Retrogaming Times Monthly

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Attract Mode

by Scott Jacobi

Short but sweet this month. I wanted to announce and brand new member of the RTM announcement team. Please welcome Video Game Evolution, or VGEvo for short. Do the names Trickman Terry and Sushi X mean anything to you? Well they should. Anyone who read gaming magazines in the late 80s, early 90s surely picked up an Electronic Gaming Monthly or two with there signature reviews and previews. Well, EGM may have gone the way of "teh suck," but if you think Trickman and Sushi are out of the game, you'd be dead wrong. They are back in action, and launched VGEvo on June 9th of 2007.

What is VGEvo? Basically, it's a hub for all things video games from the beginning to now. They are a gaming portal that houses a plethora of information; sort of a one-stop shop for gaming where people can come in, look around and branch out from there. Through cross communities, promotion and social networking, their goal is to do everything they can to help drive traffic to the best gaming has to offer. The site sports forums, a chatbox, user blogs, in-house articles, photo albums, contests, flash arcade, news feeds, classifieds, gaming clans, and their own VGEvo podcast network. They are constantly adding features and are expanding with new users signing up every day.

As different as Build Your Own Arcade Controls is from Atari Age, VGEvo offers yet another dimension of video game fandom to our readers, and I invite you to check them out. The second bit of news I have comes from a reader who I seem to have inspired. Taking a cue from NES Realm, RTM reader Eli has started Chrontendo, a blog that contains video episodes that review NES games as they appeared in chronological order. Now not only can you find out about all of the Famicom and NES games that were ever made, you can see them in action! I haven't gotten through every one of Eli's episodes yet (I intend to!), but the ones I've seen so far as well done, and you can see an evolution in Eli's process as each video continues to improve in quality.

So when you're all done reading this months issue (and not a moment sooner!) please check out both of these sites to continue your retro gaming thirst quenching. Enjoy the issue!

The Many Faces of . . . Lode Runner

by Alan Hewston

I'm back again, after a much needed break. We "dig" into yet another year, and we'll continue with our 25th anniversary tributes, and begin with probably the best multi-faced game that we have yet to cover from 1983 - the many faces of "Lode Runner". Surely you have heard of this home computer classic, and even if you've not played it on a classic computer, you may have played a sequel, or subsequent sequel . . . or a modern or online version. Regardless the gameplay of this platformer and most of its offspring are similar and should bring back fond memories for many computer enthusiasts from that era. Your mission, use your drilling tool to dig holes to avoid the enemies and collect all the treasures. From here on, I'll refer to the treasures as prizes, and to drill as to dig. Once all prizes are collected you must still escape (make it to the top of the screen) to play the next puzzling level. If you failed, you started each level fresh from the top. Some prizes will take some planning, or must be the final one collected, or simply be hard to reach. Some can be reachable only by your enemies - so make them do the work for you.

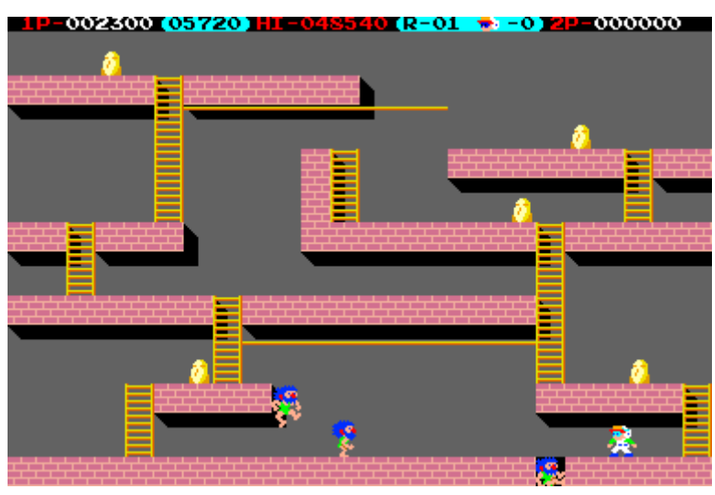
After a couple of go-a-rounds in the game's development, Broderbund finally agreed to buy the game

from programmer Doug Smith, but only with the condition that it contained 150 levels. And they wanted them done - like yesterday. The creative solution Doug came up with, to quickly secure this deal was to give his friends and neighbors a copy of the game on disk, complete with an editing tool to create their own levels. He promised to compensate them for each "good" level that they created and the rest is history as it went on to win numerous awards in 1983. I am sure that having an unheard of (at that time) 150 levels, plus the editing tool as part of the software package were instrumental in winning these awards and making this a favorite game of many players. For quite a while, many called this action/puzzle game the greatest home computer game of all time.

Besides the numerous levels and the awesome level editor tool, (Wikipedia notes it as the first of its kind), some of the great elements that Smith included were during-the-game options to add lives or advance to different levels, the ability to abort a life when you were stuck (again, probably the 1st game to do this too), and of course, you always had an unlimited amount of time to solve each level. You could pause any time as well. The action also pauses prior to the start of each level, where your icon flashes until you move. There was no luck factor or randomness to any level - it was all skill and puzzle solving combined. That is, each level's layout was always the same, brick by brick, including the starting locations of you, the enemies and prizes. The movements of the Bungling Empire Guards, hereafter called enemies, was completely a reaction, based upon where you were on the screen. The only thing random was the location of where the enemies would regenerate (always near the top of the screen) after you temporarily bricked them. All of these ingredients make this one of the most addictive classic "joystick" era games ever, and then, throw in the editor tool to create your own unlimited levels . . . then to quote Spinal Tap "this one goes to 11"

The original boxes note that included is a "game generator", which is not quite true. You'll also see this referred to as a "level editor", which is also not quite true. OK I am being anal here as it is technically a "level generator" as you can only create a level from scratch, or edit one already created. It was not possible to directly edit an existing level, but you could play any level and then block by block meticulously copy the information to graph paper, use that to create the level and then play test it until you were satisfied. I did this for many of the Championship Lode Runner levels. Here are all ten possible choices for each of the 28x16 spaces on the screen: 0) empty, 1) diggable brick, 2) solid brick, 3) ladder, 4) rope, 5) false brick (trap), 6) end of level ladder, 7) prize, 8) enemy) 9) you. The great news is that anyone could make these levels since no special software skills were needed. Discovering any or all the hidden trap(s) in an official level could take you a couple tries. As for calling it a "game generator", one could package a bunch of levels on a disk and thus it is another "game". But it is clearly not a game generator such as was released a few years later "Activision's Game Maker". Die hard fans would share home made Lode Runner levels within user groups, to fellow hackers, or upload to bulletin boards and potentially make their way around the world. Even causal fans, such as the gang on my college dorm floor got into it and created levels for me (us) to play. I forgot the details but Broderbund sponsored a competition for making levels, and took submissions on disk (or maybe graph paper too) from any platform. This led to the 50 best (toughest and/or creative) levels that were released in the 1984 sequel, Championship Lode Runner for the Apple 2, Atari and C64 (and maybe more) home computers. In addition to more sequels, there were plus public domain tools, such as the "Atari Lode Runner Utility Disk" by enthusiast Darryl May. Broderbund used creative marketing to combining the enemies from Choplifter, Lode Runner and Raid on Bungeling Bay to be from the fictional Bungeling Empire.

Lode Runner and its sequels are somewhat well documented online, and I'm going on too long here anyhow, so visit:
www.geocities.com/SoHo/Exhibit/2762/loderunner/main.htm
www.loderunner.home.insightbb.com/
And of course read about Lode Runner's beginnings as "Kong" on Wikipedia.
We can probably thank Doug for making the "Kong" ROM available for AP2 emulation.
But wait, there's more . . . nowadays there's even YouTube videos of players solving Lode Runner levels. And of course, Lode Runner was so popular it made to the Arcade.



Arcade - 1984 by Irem, who developed different arcade versions of Lode Runner. Most of the levels consisted of the original 150 levels distributed among the various arcade versions, while some levels were entirely original.

Many screenshots can be found at: www.mobygames.com/game/lode-runner/screenshots. Although I think the Atari 8 bit screenshots are from some other system.

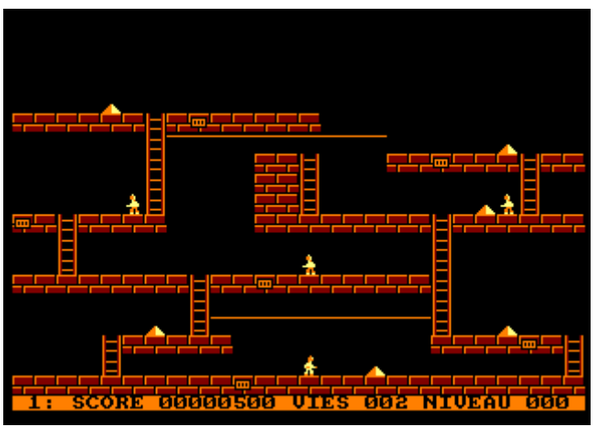
Lode Runner At Home:
Original version: Apple][by Doug Smith

1983 for Broderbund The Arcade port obviously needed to add a timer - courtesy of KLOV.com
Atari 8 bit computer by Doug Smith 1983 Broderbund disk [rarity 7]
Broderbund cart version [not released]
Atari XE: later cart release using same code by Chuck Peavey 1987 Atari [rarity 4]
Vic 20 by Mike Wise 1983 cart by Broderbund [rarity 5]
C64 by Dane Bigham 1983 disk by Broderbund [rarity unknown 4?]
Broderbund 1983 cart version (modified from disk) [rarity 3]

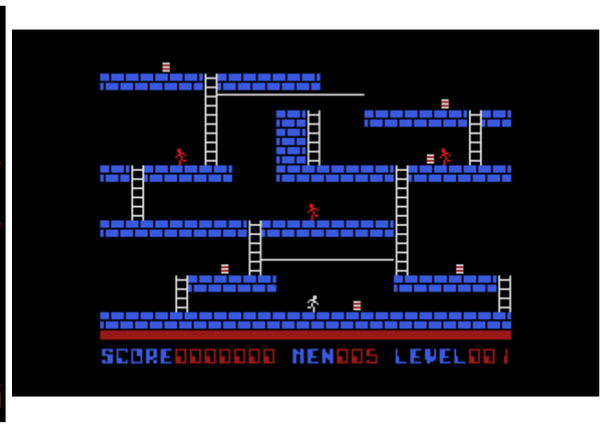
Rumor Mill: TI-99, Atari 5200 & 7800 Broderbund ads - just before the crash.

Not Quite: Colecovision - an unofficial port of the Sega SG-1000 was recently converted to the CV by Steve Bégin. If I find the ROM, I'll review this one some time.

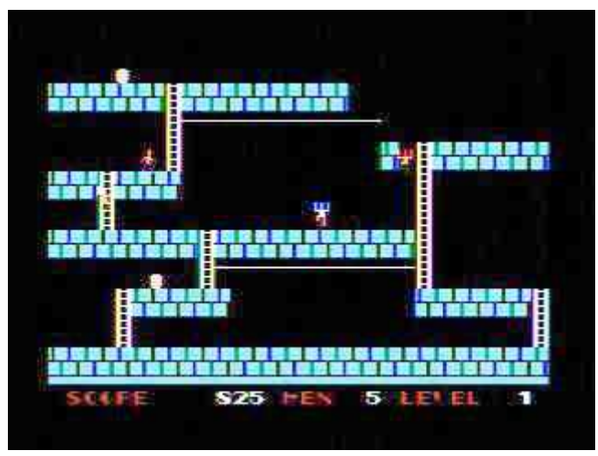
Not covered here - as I do not have these systems:
(Usually I research these more to add more meat, but this article is too large already)
Amstrad CPC 1989 with a lot of guys reportedly named "Doug" in the credits.
MSX 1983 Sony/Prosoft/Broderbund
Sinclair Spectrum 1984 double cassette by Broderbund/Domark by Ian Morrison, David J. Anderson.
Has 30x21 playfield, all 150 levels and editing tool.
Sega SG-100 by Broderbund



Amstrad port - courtesy of CPC Zone



MSX port - courtesy of Generation MSX

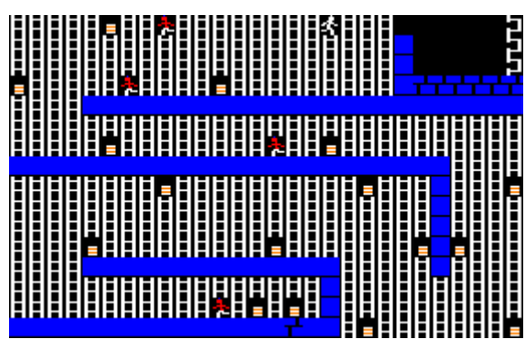


Sinclair Spectrum port - courtesy of World of Spectrum Sega SG-1000 port - Courtesy of an unknown Japanese site.

Lode Runner on newer systems:
Atari ST, PC Booter, Mac, Lynx, NES, Game Boy, BBC Micro, Nintendo DS, Virtual Console, TG-16, WonderSwan, and now even the Wii

First Classic Joystick Era Sequel: Championship Lode Runner 1984 Apple][, C64, 800 & MSX. Other Sequels: too many sequels/versions to track down here.

Lode Runner Home Version Similarities - except those in < > all home versions are very similar and have: a title screen; a demo mode; all the action takes place on single-screen levels; the playfield is 28 blocks wide by 16 blocks high <Vic (22x20)>; during the action, hit keys (typically <-> or <+>) to decrease or increase the relative game speed; regardless of speed, you always falls and move just a bit faster than the enemies; your character is mono-colored; each time you play a given level, the enemies and prizes are laid out the same; there are 150 levels to conquer; the specific levels and their



Championship LR level 3 - courtesy of Andrew Schultz's Lode Runner Tribute Page

sequence is always the same, but the levels and the sequence may vary from system to system; there's only one difficulty setting and no choice of starting level, you always begin at level 1; you can skip to the next level <Vic>; or enter the edit mode and select any level to start the action from <Vic>; you can increment your lives by 1 <Vic>, up to 255; earn points for collecting each prize, trapping an enemy in a hole, eliminating an enemy and for completing each level; there's a high score or high score screen with scores saved to disk <Vic 20> (no penalty here because a score is meaningless with no time limit and the ability to trap enemies indefinitely scoring points); your score will not qualify for the high score list if you increased the number of lives or levels, or did not play starting at level1; you can clear the high scores off any disk; after each level is loaded, there is an indefinite pause (Lode Runner icon will flash) in the action until you move or dig; restart a game any time; abort a level any time (which is necessary once you get stuck); included is the world's first ever commercially released level creator/editor tool to make your own set of levels; the editing tool is easy to use and you can save, move and modify any home made levels to disk (including the Vic, which also allows a save to cassette); play a game using the default set or a home made set of levels.

Lode Runner Home Version Similarities Continued:
collect all prizes (typically 6 to 20 per level) and you then gain access to exit ladders; take the exit ladder(s) or any ladders to the top row of the screen, which then completes each level; earn a bonus life and 1,500 bonus points (watch and listen to them tally up) each time you complete a level; you have no weapons but can press a fire button to dig the brick immediately below you and either in front of or behind you; you can only dig a brick that is not solid and does not have anything on top of it; there are options for digging behind you (default) or in front of you; you can control with the joystick, or toggle <control J/K> to use the keyboard <Vic>; when you dig, the brick(s) will temporarily disintegrate, but after a delay each brick in sequence will gradually fill back in; several bricks can be partially or completely gone at the same time; if you are inside a brick when it refills, you lose that life; you cannot climb up and out of a hole that you dig; make any contact with the enemies (other than standing on then when they are motionless) and you lose that life; any time you lose a life, the action stops and the level resets fresh from the top; you can then continue a level until you succeed, or your lives run out, at which point the game ends; the Bungeling Empire always staffs 1 to 5 enemies on each level to protect their treasures; the enemies <C64> and prizes <Vic> are multi-colored; enemies do not pay attention to the holes you dig and will fall in; but after a few seconds of being trapped, they will climb up and out of a hole; time your dig properly and an enemy can be temporarily eliminated (bricked in); each enemy eliminated will immediately and indefinitely regenerate 1 for 1 and arrive near the top of the screen; the enemies do not search for the prizes but will always pick up and carry one if they run past it; an enemy can only carry one prize at a time; a prize is not visible while they carry it; the enemies will occasionally drop a prize, and will always drop it they fall into one of your holes; there are sound effects when you dig, fall, collect a prize, trap an enemy <C64>, die, and a jingle when the level is completed as the bonus points are tallied.

We interrupt this long string of text with my usual Many Faces of collage.

A few shortfalls to this otherwise great game are there is no background music at all, and there is an annoying iris effect when revealing and closing each level - takes up too much time waiting to play each and EVERY level/life. The <AP2> is the only version that I could not figure out how to deactivate the Iris, or toggle it off. See control keys below.

"Control Keys": These vary some on home systems (Hit Control key plus): A = Abort the level; D = Dig direction from in front of you to behind you; E = enter the editor mode (which has it's own set of codes not listed here); F = add lives up to 255; J/K = toggle between joystick and keyboard (uses I, J, K, L to move and U and O to dig); R = Reset game and start at level 1; U = advance up a level; X & Z = eliminate or toggle off Iris.

Have Nots: Vic 20 (40)

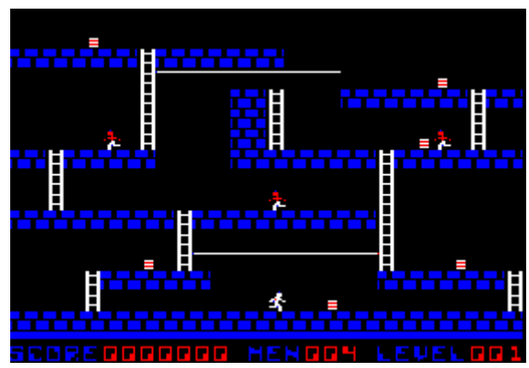
My first reaction was this version has unique screen dimensions, so the original levels cannot be made here. But I gave no penalty because it actually has more area to utilize, and creates even more levels for you to play. Despite not winning a medal, this score puts it near the top of my Vic 20 scores list. Considering it is both a good game, and rare, its no wonder I kept failing to find someone willing to sell/trade it, or to win it cheap on ebay. Despite the different screen dimensions, the Gameplay is all there from the original (9). The only significant difference is

that the amount of time required to dig a hole is too long in proportion to other versions. This makes the game a bit more frustrating which partially lowers the Addictiveness (9) which is otherwise fantastic. The <R/S> key toggles the pause. The primary reason the score is decreased from 10 is that this version does not allow you to increase lives, skip a level and even worse, you cannot play any level. You'll easily give up on completing all the levels on this port far sooner than any other. I have no clue how many levels are packaged here, so I gave it the benefit of doubt and did not deduct. If, however, there are only 20 levels or so, then subtract 1 more point from this score. On a good note, the Vic 20 editor is the easiest to use and you can save levels to disk or cassette - but I did not try doing so. The Graphics are good (6), but the worst of the lot, with visibly blocky motion (not smooth), it has the least detail, no use of multi-color, and limited color variety. The animation may be the best, albeit overdone and slow (digging), and the displays are good. The Sound is good (6) with all the effects in place, plus a unique jingle when you begin each game. Controls (10) are perfect. Does not require the <Control> key. Simply hit the keys, and use the joystick for all editing - sweet!

Vic 20 port - courtesy of Jason from Entropymine.com

Bronze Medal: Apple 2 (41)

My first reaction was analog Controls score only a (9) preventing a 3 way tie for the gold. If you bump the analog adjustable (slider) bar it will cost you at least one life to get it centered again. Yes, one can use the keyboard, but I've yet to score a keyboard scheme higher than a 9. [I actually have an Apple 2 to Atari joystick adapter on order and we'll see if it can perfect the control in games like this. I hope so, and then we'll have an article telling so. Regardless, such an adapter was not (readily) available back in the day, so I'll still not ever change this score to a 10]. The Apple][joystick's two fire buttons, are utilized here (maybe not everyone will like it) - so one fire button digs behind you and the second button digs in front of you. No need to turn around repeatedly! Gameplay is well done (9), with all the action as noted above. The demo plays to completion through more than one level. Although the action is slowed ever so briefly for disk access, the Addictiveness is still awesome (10). I may not have been strict enough (still kept the score a 10), as the real delay in playing is that of the dreaded Iris effect - which apparently cannot be toggled off. The pause is toggled by the <Esc> key. The Graphics are very good (7). Despite limited color variety, there are good details, some multi-color, OK animation, and good displays. Sound is good (6) with all the effects in place, and I did not reduce the score much for the internal sound. As usual, the game is only available on diskette.



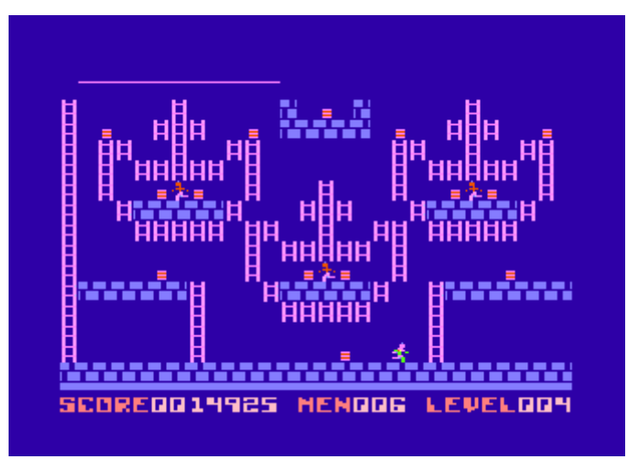
Apple][screenshot from Entropy Mine

Gold Medal: Atari 8 bit computer & Commodore 64 (42)

A tie, plus each system has 2 different versions, cart and disk.

Atari 8 bit computer (42) (Cart 42 & Disk 42)

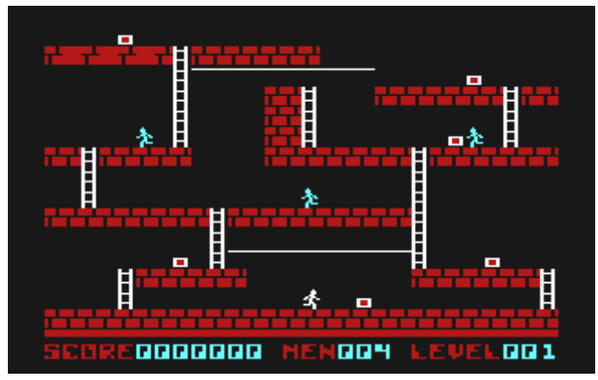
My first reaction was the XE (cart) version plays and looks to be the same in every way as the disk, but on my 800XL it displays light red bricks on a dark red background, instead of light blue bricks on a dark blue background as seen in every online screenshot I found. IMHO, all the non-Atari versions look better because they have a black background, and either red or blue bricks. The XE version does not track a high score, but you can save / play edited levels to/from a disk. The floppy disk version has a slight delay while loading each level from disk. I did not find any other differences between the cart and disk (other than the title screen credits) and so the notes and scores in each category are identical. The Gameplay (9) is all there, and it appears that all the levels are identical to the original. Addictiveness is awesome (10) with the ability to add lives, advance a level and play any level. The pause is toggled by the <Esc> key. The Graphics are pretty good (7) with good details, some multi-color, decent animation, and good displays. The color variety is limited on all home versions and I did not penalize for the non-black background. Sound is good (6) with all the effects in place. Unique to this version is a sound effect when you end your game via the restart. Controls (10) are perfect. I recommend



Atari 8 bit port - courtesy of Atarimania

either version, but the cart will last longer and has no delays in loading.

Commodore 64 (42) (Cart 41) (Disk 42)

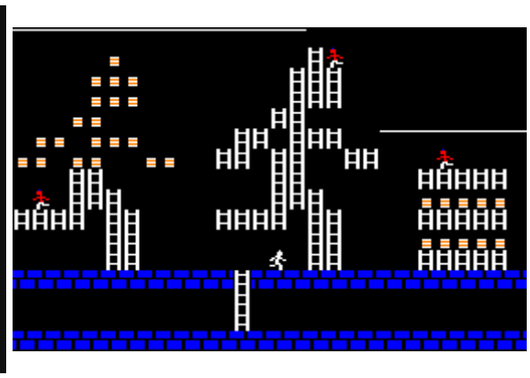


C64 level one - courtesy of Lemon64.

My first reaction was the cart version has ONLY 17 levels, and then you cannot add lives or advance a level, but you can play any level. So a point is lost here for lack of addictiveness. Fortunately the editor tool does allow you to save / play home made levels from disk. Level #17 on the cart is actually the same as level #150 on other ports. Good news is the cart version has no annoying Iris effect to toggle off. Otherwise all the scores and notes are the same, except for Addictiveness. Gameplay is great (9), the disk version is complete with all 150 levels. Despite the action being delayed during disk access, the Addictiveness is still excellent (10). The pause is toggled by the <R/S> key. The Graphics are very good (7) with good displays, good details, and decent animation. The only use of multi-color is for the prizes and as said before, the color variety is limited on all home versions. The Sound is good (6) with all the effects in place, save that of trapping an enemy guard. There is a unique jingle to the 64, when all prizes are collected and the escape ladder(s) appear, you hear one of several different jingles - from famous songs. The Controls (10) are perfect.

Acknowledgements, Updates and Errata since last month.
Special thanks to reader Tim Fagan who loaned me his Vic 20 version of Lode Runner to make this review complete. And then . . . just after I posted my Miner 2049er reviews, I learned that the Timster has the Vic 20 port that I hope to borrow as well and bring back as a Lost Faces review in 2008.

C64 title screen - courtesy of Lemon64.


Level 118 is cool - courtesy of Andrew Schultz Lode Runner Tribute Page

Hopefully I will not disappoint you by saying that I do not plan to review the Many Faces of "Championship Lode Runner". Odds are I'd say the exact same thing about each version as I did here, and we'd just be repeating the same 3 medals winners.

I'd like to point out another source (I've not verified) of levels. C64 Roge Tisdale & Artis software 1988 - created 192 new levels in a package. Not sure if they were authorized by Broderbund or Doug Smith.

Come back next month for another 1983 review, the Many Faces of "Keystone Kapers" on the Atari 2600, 5200, 8 bit computer & CV. Contact Alan at: Hewston95@NOSPAMstratos.net or visit the Many Faces of site: http://my.stratos.net/~hewston95/RT/ManyFacesHome.htm

Video Game Memorabilia: Board Games

by Tom Zjaba

One area of video game collecting that has not taken off yet is video game memorabilia. If video games follows other hobbies, it will be the last thing to go up. Comic books and sports cards went up for years before there was any real interest in the memorabilia. So if you are looking for a segment of the video game market that is cheap to get into and has plenty of room to move up, check out this column that looks at the different segments of video game memorabilia. Each column will look at one specific area and talk about prices, potential to go up and the rarity.

Board games based on video games are among the cheapest video game memorabilia. You can amass a nearly complete collection of the classic board games for under $100.00, not counting shipping. Some like Pac-Man and Donkey Kong can easily be found for $5.00 or less. Only a handful will prove any problem to find now. But this will change as they were not made in huge quantities. Unlike traditional board games like Monopoly or Risk, these were made for a year or two and then retired. They did not stay in circulation, so there is a finite amount made. And there is even a smaller amount of them that are complete and in good shape. The board games were made for kids and they tend to lose pieces. So like new board games that are complete will command a premium down the road as more and more video game collectors branch out and start adding memorabilia to their collections.

When buying board games, the first thing to do is research what are all the pieces that came with a particular board game. Did it have separate instructions or were they printed on the inside lid? Did it come with dice or a spinner? How many total pieces are included? This way you will know what is supposed to be included and will end up buying an incomplete board game. A little research on ebay or any other auction sites will yield information for you.

As with any collectible, condition is very important. Make sure the manual is not missing any pages, that there is no writing on the box and there are not creases or cracks in the lid. The lid is probably the most important part as far as condition is concerned. Think of it as the cover of a book. If the front lid is damaged, pass on the game. Also be on the look-out for boxes that have been repaired with glue, tape or staples. This will ruin the value of the board game.

There are a few board games from the classic era (classic era games are the ones that were made before the NES) that command more money. Dragon's Lair will go for $20.00 or more if complete and in nice shape. It is one of the more desirable board games as there are a lot of collectors of Dragon's Lair memorabilia. Another more expensive board game is Turtles from Entex. Do not confuse it with the much more common Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles board game as they are two very different things. Turtles is based on a obscure arcade game that was later ported to the Odyssey 2 game system. It is one of two Entex board games based on video games (the other being Defender) and rarely shows up in auctions. It can go for as much as $20.00, but it can be months before one shows up.

Two of the rarest of the video game board games are Pooyan and Wizard of Wor. Both are made by Ideal Games and are without a doubt the hardest to find video game board games. They show up on ebay a few times a year if that and can go for as little as $10.00 to as much as $50.00 each. They were both part of a series of games called the Flip Rcade series and as far as anyone can tell, they were the only ones made.

The Nintendo era board games seem to do better as far as prices go. The Super Mario, Legend of Zelda and even Sonic the Hedgehog board games can bring in $20.00 or more. They seem to be the only ones that command much money from the newer board games. Others like Tetris (yes, there is a board game based on Tetris) and Double Dragon are quite affordable.

Here is a list of almost all the video game board games along with the companies that made them and what year they were released.

Berzerk Milton Bradley 1983
Blueprint Ideal 1983
Centipede Milton Bradley 1983
Commando Bandai 1983
Defender Entex 1982
Donkey Kong Milton Bradley 1982
Donkey Kong Board Game Takera 1999
Double Dragon Tiger 1989
Dragon's Lair Milton Bradley 1983
Frogger Milton Bradley 1981
Ghosts n Goblins Bandai 1989
Joust Parker Brothers 1983
Jungle Hunt Milton Bradley 1983
Legend of Zelda Milton Bradley 1988
Ms. Pac-Man Milton Bradley 1982
Pac-Man Milton Bradley 1980

Pitfall Milton Bradley 1983
Pole Position Parker Brothers 1983
Pooyan Ideal 1983
Popeye The Arcade Game Parker Brothers 1983
Q*bert Parker Brothers 1983
Street Fighter II Milton Bradley 1994
Super Ghouls n Ghosts Tsukuda Hobby 1991
Super Mario Bros Milton Bradley 1988
Super Mario Bros Waddingtons Games 1992
Super Xevious Namcot 1988
Tetris Milton Bradley 1989
Turbo Milton Bradley 1981
Turtles Entex 1982
Wizard of Wor Ideal 1983
Zaxxon Milton Bradley 1982

Tom Zjaba (Who continues to do comic strips based on video game characters at the Arcade After Dark website. Check them out at http://arcadeafterdark.com/)

NES'cade -- Donkey Kong 3

by David Lundin, Jr.

The fifth and final remaining Arcade Classics Series NES title is also one I've been dreading to take a look at. While it's not necessarily a bad game, it is an extremely mediocre title. When I envisioned the NES'cade column, the main point was that I could write about arcade conversions that I enjoyed or were at the very least interesting and non mainstream. The occasional poorly ported game was something that would burn me out with the Titles of Tengen column, so NES'cade would be a nice change. That all goes out the window with this installment of NES'cade. With that we are brought to Donkey Kong 3, an unorthodox departure from the gameplay formula of the previous two games in the Donkey Kong series. Rather than featuring the further exploits of Mario and the title ape Donkey Kong, the third game takes a step to the side and the player instead takes on the role of Stanley the Bugman. This time Donkey Kong has invaded Stanley's greenhouse, hanging from the rafters, and stirring up nests of insects to eat Stanley's flowers. An exterminator by trade, Stanley grabs his bug spray gun and attempts to rid his greenhouse of the attacking swarms and the giant ape.

Released on the Famicom shortly after the system's launch, it was yet another easy to distribute title in the United States during the early days of the NES. The main reason for this being that absolutely no localization was required or performed. The ultimate objective of the game is based upon high scores alone, as there is no continuing progression level to level as with the previous entries in the series. The screens change slightly between stages but the basic objective and set up remain exactly the same, things just get faster with more and varied enemies on the screen. Each stage begins with Donkey Kong hanging from the rafters and preparing to stir up the hives to send bugs down to capture Stanley's flowers. Bugs stream from the hives and head downward, attempting to shoot or collide with Stanley on their way to the flowers at the bottom of the screen. Caterpillars crawl out from the sides of the screen and stop once shot, eventually changing direction. More than anything they exist to block shots and create dead space on the platforms as touching a caterpillar will result in the loss of a life. Donkey Kong himself isn't much of a threat with the exception of the few stages where he throws down coconuts. There are two ways to complete each level: either by killing all the insects or forcing Donkey Kong to the top of the rafters with shots from the spray gun. This means Donkey Kong can pretty much be left ignored as he never leaves the rafters or gets down low enough to come into contact with Stanley. However when an opening is created in the insect cover, quickly driving Donkey Kong to the top of the screen can be used as a fast way to end the stage and pick up a higher time bonus. Forcing Donkey Kong upward is also the only way to cause a more powerful spray gun to drop down when it is present. The stronger spray gun can destroy any insect including the caterpillars and will make Donkey Kong climb faster but it only lasts for a limited time.

Arcade Original

NES Version

It's hard to fault the NES port for anything than being a conversion of a unpopular game because in terms of a port it does everything near perfectly. Control is spot on with the directional pad replacing the joystick. Both buttons B and A are used to shoot blasts with the bug spray gun. The visuals appear to be ripped directly from the arcade with only a slight loss in resolution and background detail on the NES. All characters and items look exactly as they did in the arcade with near perfect duplication of the original sprites. Even though Donkey Kong 3 in the arcade used a vertical display, the perspective change is perfectly executed, as are the subtle corrections in enemy flight paths and characteristics. Instead of the screen being stretched out, the trees on the sides of the screen are lengthened, basically letterboxing the vertical display between them. This allows for a near exact duplication of playfield size. Audio is almost exact, the audio hardware in the arcade cabinet is probably very similar to the NES sound hardware. All the sound effects and musical tunes make the jump onto the NES, the cartridge sounds just like the arcade cabinet.

Here we have a rarity, a wonderful recreation of the arcade original but of a game not all that many people enjoy. If you did happen to enjoy Donkey Kong 3 in the arcade you'll love the NES port as it's as perfect as you could get on the hardware. As with all the Arcade Classics Series titles the game is extremely polished and a solid entry into the arcade library on the platform. It's a shame the game itself isn't a better title to begin with but again if it's a game you enjoy then by all means you should own the NES version. I've always felt Donkey Kong 3 was the weakest of the entries in the Arcade Classics Series but given the other games in the series, that's nothing bad at all.

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

Apple II Incider: Text Adventuring

by Donald Lee

Technology is advancing all around us everyday. From high powered PC's to the XBOX to the Playstation 3, computers and video game systems have come a long way since the 70's and 80's. However, as technology advances some things inevitably get left behind.

Among those left behind today is the genre of text adventure games. Many people know of Infocom and their huge line of text adventure games. Zork was the most popular but there were other hits such as The Hitchhikers's Guide to the Galaxy by Douglas Adams and the Enchanter Trilogy.

The appeal of text adventure games were obvious. Instead of trying to use the limited graphic capabilities of the older generation of computers to depict locations or scenes, a text adventure counted on text descriptions of a locale and left the gamer to use their imaginations to visualize.

As for my own personal experience, I only officially played one text adventure game from Infocom. That game was Seastalker. I can't remember how I ended up playing the game, but it seemed fun enough for me to try. I also didn't realize until afterwards that Seastalker was considered an "entry level" game which was good enough for me.

I seem to recall a lot of frustration with the game initially. Early in the game, there was a situation that came up immediately. If you didn't quite do something right, you would have to get killed and start over. Keep in mind, this was in the 80's and we had nothing like Google to help us look up answers or solutions. I don't remember exactly how I found the answer to my early problem, but it got me past the initial stage of the game.

It took me a few weeks, but I ultimately ended up finishing the game. However, I never found the motivation again to play another Infocom game. I did play other non-Infocom text adventure games though. None were as advanced as the Infocom games, but they were interesting. I may have to do

some research on what the name's of those games were. I think they were included on those Apple II disk publication Softdisk.

Today's gamers are very lucky. Developers have so much graphical (and sound) horsepower to work with. Just about anything game developers can visualize, it can be put on your screen. That wasn't always the case with games back in the 80's. Text adventures were a unique experience and you owe yourself a shot to give it a shot and see what you missed.

I've rarely thought in advance of what I will write since I started writing for RTM, but since I am on the topic of text adventure games, I think I will cover another type of text game I played in the past. Stay tuned!

Game Archaeologist

by Scott Jacobi

Before I get going this month, I figured I would respond to some of the comments that I have received. I didn't realize that NES Realm would be missed so much. And it's not that I really wanted to do away with it so much as I wanted to repurpose my efforts. StrategyWiki constitutes a major portion of my video gaming efforts, as as such, I wanted my writing to reflect some of that. I felt that my writing for NES Realm was becoming formulaic, and less interesting to read.

Having said that, Game Archaeologist is still in the design phase and I will continue to tweak it and refine it as I go on. Rather than concentrating on just one game, I will try to go back to a multi-game format. Of course, that will all depend on just how many guides I publish for that month. This month, I had the pleasure of constructing guides for the following games: Gradius, Spy vs. Spy, Dragon Warrior, Star Soldier, Ghosts 'n Goblins, Kung-Fu Heroes, and Choplifter. Granted, most of these are pretty well known games, but there was still a lot of discovery involved in the process.

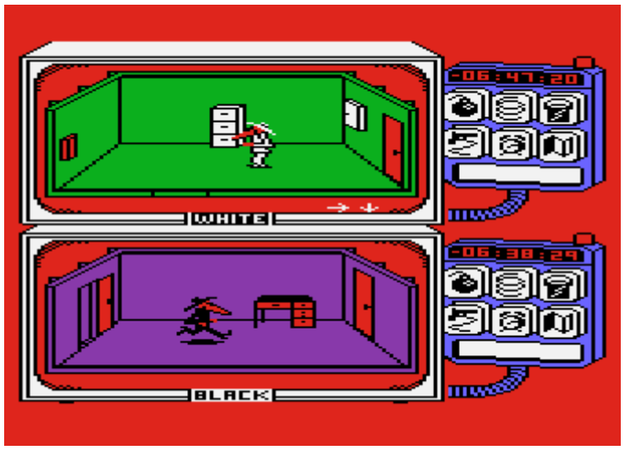
Starting with Gradius, you know how when Street Fighter II was really popular, it seemed like it graced the cover of every video game magazine on the market? That happened with Gradius as well in Japan. It's interesting to note just how different some of the conversions were. The most spot-on accurate conversion was the one created for the Sharp X68000 computer, which was the Japanese equivalent to the Atari ST and Amiga systems, all of which utilized the Motorola 68000 CPU. So accurate was the X68k conversion that it was actually included as the computer's pack-in to demonstrate that incredible power of the machine. Yes, Gradius was a pack-in game! The version that I'm sure most readers are familiar with is the NES conversion. This version sacrificed a lot of the authenticity of the game in order to include all of the stages in their entirety. Limitations of the hardware forced Konami to drop the number of simultaenous options from 4 to 2, and the laser's effectiveness was reduced. Nevertheless, it is considered one of the most celebrated conversions ever made. The MSX conversion was extremely crippled, but was so popular in Japan, that it spawned it's own unique series of sequels. My favorite, however, had to have been the TurboGrafx-16 (or PC-Engine) conversion, which was so complete, it even featured an extra stage not present in the arcade version. Not only that, it contained an incredibly pumped up soundtrack, which sounded great in stereo. I read on one Japanese page that I translated that the altered soundtrack was considered a negative, but I couldn't tell if that was a Japanese sentiment or one person's opinion.

The pixel perfect X68000 Gradius

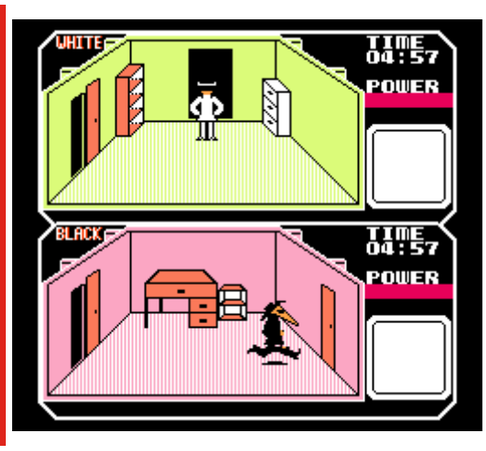
The crippled but beloved NES Gradius

Writing a guide for Spy vs. Spy was even more of a trip down memory lane. Spy vs. Spy was definitely one game where trying to improve upon the game for newer consoles actually detracted from the game instead of enhancing it. Part of what made fighting in Spy vs. Spy so filled with anxiety was that you couldn't see how many more hits you could withstand, so you always prayed that your enemy was on the verge of dropping before you did. The NES version added a health bar, which completely ruined that magical effect. In the end, I enjoyed returning to my tried and true Atari 800 version a lot more. (For some reason, the Atari 800 version is the only one in which utlizes a red

background instead of a blue one...) In the process of researching the game, I am ashamed to admit that I never once thought of the common practice of letting the computer collect all of the items and booby trapping the doors that lead to the airport, thereby killing the black spy, collecting all of the loot, and winning by doing hardly any work.



The red background of the Atari 800 Spy vs. Spy

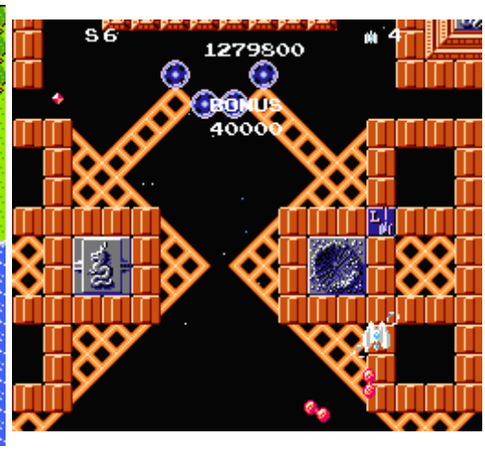


The inclusion of the health bars ruined the NES version

The Dragon Warrior guide was a guide that I started a long time ago actually. I got so far as describing the very beginning of the game, but I had trouble deciding how to write a guide for the bulk of the game. As RPGs go, Dragon Warrior is rather simplistic (yet still so ironically fun) and it seemed odd to me to explain where to go when the choices were so limited, they were practically obvious. When I returned to the guide, I took a note from one of the many Japanese guides that I own (which I can't read, but still enjoy looking at), and I decided to mirror its format. I find Japanese guides very inspiring because they are so encyclopedic when it comes to a game. You think that there couldn't possibly be any need for that much information about a single game, and yet, whenever I had a question (and could understand the answer), there it was, in impecible detail. In the end, I think the guide came out well, if not somewhat simplistic.

Star Soldier was interesting. In the process of trying to be as thorough about each game as I possibly can, I learn a lot about certain games that I never even knew about (hence the purpose of this column.) At first glance, it always appeared to me to be a rather generic vertical shooter. It happens to stand out as one of the defining vertical shooters of Japanese history, and is still a game which players use to test their skill. Rather than tying enemies to a particular location in the stage as most shooters do, enemies in Star Soldier were free to appear as soon as the previous wave was obliterated. So that faster you destroy the enemies, the more you ultimately end up fighting. Star Soldier also has an astounding array of hidden items that you can uncover, most of which simply provide bonus points, but some of which supply rare and incredibly strong power-ups.

A familiar scene to any true Dragon Warrior fan



The location of the secret powerful lasers in Stage 6 of Star Soldier

I thought that researching Ghosts 'n Goblins was going to be a brutal experience until I discovered one thing: the invincibility cheat code in MAME. Yes, I am not ashamed to admit to cheating in Ghosts 'n Goblins, because if I hadn't, a majority of that guide would have been impossible to write. Ghosts 'n Goblins is truly one of the most grueling and difficult games of its time, possibly second only to its own sequels. I really had to wonder what compelled the designer of the game (who is the same guy that designed the Mega Man series, a far more reasonable play experience) to make the game so fiendishly difficult. If reaching the final boss wasn't difficult enough, forcing the player to go through the game an entire second time before they were rewarded with the ending was just cruel. It was interesting to note how many more secret item location were added to the NES version, which Capcom farmed out to Micronics, a company that history has proven not to have a mixed record with Famicom games. The NES version, amazingly, is the basis for nearly half as many conversions as

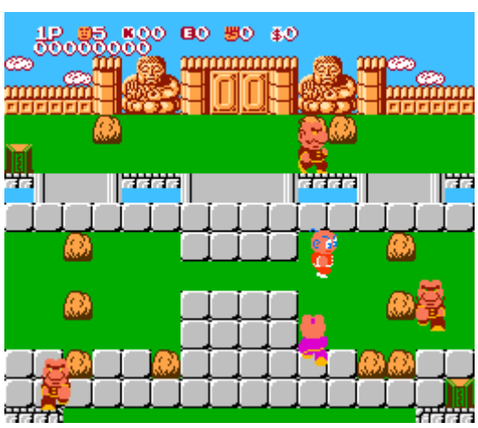
the arcade version is.

The American and European only Game Boy Color port of the NES version

The Japanese only Game Boy Advance port of the NES version

There isn't much interesting to report about Kung-Fu Heroes. It was another attempt to "Nintendo-ize" an existing arcade game (in this case, Chinese Hero) and making it slightly more plot-driven and finite than its never ending arcade originator. It features 32 stages with the expected increase in difficulty (which actually gets quite difficult), complete with bonus rounds and warp zones. More interesting than the game itself is the fact that this spin-off from an obscure arcade game became a launching pad for an entire series, known as the Super Chinese series in Japan, the latest of which as published as recently as 2004 for the Game Boy Advance.

As I mentioned in NES Realm, I was never a huge Choplifter fan, although I certainly appreciate its legacy, and in truth, I grew a little more fond od the original computer version while I worked on the guide. But the most interesting aspect of the game is that it is one of the very few games that ever went from being a computer game first to an arcade game second. There's an astounding array of examples going in the other direction, and around the mid-80s, it wasn't uncommon to see arcade games undergo vast changes during the transformation into home consoles games. Kung-Fu Heroes above is a perfect example. Arcade games tend to emphasize the questing aspect of a game and demphasize the score. Choplifter never had a score to begin with, so it's interesting that Sega decided to include one. The difficulty ramps up a lot more quickly in the arcade as well, presumably to keep expert Choplifter players from hogging the machine. I don't really know how popular Choplifter was in the arcades, but I kind of wonder if the arcade version *needed* a score in order to be a successful arcade game, or if it could have done without one and remained true to the spirit of the original game. Anyway, all of the home conversions that were made after the arcade game was developed mirrored the arcade version more than the computer version. The NES version is actually quite bad. Go figure.



The start of a typical Kung-Fu Heroes game

The arcade conversion of Choplifter. Now with added scoring.

Mastering Sega - The Light Phaser

by Craig Morris

During the later half of the 8-bit era the 'light gun' became somewhat of a standard peripheral. Many of the popular systems of the time included the light gun/phaser as a pack-in, namely the NES and the Sega Master System.

Despite the wide ownership of the light gun peripheral there were few games produced for either system. This may have been due to many factors, technological limitations of the systems, bad public relations ("I don't want little Johnny shooting people on the TV!"), or simply lack of demand. Hopefully the introduction of the Nintendo Wii will usher in a new era of light gun games that exceed traditional 'rail shooter' mechanics.

Due to the simple "point and shoot" nature of this genre there tends to be fewer gameplay elements than a conventional 8-bit game. Subsequently I'll be reviewing two games this month.

First up - **Rambo III**

Despite the title, this is in fact only the second Rambo game for the SMS. Released in 1988 as an SMS exclusive, it was in fact based on the movie Rambo III and is not really a true sequel to the previous game, "Rambo, First Blood Part II", which was not even a light gun shooter. Interestingly enough there never was a "Rambo, First Blood" released for the SMS.

Set in Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation your goal is to rescue friend and brother-in-arms Colonel Trautman. The game is divided into 7 missions, each representing different Afghani locales. You shoot your way through each level trying to kill as many commies...errr...Russian troops as possible. They don't make it easy; in addition to troops they throw a variety of ordinance your way - mortars, attack choppers, tanks, the works.

Note: The creator of this video is waaay better than me...

It's a basic and fun game. If it moves - blast it - unless it's a civilian. The interface is simple: your score, a life meter, and 3 icons - grenades, health power-ups, and ammunition. You score increases as you shoot enemies. Bonus points are awarded at the end of each mission for the amount of grenades, health power-ups, and ammunition you have remaining. You get a single life but are allowed several chances to 'continue' upon death.

Unlike many games of the genre (Safari Hunt, Marksman shooting, etc...) you aren't faced with a series of static levels with a few moving objects. Each level progresses steadily from left to right adding an element of urgency/suspense to the action. If you like rail shooters you'll enjoy this game.

Next - **Rescue Mission**

Released in 1987 this Sega exclusive is a bit of a departure from other games in the genre. In Rescue Mission your goal is to defend the evacuation of wounded soldiers (via railroad handcart?!) from incoming enemy troops. As your medic progresses over a series of connected railroad tracks he picks up wounded troops. If he makes it to the first-aid station, you win the round. If not you lose a life (3 in total).

Note: Not my voice...

Again, a very simple and straightforward game. Shoot enemy soldiers while being careful not to shoot your own wounded. Points are awarded at the end of the round for enemy soldiers killed and for rescued wounded. There is no damage/life meter, but injury inflicted on the medic is visible. The more injuries he sustains the more wounds appear, very innovative for its day. The only down side to the game is the 'upbeat' music. Sniping enemy soldiers to prevent them from killing your wounded requires something a wee bit more melancholy.

On a somewhat unrelated front Nintendo announced (finally!) a SMS virtual console channel for the Wii. While not a big fan of the virtual console this is great news for classic Sega fans, hopefully providing easy access to some of the Japanese and European games that were never released in North America.

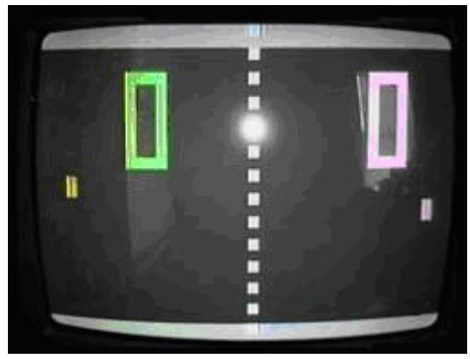
Two plugs for Nintendo in a Sega system review. This has to be a record.

That concludes this month's SMS review. Feel free to send comments/suggestions/requests/reprimands to retro@amalgam.ca

Growing up with Games: The Mid 70s

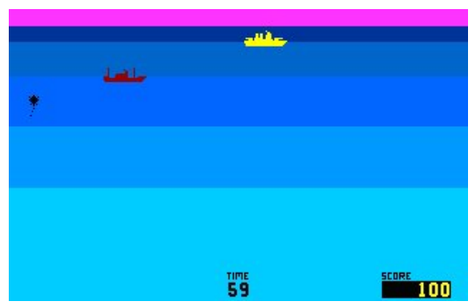
by Brian H.

The mid-seventies....ahhh, what a great time in history. America's 200th birthday, Rocky, Star Wars, Saturday Night Fever, and my introduction to one of the greatest games known to man....wait for it.....PONG!



One play at a relative's house and you're hooked. After a few rounds himself, Dad gives in and buys the family some good ol' electronic entertainment. $80.00 was the price to be paid, but to a six-year old, it was amazing. Feeling even more competitive? Flip that switch to Hockey or Squash and let the betting of candy begin!

Head down to the local convenient store or shopping mall and for 25 cents you are transported to the old west as a gunslinger in Boothill, or grab hold of the periscope and instantly you are in charge of sinking enemy ships with your torpedoes.



The graphics were simply by today's standards, but what a step up they were compared to the motorized and mechanical games that came before them. Nobody knew how the technology worked, and even what the technology was.....you didn't care, it was magic!

Then it came, like an unstoppable video monster. They marched upon our planet seeking destruction upon everyone's quarter supply.....Space Invaders.

There was no more saving quarters in those little blue books you got from the bank, that all was gone now. Go through your parents' change and ask if you can put that shiny sphere into your book for savings, only to replace it with a metal slug from an electrical box, as if to give the book some weight upon an unexpected cleaning of the room!

Christmas 1978 brought with it a disaster of sorts. Father exceeded our lofty expections of gifts and surprised us with the Atari 2600...well ok, it was the Sears brand that came with Target Fun instead of Combat, but still....come on! Dad was the hero of the year. I can still see the price tag on the box..$179.99. That is a ridiculous amount of money back then don't ya think?

Classmates from school also received this modern marvel. Fish tanks went uncleaned, sidewalks always covered with snow, PONG got stuck in the closet never to return, and homework....homework? What is this mysterious phrase that Mother speaks of? With this videogame system came a major problem. Games! Not as in there weren't enough to play, but how to pay for them? At $25 to $30 a game, parents were not rushing out to purchase a new one every time junior got tired of shooting smiley faces or racing down a stick fence lined street at night. If I had only saved all those quarters in the little blue books!

Game on, Coffee1970

Game Over

Super issue this month. Special thanks to Tom Zjaba for the contribution, a special welcome to new author Brian H., and a big thank you to VGEvo for the announcements.

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