting at (skill) levels 2 or 3 <2600> by using passwords; passwords are the same on all systems; every room contains one hidden vault, of which the contents are unique every game & level; each room has a randomly located secret rock which when chiseled will open the vault door; on-screen timers display both your air supply and (when necessary) poison time remaining; the on-screen display includes the score, number of lives, # of bullets and # of acid flasks; shoot your bullets left or right to vanquish the spiders and snakes inside; throw acid flasks left and right to eliminate the mummy, and if near the wall will open any vault door; a limit of 5 flasks of acid can be collected, the rest will be wasted; 5 bullets are provided for each trip into the pyramid; AFAIK only 2 spiders and/or snakes can be in the rooms, but if eliminated will eventually be replaced; the Geiger Counter <2600> determines if a Map Rock or Map Vault is present in the current room or one above/below; solving the correct colored sequence of the Map Rocks reveals the password to start at the next level; there are 3, 4 then 5 Map Rocks required to solve levels 1, 2 and 3+; map rocks are hidden to start each level and after you find them, if not used in the correct sequence they will disappear and be re-sealed (hidden) in a random (vacant) vault; fortunately Map Rocks remain in the room that you drop them, so all 5 can be accumulated and placed in the Map Vault room; points are earned for killing enemies, opening vaults, collecting treasures & using correct Map Rocks; poor programming makes scoring points unlimited so they are essentially meaningless except on the CV where there are not unlimited; the outside ground level is a 2-dimensional <2600> surface so you can move in all 4 diagonal directions to go around the snakes; snakes can move or climb in any direction, anywhere; duck <2600> to avoid the moon god's wrath; a warning timer is heard when you are bitten by a snake or spider <CV, C64>, and also when you have 10 seconds of air remaining; being bitten repeatedly will make the poison timer decrease rapidly <2600>; tools must be stowed prior to exiting a room; the chute screen <2600> has no purpose other than to provide more game depth - it lengthens the game, but takes no time off the timers.

Overlays: No overlays were provided for this game, making for an opportunity for someone who is

artistic to make them for the 5200, CV and even the C64. Make them and send them to us and we'll give you credit and post them here. In place of an overlay, here is my summary guide for all systems.

Summary of Actions	2600	5200	8-Bit	CV	C64
Pause	B/W & Color	Pause	Option	* and #	Run/Stop
Select Gun	Game Select	1	1	1	F1
Select Acid Flask	Game Select	2	2	2	F3
Select Chisel	Game Select	3	3	3	F5
Select Geiger Counter	N/A	4	4	4	F7
Select Nothing / Drop	Game Select	5	Space	5	Right Shift
Pick Up Map Rock	Fire	6	5	6	Space
Enter Temple / Use Item	Fire	Bottom Fire	Fire	Left Fire	Fire
Exit / Duck / Pick up item	Fire	Bottom Fire	Fire	Right Fire	Fire

Have Nots: Atari 2600 (39)
My first reaction was too bad they couldn't have used a joystick plus a control pad or configured the controls for 2 joysticks like Raiders of the Lost Ark. Gameplay is very impressive (8) and deep, missing only the ability to duck (not a big deal) and the Geiger Counter (GC). Having the GC or not makes it a different type of game to play - strategy wise. Each level can be completed much faster using a GC, but I'd prefer if the GC was an item to be found or perhaps given to you at the start of level 2. On other versions, by level 3 you're completely relying on the GC to survive. There's just no time to go searching everywhere, especially since points don't really matter on most versions. There are also no spiders on the 2600, but since snakes & spiders are identical in gameplay - there's no penalty here. Addictiveness is enjoyable (8) and this is the easiest version to learn and get going on. Even better, the 2600 has the fastest on-screen movement, and due to the graphics limitation of no chute screen, the game is never slowed down there either. So for a level 1 quest, I'd suggest playing the 2600, but in the long run, with no way to start at levels 2 and 3 (despite the password being given at the end of the level), if you just want to play level 2 or 3, then try a different version. Graphics are very good (7) with lots of color, all 50 rooms are included, and there's some animation as well. Most noticeably missing is any detail - not much to see in any room and our hero is blocky and single colored. He changes color based upon what object he has. The simplicity of one color makes it quite easy to instantly tell what object Sam has at any time. As for on-screen action. There is not too much on any version. Sound is pretty good (7) with all the effects, but they are a little weak and there's less music than the rest. The most important audio element in the game (IMHO), and one not found on the original CV version is an audio alarm when you have become poisoned. The CV & C64 both lost a point for omitting this most critical element. Controls score a (9). This setup is the simplest and I think you'll agree it is the best for a beginner. The motion/control both outside and inside the temple are best on this version, hands down. Likewise, always knowing what item you have active leads to fewer controls mistakes. But in the long run, constantly toggling the "game select" switch is tedious, and probably not a good idea. It works, but I'd suggest playing this on a 2600 Jr. which is easier to toggle and puts less wear on the system, not to mention less shaking which might interrupt the power. The 2600 Sunrise cart is the rarest cart on any system, but the Telegames re-release is not too hard to find.

Have Nots: Atari 5200 (40)
My first reaction was other than controls, this version is identical to its 8-Bit cousin. Although not too rare, I do not have this cart, and the multi-cart version locks up on me after only a couple minutes of play. Everything but the controls are scored identically - see below for those scores. The Controls require the keypad to play, thus you cannot avoid using a standard 5200 or trak-ball controller. Unfortunately the Trak-ball does not work and I had no luck combining that with the Masterplay Interface. I am probably generous in scoring this a 7 using standard 5200 controllers on such a controls-intensive game.

Silver Medal: Atari 8 bit & Commodore 64 (42)
The C64 has the nicer keyboard choices and better graphics making it easier to tell what item you are holding. But the C64 has glitches that should have been fixed, mainly the sluggish motion when climbing stairs, poor collision detection, and the missing audio warning when poisoned. My scoring resulted in yet another tie, but the C64's frustrating problems may outweigh its enhancements.

Commodore 64: My first reaction was how did they miss the poor collision detection in play testing? Bullets pass right through the enemies. The Gameplay is great (9), with a lot of depth and no elements missing. The Addictiveness is very fun (8), but has been decreased due to the unlimited scoring and poor collision detection. Graphics are superb (9), with some animation, nice color and the best detail (specifically identifying what item you carry). The 3-D look is not as effective as the CV. Sound is very good (7), but a point was deducted for missing the audio alarm when poisoned. Controls score a (9). Although easier to use the console buttons than the 2600, the complexity is an issue for all versions and the diagonals are really hard to work. Found on disk (and maybe cassette) only and seems to be pretty rare at that.

Atari 8 Bit: My first reaction was why fix some things, but yet not match keyboard commands with the 5200 and CV. The choice of the "option" key for the pause is careless - if you miss it by a little bit - you've just reset the game. Dooh! Gameplay is great (9), same as C64. Addictiveness is very fun (8),

but again we have the unlimited scoring. Graphics are beautiful (8) with good color, 3-D look and animation, but the detail, while better than the 2600 is not done well - and items are not very distinct. Sound is sharp (8) ands the best with nothing missing. Controls score a (9), and by a narrow margin may be the best, but they are still complex and you'll have some minor glitches on the stairs. The game is on disk only, but a cart shows up on the Digital Press Rumor mill.

Gold Medal: Colecovison (43)
My first reaction was this version clearly came out first. Subsequent ports got almost everything exact with the only SNAFU being the unlimited scoring glitch. Gameplay is fantastic (9) with nothing missing. Despite the deep concept and great programming to match, I'm guessing that they rushed this out the door just before the crash. All versions could have had 5 start level options and more gradual increase in their difficulty. A 4 story pyramid with 8 entrances and then 20 rooms in level 1, then 28, 36, 44 & 52 rooms in levels 2, 3, 4 & 5 respectfully. Addictiveness is wonderful (9), clearly the version to continue playing after you've conquered the first 3 levels. At least here you can still play to get a high score. Graphics are superb (9), the best. Sound is very good (7), with all the effects. No version has a lot of music and the CV takes a penalty for lacking the poison audio warning. Controls scored a (9), and despite the best layout, are the hardest to learn and most frustrating to control - especially the stairs with the CV knob. But having all the controls combined into one controller really does help & surely CV die-hards would score this a 10. I had the most success using the Amiga Stick. Now if they'd have combined the fire buttons into one (like all the others) and allowed both controllers to work simultaneously, I'd use both an Atari stick to move and a CV controller for everything else and probably score this a 10 as well. Regardless, this is the best classic version, and the hardest cart to find.

This review was written while thinking about that song "I Don't Like Spiders and Snakes". ;-) Come back next month for our biggest collection of "Faces" to date, in the Many, Many Faces of Centipede - showing up on just about every system we cover here. Contact Alan Hewston at: Hewston95@NOSPAMstratos.net or visit the Many Faces of site: http://my.stratos.net/~hewston95/RT/ManyFacesHome.htm

The TI-99/4A Arcade

by Bryan Roppolo

After reading the request in last month's issue of Retrogaming Times Monthly for more writers, I decided to get into the action and write my own column. This new section, called The TI-99/4A Arcade, will focus on video game cartridges for the TI-99/4A system that have not already been covered in Alan Hewston's "The Many Faces of...". The TI has a number of arcade translations that never made their way to other systems, and that's where I'll be starting for the grand opening of the TI-99/4A Arcade. Each month will include 3 reviews, and this months 3 cartridges are Treasure Island, Blasto, and Hustle.

Treasure Island (1983 Data East) - Port of 1981 Data East Arcade

This is a Japanese arcade game that I personally had never heard about until playing it on the TI-99/4A. In the game, you take the role of an island explorer who must get to the top of Treasure Island before it becomes completely submerged in water, and along the way avoid monsters, gorillas, poisonous skulls, and boulders while picking up scattered treasure for points. Your only line of defense is an unlimited supply of rocks which may be hurled at the monsters and gorillas that are on your tail. The game uses an interesting concept where the island constantly is sinking downward into the water while you try to make your way to the top. It's because of this vertical scrolling that the game becomes more challenging and interesting than a simple one-screen video game.

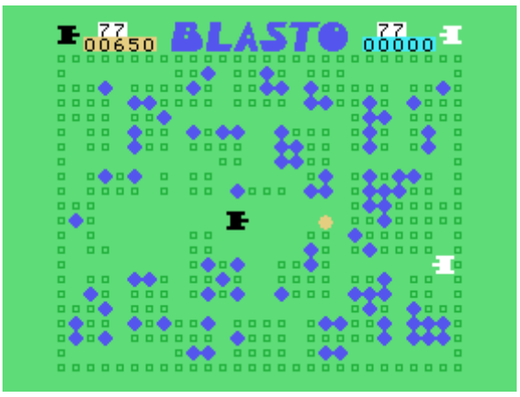
You start out with 5 explorers, and in a matter of seconds the island will start to sink with your only hope for survival being to head for higher ground. However, getting to higher ground is not as easy as it sounds! This is because you can only move on the white paths that lead up and across the island, and sometimes these paths are blocked by poisonous skulls that when touched send your explorer head first into the water below. Therefore, you must choose your way carefully or will be forced to turn around and find another way up the island, and in this game every second counts as the water is always close behind. It's also important to note that sometimes there are paths which are simply dead-ends, and you can't see they don't go anywhere since the screen has not scrolled up far enough. Not being able to see where all the paths go is what makes the game very challenging at times.

In addition to the challenge of selecting the correct paths to take, there is also the challenge of the caves. These caves exist to provide a quick way to climb up the island, but sometimes can also act as traps. If you choose to enter a cave, your explorer will randomly exit from another cave somewhere on

the screen. Sometimes this can be a good thing, especially if the water is so close behind you that your only option is to enter a cave and hopefully come out farther up on the screen. But you have to be careful since boulders will randomly roll out of caves and monsters/gorillas use the caves quite frequently to get around the island. If you happen to enter or exit from a cave that a boulder or beast is also entering/exiting from...you'll fall to your death. Of course, it goes without saying that you must also avoid the beasts and boulders outside of the caves, as they too travel on the white paths that you are confined to (boulders can only travel downwards on the paths, while monsters/gorillas can travel both up or down depending on where you are in relation to them). To help battle the monsters/gorillas you can use your endless supply of rocks which can be thrown down towards any oncoming beasts. However, trying to hit an enemy can be hard since the rocks can only travel down the white paths, and therefore the monster/gorilla must be below you when you drop the rock in order for a hit.

Besides the monsters, gorillas, poisonous skulls, caves, and boulders there are of course...the treasures! On your safari to the top of the island, there are ruby lamps and golden crowns scattered about randomly (and usually placed in locations that are kind of off to the side, making you have to go off the main path to get them as is the case with the golden crown in the top right of the screen shot). However, you are not required to pick up these treasures but they will increase your score dramatically if you do. Once you manage to reach the top of the island there will be a little house, or what appears to be a house, and the explorer will wave his arms while music plays in the background, signaling the end of the level. Overall, I like this game quite a bit, but personally find the first 3 levels too easy. Once you reach the 4th level, things get hard pretty quickly. If the game had more play options (such as a difficulty setting) then I would have given Treasure Island a higher score. Also, just to add some challenge to the first levels there should be a set amount of treasures you are required to collect before being able to pass on to the next round. But, even with these elements missing from the game it still gets a fairly high score here simply because it's fun to play, especially once the challenge picks up on the 4th level. Try your hand at Treasure Island and see if you can save the explorer from drowning in a sea of misery!
Grade: B

Blasto (1980 Milton Bradley) - Port of 1978 Sega/Gremlin Arcade



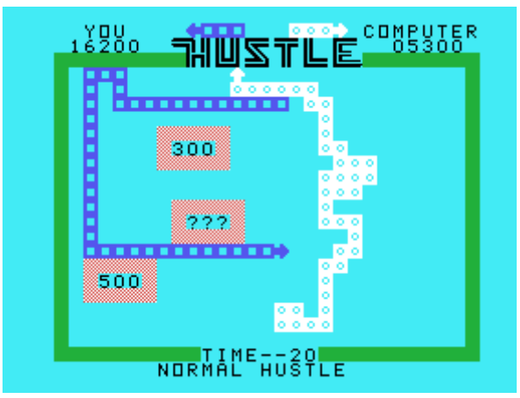
This is an awesome arcade translation on the TI! Through out my years collecting, I've never once ran across a negative review for this game (and rightly so). One thing to understand about Blasto is that there are really two games in one. In the one-player mode, you control a black tank that must clear a mine field by shooting the blue mines before times runs out. Then there is a two-player game where you can either attempt to clear more mines than your opponent, or go into a head-to-head battle where the victor is whoever shoots the other tank more (and therefore ends up with the most points). Both variations are fun to play, but in my opinion the mine field is more unique and fun, especially with two players as it gets quite intense!

One of the best features in Blasto is the wide variety of options, which is a common feature in all TI-99/4A Milton Bradley cartridges. The player(s) can choose the number of players, game speed, amount of tank trails, tank motion, battleground, and mine density. With all these options, it's always fun to play the game again and again with a different set of values just to see all the various games available and difficulty levels. After you have your options configured you are then presented with a green mine field (like the one in the screen shot to the right), where the blue diamonds are the mines that you must blow up by shooting them with your yellow tank shell. At this point you might be saying, "okay so this is just another shoot 'em up...what makes the game so special?", the answer to that is the way in which the mines explode. Instead simply having to shoot at each mine individually, if you shoot at a group of mines close enough to each other they will cause a chain reaction when hit. Therefore, in order to get the highest score in Blasto a strategy must be employed where you shoot a group of mines in such a way that you create the biggest chain reaction. The bigger the chain reaction, the more mines you will be able to hit before time runs out. Trust me, on higher levels of play it's a must that you think quickly and plan the correct shot. For if you simply go around shooting the mines you will end up isolating some of them, which will leave you with no other option but to shoot them directly and there is not enough time to shoot that many single mines. Also be warned that if you are too close to a mine when it explodes (inside the blast zone), your tank will spin out for a few seconds. In Blasto, every second is extremely crucial so staying a good distance from each mine is essential.

I'm not going to spend too much time talking about the head-to-head combat variation of the game, since it's pretty self-expanatory. One player takes control of the black tank and someone else the white tank, and instead of shooting mines you have to shoot at the opposing player. Whoever ends up hitting the opponent more wins the game. Also, there are black walls that act as obstacles just to add to the challenge a bit. Both the head-to-head and mine field versions of the game are a "blast" to play, especially if you are a fan of the ever famous Atari 2600 Combat.

Grade: A+

Hustle (1980 Milton Bradley) - Port of 1977 Gremlin Arcade



This game is part of the same Milton Bradley series as Blasto, but never did seem to get as much attention as its counterpart. However, that does not mean the game is not as good as Blasto! In my opinion, it's really a tossup as to which title should win out as both are extremely fun games to play. How Milton Bradley knew enough about this arcade game to license it for the TI-99/4A is beyond me, but it is no doubt an excellent translation of a great (but what seems to be largely unknown) arcade game.

As you can tell by the screen shot to the right, there are two snakes on the battlefield. In the game, you control a blue snake and try to gobble more points than the white (Computer or Player #2) snake. Whoever has the most points when time runs out, is the winner of the round. While it may sound easy, there is a catch! The more points that you accumulate...The fatter (longer) you get! This makes it harder to maneuver your snake since you have to avoid crashing into yourself once you become so long (just look at the white snake in the screen shot, he almost got stuck between his body and my blue snake's body!). There are also some nice features which add even more challenge to the game, such as the fact that the points could decrease or increase (depending on the game you select) in value the longer you take to gobble them up. Also, after a few seconds the boxes of points will disappear if you are not fast enough. Then there are the boxes marked "???" which either could add points to your score or, believe it or not, add to your opponents score! So it's always a gamble as to who will get the points regardless of which snake actually gets to the box first. So if you're in a tight game and near the end of the round, you might want to consider avoiding the question mark boxes since they could actually do you in so to speak.

As with Blasto, and most other Milton Bradley TI-99/4A games, Hustle is loaded with variations and options. There are way too many available in the game to go into detail, so here's a rough description on what you get with the game. The first option you have in Hustle is for a one-player or two-player game. In one-player mode you have the option to play the game as "Normal", "Countdown", or "Countup". The Normal version of the game is when the points each box is worth does not increase or decrease depending on the length of time it takes for you to get to the box. The Countdown variation means the longer it takes you to get to a box, the less points it is worth, and Countup is exactly the opposite (which actually can be quite hard since you sometimes might want to risk waiting for a box to go up in value before eating it, and in the time you are waiting the opponent snake might get to it or you could end up crashing into your tail if you are really long). Now in the two-player version things really get interesting! You can either play the normal game of Hustle with the same variations as mentioned above for one-player, or you can play Snakefight or Blockade. In Snakefight each of the snakes stay only 2-blocks in length regardless of how much they eat, and in Blockade the snakes continuously keep getting longer and longer with the goal being to enclose your opponent until he finally crashes into your tail or his.

Wow, with all these options it's no wonder this game is such a blast to play! My recommendation is to invite a friend over to your house for a sleep over and challenge him to a game of Hustle, because with all these variations you might be pulling an all-nighter.
Grade: A

For more reviews, graphics, and information on TI-99/4A video game cartridges stop by the TI-99/4A Videogame House at <http://www.videogamehouse.net/>. This site is run by a staff of TI-99/4A enthusiasts, including Bryan Roppolo himself and has been responsible for finding unreleased TI-99/4A video game cartridges such as Lobster Bay.

Penguin Games For A Midsummers's Eve

by Mark Sabbatini

Ah, the holiday season. A chance to bask in the nonstop summer sun, feast on seafood and watch visitors bumble about haplessly. What could possibly go wrong?

Well, there's getting eaten by a walrus. Or shot by a mutant Windows 95 logo from outer space.

Northerners might spend their short December days obsessed with trips to overcrowded malls, but it's midsummer for inhabitants of the extreme southern continent of Antarctica. It's also when a few thousand scientists and other workers are busy conducting research at various international stations. As a former worker whose spouse is still down there this time of year, my thoughts naturally tend to drift south from my home in Alaska.

Luckily, at least one form of penguin lust is remarkably easy to satisfy (no, not that one, ye demons of

impure thought) thanks to a surprising variety of games taking place in the southern polarsphere. Realism isn't always their strongest suit, such as the common error of putting Arctic polar bears at the wrong end of the world (since space aliens are also there I suppose nitpicking scientific details is petty), but most score high on the inevitable "cuteness" factor that no doubt causes programmers to cast the flightless fowl in leading roles.

The following are some of the more successful or otherwise noteworthy penguin games for classic arcade and computer consoles, with an emphasis on those that are easy to find and play either online or as a download. All are free and, in the interest of including a few extra titles of note, some go beyond the strict RTM era of the '70s and early '80s to include platforms such as the 8-bit NES and conversions for modern machines. They're listed roughly in order of original appearance, with grades representing a collective rating for the original and any conversions.

Pengo (multiple platforms; B+)
Not much to explain here; almost anyone reading this is likely to know Pengo was the basic unit of money in Hungary until it was replaced by the forint in 1946.

OK, maybe not. But it does make one wonder if there's any connection to the world's most successful penguin-themed game that debuted as a coin-op machine in 1982 and, despite only middling success, has been ported in numerous forms to pretty much every gaming platform since.

The single-screen game involves kicking ice blocks around, with the general goal of using them to squash waves of Sno-Bees intent on your destruction. This involves some Pac-Man-like navigating, with some elements from other classic games like Dig Dug and Sokoban tossed in. As with most addictive classic games with simple themes, there are a few complexities that greatly boost playability. One is the ability to temporarily disable the bees by lining up three "diamond" blocks in a row. Another is "freezing" enemies by kicking walls. Cute cartoonish graphics and a rendition of the tune "Popcorn" in the background no doubt added to the charm for many gamers.

There are so many clones of this game, ranging from the Sinclair ZX-81 to modern Windows and mobile phone versions, it's impossible to begin to list them all here. But as a rule of thumb, the simpler versions staying close to the original are superior to those that try to get flashy.

Among "official" home conversions, those for the Atari 2600 and 8-bit computers score highly (a RTM "Many Faces Of" column gives the 2600 version a silver medal score of 41 and the 8-bit versions a gold medal score of 42). Disappointments include a Commodore 64 version with faulty gameplay and a rare Atari clone called Peter Penguin with terrible graphics, poor enemy intelligence and occasional untimely deaths due to poor collision detection (mentioned here since it seems to be a collector's item). A couple of pretty good and widely posted online games, Ai Pengo and Iceblox, allow players to either discover or relive the experience.

Antarctic Adventure (Colecovision, NES, MSX; B-)
This is at heart a 3D-style driving game with penguins and walruses instead of cars and rocks. As a driving game it almost certainly would get slammed as awful, but the whole cuteness factor of making this an Antarctic quest made it popular enough to earn ports beyond the Colecovision.

Your flightless fowl's ultimate goal is the South Pole, which he reaches by traveling to various base stations in 10 stages. He has to dodge or jump over ice holes and walruses, while eating fish that fly out of the ice holes for extra points. Collisions or falls slow him down, but beating the clock determines ultimate success. It's cute and decent in pace, but 1) the courses are very straightforward compared to almost any racing game, 2) control over your penguin is very limited compared to the shifting/braking/steering of most drivers and 3) the short snippet of background music gets really annoying quickly.

The game is easily found for all of the platforms mentioned, and can be played online through some java emulators, including an MSX version at www.classicgaming.com/jmsxemu/.

Thin Ice (Intellivision; B)
A Qix-like game, where Duncan the Penguin dunks other penguins by skating circles around them. Feasting on shrimp speeds him up, but big bad seals and polar bears are his deadly enemies. The graphics are average for an Intellivision title, and the rather repetitive tune is at least kind of catchy - someone actually made a MIDI version of it and posted it as part of a collection of historic video game music at a site dedicated to such tunes.

Eskimo Eddie (Sinclair Spectrum; C-)
A bit different in that the player's task is to protect penguins from polar bears by navigating a Frogger-style screen to his fowl friend. A second screen requires the penguin to protect himself against snowbugs by pushing ice blocks into their path. It's a good concept, but poorly executed in both gameplay and graphics.

Penguin Towers (Commodore 64; incomplete)

A variation on the "bomber" puzzler where the player places bombs in a maze, trying to trap and kill enemies. In this case the player is a parrot and penguins are sworn enemies. Got good reviews in its day, but I haven't played it myself so I can't grade it.

Parodius (multiple platforms; B-)
A fairly average 2D scrolling space shooter that began life either as an arcade or 8-bit Nintendo (NES and Gameboy) title before being ported in somewhat altered versions to more advanced platforms such as the Playstation One and Sega Saturn. It apparently stands for Parody of Gradius, which it is modeled after. Various odd space creatures - including penguins tossing bubbles or eggs or something - attack the player's ship, which can collect power-ups to aid its journey. Having only played the Gameboy and NES versions, I rate the former as superior even though it's in black and white, due to cleaner graphics and smoother gameplay. Very good in the limited realm of penguin games, but there's way too many shooters in the world for this to truly stand out.

Attack Of The Mutant Penguins (Atari 7800; Amiga; incomplete)
Here's a bizarre thought: A game fighting mutual penguin lookalikes from outer space may be more realistic than most games on this list.

The reason: The main objective is clubbing aliens masquerading as penguins into submission using a bat or frying pan, exactly what stranded explorers such as Shackleton found themselves doing a century ago when they ran out of food and were forced to eat the real birds to survive (most agree they tasted awful). But this is the modern age and the goals are more dire - fail here and all of Earth falls victim to the invaders.

There are a ton of bonus weapons, two-player options, and what appears to be highly intriguing gameplay and graphics. I say apparently because, alas, I haven't had a chance to play it so far - only read descriptions and reviews of it - hence the lack of a grade. But it's certainly high on my "to-do" gaming list and, given the dearth of Atari 7800 software, this looks like as good a title for the console as most.

Penguin Wars (Gameboy, NES; C+)
Dodgeball of a sort comes to the animal kingdom. You select one of several creatures, then fire balls across a court at your nemesis, trying to stick him with more more balls than you before the timer runs out. It's fast and fun for a few games at a time, but the Gameboy version is slow and gets monotonous after a few rounds. The NES version (called Penguin Kun Wars) has more variety to its playfields and better overall playability.

Penguin Land (Gameboy, Sega Master System, mobile; B-)
An arcade puzzler deemed interesting enough to be ported to modern day cell phones, this "down scrolled" (instead of "side scrolled") requires a penguin named Overbite to return eggs to its mother, who happens to be at the bottom of a deep cavern. Getting there requires pecking holes in layers of ice and pushing the egg into them, avoiding long falls and enemy creatures such as bears that will crack the egg. Fun and challenging, if a little lacking in depth, and would be an ideal mobile pastime if the controls were better.

PC Invaders (Atari 2600; C)
This is a graphics hack of Space Invaders on the Atari 2600, but earns a mention since it scores reasonably well on the cuteness scale and there aren't exactly a ton of VCS penguin games. The player's ship is replaced by a penguin, which shoots computer icons such as the Windows logo and a mouse pointer. Linux fans will love it, but it would score higher (for me anyhow) if it featured more natural enemies like walruses, explorers and egg-stealing birds.

Pengo Circus (Java; C-)
Think "Pengo" and "Circus Atari" and you'll get the idea of this online game. You control a see-saw with a pair of penguins that take turns popping fish. It's fun for a few games, but graphics are very crude for a modern computer game.

Super Tux (PC, Mac, Linux; B)
This is as unapologetic clone of Super Mario Brothers as they come, but it's a quality rendition, free and comes with a level editor. Gameplay is very similar to the original 8-bit Mario version in terms of power-ups and level design, so players who have outgrown that breed of platform games will likely find this unsatisfying unless they have a thing for penguins.

Polar Rescue (Java; B)
Another polished platformer, this time playable on Web browsers. More unique than Super Tux and the action isn't limited to side scrolling, but it's a long way from being something gamers haven't seen before. Graphics are very good, if a little inconsistent, sound is impressive for an online game and it's easy to learn while presenting a decent challenge.

Cross Section (Java; B-)
Pretty good for an online platform game, but below the best. Players use a slightly unusual six-key

layout to navigate their penguin through scrolling worlds, avoiding hazards like spiders and collecting fruit for bonus points along the way. It's a bit slow and shallow, but on-screen help guides makes this an easy game to play in a hurry.

Tux On The Run (Java; C-)
This widely available game is a tame platformer compared to the others above, perhaps not unexpected since I believe it was the first of this genre to appear online. Levels are comparatively short and simple, and the controls and other gameplay elements are generally subpar.

HONORABLE MENTIONS

There's a large number of free penguin games with no pretense of retrogaming, thanks largely to the Linux operating system's use of a waterfowl named Tux as its official mascot. It's also no surprise the games - all free, of course - are among the best written, given the passionate devotion users have for the operating system. Many have been ported to Windows and/or the Mac. A quick rundown of some:

Tux Racer (Linux, Windows, Mac), a first-rate 3D snowboarding-style game starring a penguin on its belly instead of a thrasher on the slopes; TuxKart (Linux, Windows, Mac), a 3D racing game of similarly high quality; Pingus, a Lemmings-like game (Linux, Windows); Tux Typing, a typing tutor (Linux); Black Penguin (Linux, Windows), a Qbert-type game with rather crude graphics; Super Ice Qube Hopper, another Q-bert knockoff (Windows); Defendguin (Linux), a Defender clone with penguins instead of humanoids to protect; and TuxPuck (Linux, Mac, Windows), an air hockey game similar to the old Mac hit Shufflepuck.

Videogame Fan Fiction

Reported by Alan Hewston

This is a new concept, and may still be unique. It's not every day that someone takes one of our classic video game giants and turns it into a story.

It's based on the classic game Gyruss and is entitled . . .

"From Neptune to Earth"
by David Cuciz & James Krych

The Story of the 357th JMFAS
(Joint Military Forces Attack Squadron)
Most Highly Decorated Unit of the Ideoclan War

This story is still work in progress, with a couple more chapters to go. The authors are asking for your artwork and other graphic contributions to be added to their efforts. You get no royalties, but a chance to show off and get credit for your artistry and love of videogames. Expect to enjoy the attention to scientific detail and the problems and challenges of interstellar travel and space warfare. You'll quickly realize the writers' have military experience which adds a lot more realism to the story. You may recognize the name Jim Krych a former Retrogaming Times writer. To see their work to date, check them out at:

http://www.gooddealgames.com/Fan_Fiction.htm

I'll report back in a few months when their story is completed. Good job so far Jim and David

Game Over

Wow, a very large issue this month! I guess all videogame magazines grow in size around the holidays. We hope you enjoyed this month's issue, and you can be sure we have plenty more next month. Until then we wish you and yours happy holidays.

- ***Adam King***, Chief Editor

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