

Retrogaming Times Monthly

Issue #47 - April 2008

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Attract Mode

by [Scott Jacobi](#)

Unfortunately, we have a truncated issue this month, as many of our authors have been under the weather. Nevertheless, here is what we were able to pull together. To be honest, I've been giving a lot of thought to what I would put here this month. Much of my free time has been spent with Super Smash Bros. Brawl for the Wii, and I thought that I might discuss that a little bit, especially with respect to the wonderful nostalgia it has brought me by including Pit of Kid Icarus fame and R.O.B. as two of the combatants. But in the end, I really couldn't find the words to do the experience of playing the game justice. You simply have to play it for yourself.

It made me realize that as much as I enjoy writing the introductory column, it's hard to come up with ideas each month. Even more, it's hard to guess which topic I have in mind will be the most interesting for others to read. So I had a thought.

We've asked many times for contributions to RTM from any interested authors. However, I realize that the idea of coming up with an article every month is a little daunting to many who might otherwise wish to contribute. So, for the first time, I would like to offer this space up to any guest authors who would like to be guest authors for one month. If you would like to take me up on this offer, then please email me your editorials. I will select the best one and feature it in this spot. This is your chance to share your perspective on retro gaming, and the issues related to it that matter to you.

So please give this idea some thought, and send your articles to me through the address connected to my name above. Please make sure that you put RTM somewhere in the subject, and that you send all submissions by the 25th of each month. Also, be sure to clearly indicate how you would like to be credited. After all, RTM is not just our publication, it belongs to every reader and retro gamer out there. I'm looking forward to reading your submissions.



The Many Faces of . . . Robin Hood

by [Alan Hewston](#)

We continue our string of 25th anniversary tributes, with the many faces of "Robin Hood". A first time appearance by those ever so cool (or ugly) looking XONOX, double-ender carts. My wife thinks they are ugly, but there is some beauty to that uniqueness and largeness. Unfortunately all versions are hard to find on the original media, but since they were all officially released, and about equally rare, there's no need to disqualify any. Fortunately, they do show up (or are easier to search for) on ebay often enough, but if not, you can play a few via multi-cart and of course, all are available via emulation. The cart format is appropriately paired up as a double-ender with another hero from British history/folklore - Sir Lancelot.

I must apologize as I had not previously played Robin Hood much and having only found online the 2600 manual, I probably missed a few nuances on some versions, but I am confident the scores will work. [The original manuals are rarer than the carts/disks. If anyone has these manuals, please scan or retype and send to me and we'll post a summary next month.] To make things worse, the 4 versions are somewhat dissimilar, making it even harder to compile and score. Feel free to blame me if I missed anything significant or if the scores/penalties seem unfair - I really rushed this issue and was late. Several of the RTM staff must have had "Spring Fever" too and with an otherwise light issue, we held up this release until I finally got my review in.

Fortunately, both of the 1983 carts are similar, and likewise, both of the 1984 released ports are similar. Hopefully this split will make it easier (albeit more wordy) to follow my review. The goal of the 1983 releases (Vic 20 & 2600) is to maximize your score and keep the game going - level after level

by avoiding death. The goal of the 1984 releases (CV & C64) is to earn the highest possible ranking, which requires you to complete the game in the fastest time possible. Unknown if the ranking is affected by a loss of any lives. The highest ranking is probably only be attainable at difficulty level 4, but you could still try each setting to see what is the best ranking you can earn. Hopefully I can motivate you to give them a try, but keep in mind the difference in the goal.

See several classic era screenshots at:

www.mobygames.com/game/robin-hood/screenshots

Home Versions:

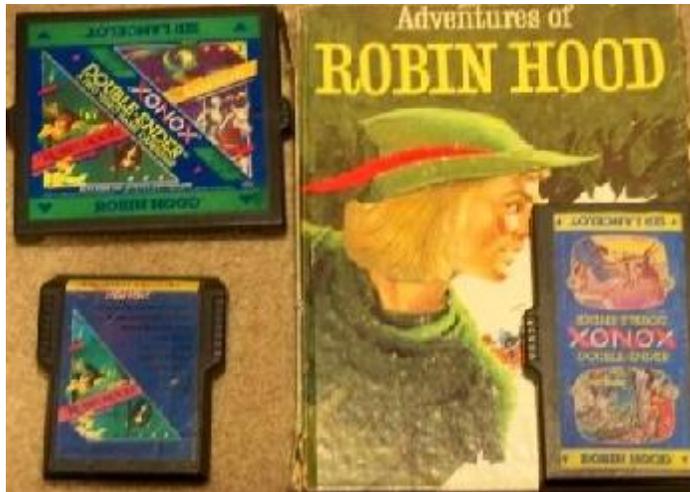
All home versions were released by XONOX, with the Atari 2600 being the 1st.

Atari 2600 cart 1983 by Antony R Henderson for XONOX, Rarity 7

Vic 20 cart 1983 by unknown for XONOX, Rarity 6

Commodore 64 disk 1984 by unknown for XONOX, Rarity - unknown

Colecovision cart 1984 by unknown for XONOX, Rarity 6 & 9



Rumor Mill & Classic Era Sequels:
None & None

[Are the Vic 20 XONOX Double-Ender carts the largest and ugliest of the era?](#)

Robin Hood Home Version Similarities (1983 titles - score the highest - Atari 2600 & Vic 20) - except those in < > these home versions have a choice of 1 or 2 players <Vic>; with choice of 4 <Vic (1)> starting difficulty (in reality these are starting rounds or levels); there's no ability to pause any time during the game; the startup/title screen displays a demo of sorts; there are three screens of action each level, the Forest, outside the Castle, and inside the castle; although there is an endless supply of the Sheriff of Nottingham's men, there is only one present at a time on any of the three screens; in place of the enemy, one of Robin's own Merry Men (looks just like you) may make a brief appearance as well; be careful not to shoot him, or you lose a life; the enemies know exactly where Robin is and will hunt you down; the graphics are fairly big/blocky so there is not much room on the screen to maneuver; on the first 2 screens you receive 16 arrows each life or each time you begin these screens and must eliminate 11 (in the Forest) and then 6 (outside the castle) of these enemies to advance to the next screen; if you run out of arrows, you have nothing left to defend yourself with, and any contact with the Sheriff's men or their arrows costs you a life; each life you get back 16 more arrows; your arrows are fired one at a time and cannot be fired again until they hit the enemy or clear the screen; each confrontation is very limited as all arrows are only fired Left or Right, not in any other direction; everyone can move about in all 8 directions; (to keep the action really limited?) you are frozen in your tracks while your arrow is in flight; the same is true for the enemy movement <Vic 20 (oops they're never frozen)>; since these enemies just pop out of thin air, appearing at almost anywhere on screen, and they know where you are and can come out with arrows blazing - you are given a slight advantage in both your movement speed and arrow speed; if your arrow hits them first, their arrow, even if dead on you, will magically disappear; after you have shot 11 enemies in the Forest, you'll be alerted that you can now move to the right edge of the screen, thus advancing to the next screen (2600 the score flashes, Vic 20 you'll hear a new sound when sufficient enemies have been shot); the Forest has a few trees that obscure the view beneath them; outside the castle the terrain is mixed and you may be unable to move freely through any transitional areas; the castle moat is also deadly, but the 2600 manual claims that you can cross it and scale the walls; after eliminating 6 enemies outside the castle, the portcullis (gate) will then go up and down as a hazard; in addition, an arrow will continuously fly across the width of the screen; if you attempt to scale the castle walls (2600 only) one of the henchman will fire an arrow your direction as well; avoid all these obstacles and gain entrance into the castle; inside the castle no one has any arrows, and you are defenseless; you must quickly use the secret passages and/or stairs in your search for the randomly located treasure or Marian behind two of the 7 doors; a random lock can come and go - temporarily barring some doors; press the fire button to open any unbarred door, behind which is either a guard to avoid or a prize; after finding the treasure or saving Maid Marian (whichever one you do first), you will complete that level of action and return to the Forest on the next higher skill setting; the action is faster and the enemies are smarter; you will hear a jingle and score points for shooting the Sheriff's men (2 k) ; also earn points for advancing to the next screen (8 k) and collecting the treasure (20 k) or rescuing Maid Marian (20 k); in lieu of advancing to the next screen, you can score even more points you can stick around the Forest and shoot until you are out of arrows. There is no music during the game, just a bit at startup on the 2600. You'll hear footfalls when you walk, and the sound of each arrow getting fired and hitting a target. No effects for opening a door or collecting a prize.

- - - INTERMISSION - - - Sorry this section is long

Now then, Robin Hood Home Version Similarities (1984 - earn the best rank - Colecovision & Commodore 64) - except those in < > these home versions have a choice of 1 or 2 players; with a choice of 4 game difficulties; there's no ability to pause any time during the game; there are four action screens, move to the right each time to get to the next screen; I've named screens 1 to 4 as the Forest, the Hills, Outside the Castle, and Inside the Castle; once all 4 screens are completed, you receive your rating; and any contact with the Sheriff's men or their arrows costs you a life; lose all your lives and your rating is always a "Stable Sweep"; an on screen clock counts up the seconds and minutes of your quest; the less time spent, the better your rating; (I assume) the higher the skill level, the higher the possible rating; does not appear that losing a life impacts the rating, other than losing all of them; in ascending order, some, but not a complete list of these ratings are: "Stable Sweep" "Sword Polisher", "Merry Man Jr.", "Robin Jr."; you can move around in any direction and fire arrows in all 8 directions; on the first two screens you must eliminate all the (limited number of) Sheriff of Nottingham's men to advance; you have an unlimited supply of arrows (C64 must refill 10 more in the Forest) throughout the game; both you and the enemies can now fire arrows and then immediately afterwards move about; you cannot fire again until the arrow hits its target or clears the screen; the enemies know exactly where Robin is, but they always arrive fairly far away from the middle of the screen and you have time to spot them and avoid them; unlike the other version, the graphics are much smaller and detailed, so there is a lot more room to maneuver on the screen and dodge the enemy or their arrows; the enemy are smarter on subsequent levels, so the progression of difficulty increases nicely; on screens 1 and 3 there are three and two enemies who fire arrows back at you; screen 2 is new here, (the Hills, not included on the 2600) where about 10 henchman walk their beat, back and forth ignoring you, until you confront them; you and they each have a sword to swing in 3 different positions; taking out these henchman is the most fun action sequence in the game as you repeatedly hack away until one of you dramatically slumps to their death; Outside the Castle you can shoot or avoid the foot archers, but concentrate on the Castle Archers - after nabbing 5 or 6 of them, the drawbridge can then be sprung; a change in the drawbridge/door color (or a white blob) gives you that hint to shoot it, and it then opens up; evade any men/arrows while you enter the castle; you cannot cross the moat and scale the walls; inside the Castle there are no secret passages, but now are 12 doors and a few flights of stairs; none of the doors has a barrier, but you must press the button to open a door; each door randomly has either a guard to avoid, or a prize; collect both prizes to complete the screen/game; after collecting either prize, all the enemies disappear; the prize is then treated as having been collected and shown near the bottom right of the screen; multiple enemies can pursue you, and even up the stairs; there are no footfalls heard and you never see any of Robin's own Merry Men in these 2 versions; all exterior screens have some trees, which obscure the view beneath them; touching any water surface or similar out of bounds region costs you a life; there is some startup music in the Forest (which on the CV continues the entire game, changing slightly (or restarting) each time you advance a screen); there are sound effects for each arrow fired, each arrow hit, each sword swing, and each sword hit; each door opened and prize collected.

Have Nots: VIC-20 (31)

My first reaction was there was almost no effort to enhance this game. The footfalls sound better and the animated moat is cool, but most everything else ends up being worse than the 2600, but cumulatively, only a 1 point difference. The Gameplay is (6) respectable, with a plot, and multiple screens, but limited action. There is some strategy and a chance to improve your skills and go for even more risky points. But it suffers greatly from only having only 1 enemy at a time, firing only L/R, not being able to move after firing, only having a few doors to chose, and almost no room to maneuver. Wow, maybe I needed to score it lower after all of that. Unknown why, but on 3rd level the castle gate does not open after 6 enemies have been hit. More time is



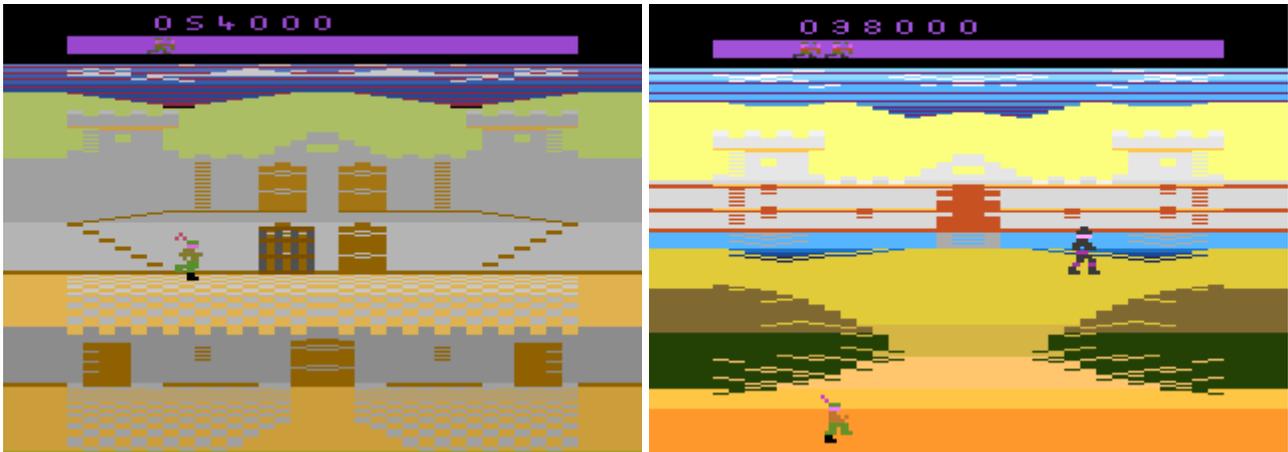
Vic 20 outside the castle - courtesy of Moby Games

needed to play test and see if this reoccurs. The Addictiveness (5) is fair, with enough randomness and some chance that you'll either have gotten better or luckier by the next game and score more points. But there is too much luck & reaction and not enough strategy to keep bringing you back for more. Graphics (5) are mediocre and blocky which does make the details and animation visible but at what cost. There is a decent amount of details, color variety, backgrounds, graphic variety, multi-color and displays. Of course, smaller, less detailed and less animated graphics would not help this score, but smaller graphics would really have made the gameplay and addictiveness a whole lot better. I'd rather have it look worse and be more playable. Surprise - there is even wasted space on the edges making the Vic even narrower on screen 2 than the 2600. The animation is well done, especially the simple animated moat. The Sound (5) is acceptable, with just enough effects to get some feedback and thrill of multiple things going on. A nice touch was the addition of a sound effect once you have eliminated enough enemies to move to the next screen. The Controls (10) are perfect. An amazing 7 other XONOX titles were released on the Vic 20, and assuming that I do not

miss out on buying the now available multi-cart - the "Behr Bonz Multicart for Vic 20", then I'll be coming back to a few XONOX reviews, or Lost Faces some day.

Bronze Medal: Atari 2600 (32)

My first reaction was neither the 2600 nor Vic lets you last long enough on the final screen to learn what the heck is really going on, but hang in there. The Gameplay is good (6), pretty much as described for the Vic, but slightly better - having a choice of all 4 start difficulties, the slightly smaller graphics make for a little more room to maneuver and plan. The Addictiveness is acceptable (5) with a little more gradual increase in difficulty as the enemies do not immediately come at you in round 1, but will do so in later rounds. Two things that really hurt are the enemies can arrive nearly anywhere on screen (how rude) and the inability to get onto and stay on or climb the stairs. The double deaths are unforgivable. I found no way to climb the moat, but clearly the game changes depending on if you try to climb the walls or enter the portcullis. There is even more luck & reaction and less planning than the Vic. The Graphics are OK (6) with a similar description as the Vic, but with smaller, better details and backgrounds. There is better use of color and color variety as well. Sound is adequate (5) with some startup music and a few effects. Hearing an effect when going to the next screen is nice, but the footfalls are worse than the Vic. As usual, the 2600 Controls (10) are perfect.

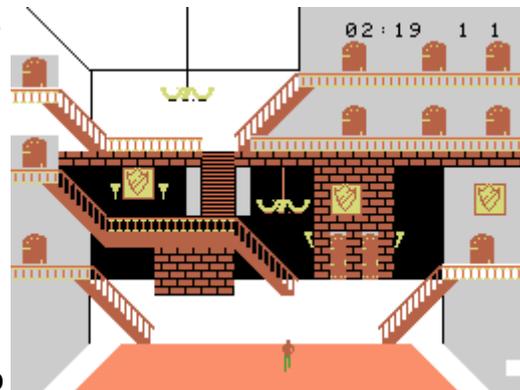


2600 Inside & Outside the Castle courtesy of Atarimania & AtariAge

Gold Medal: Commodore 64 & Colecovision (37)

Colecovision (37)

My first reaction was yes this is a tie, but on a finer point scale the C64 port would have scored a little higher. The CV has better music, the C64 better detailed graphics. Gameplay is quality (8) with 4 screens of action and a lot more choices and planning than the 2600 original. Having multiple enemies, arrows, hazards, and room to maneuver makes these two versions much better. The Addictiveness is OK (6) as you'll want to play these versions more. A choice of 4 somewhat harder difficulties will bring you back to master each skill level. One drawback is getting used to waiting for each dead enemy to completely fade from existence - if you touch him, goodbye to you. The Graphics are effective (7) with more details, multiple enemies, good displays, nicer animation, some color variety, good use of multi-color, graphic variety and backgrounds. The Sound is not bad (6), significantly improved with a full musical score, and effects added for the sword swinging and, opening doors. Instead of unique effects for "game over", collecting a prize and starting a new screen, the musical score is slightly altered to let you know of these events. Controls were tedious, especially the diagonals using the standard controllers, but were just about perfect (10) via the Super Action controllers. I still had trouble ascending the front right doorway, but that appears to be a graphics glitch not the controller.

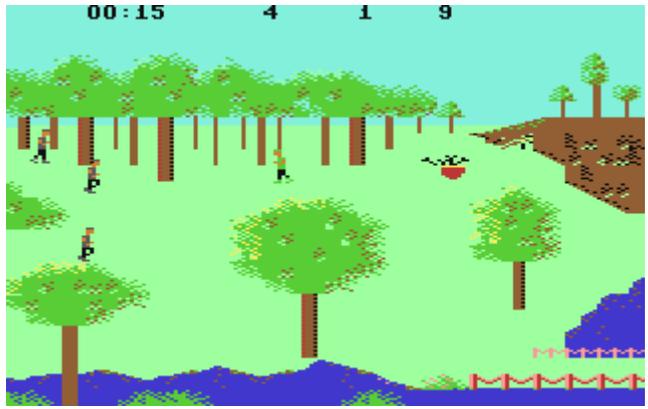


Colecovision - Inside the Castle courtesy of Mobygames

Commodore 64 (37)

My first thoughts (from back in the 80's) were this game will score low and not win a medal - but alas no other port was better. The Gameplay is impressive (8) and as good as the CV, with some minor differences. The added use of refilling your spent arrows is very nice, as was seeing as many as 5 enemies in pursuit on the final screen. There is limited space outside the Castle, forcing the use of a lot of diagonal shot by both sides. Screen 2 is incredibly hard and time consuming to

learn how to defeat all the henchmen. If they just could have had level 4 this hard and made level 1 easy - that would have been impressive. Usually the CV is the one guilty of being too hard at level 1 and not gradually increasing in difficulty. Fortunately one does not lose a life (on screen 2) for being slain countless time. But it sure does eat up the clock when you parry poorly. Addictiveness is good (6) matching the CV, but without the deadly - dead enemy effect. Graphics are impressive (8) with a lot more detail, adequate displays and multi-color. There's great color variety, graphics variety, backgrounds and good animation. There is more action here than anywhere else, with as many as five enemies in pursuit and more frequently where 2 arrows are fired at you. The Sound is slightly better than the 2600, but still average (5) with some startup music, but not lasting throughout the game. There are sound effects for collecting a prize, opening a door and swinging the swords. Controls are perfect (10).



See the C64 arrow supply in the Forest - courtesy of Lemon 64.

Acknowledgements, Updates and Errata since last month.

- This entire review was added after Scott wrote his Attract Mode, so the issue is a bit fuller now. Sorry to make you wait an extra 10 days.
- This is one of the lowest scoring games we've seen to date - maybe I was too hard on it - maybe Sound scores should all be increased by 1 point.
- Technically, some of the air born weapons may be crossbow bolts, and others may be arrows, but I just called them all arrows for ease of description. For Star Trek fans, I quote Lt. Worf "I protest, I am NOT a Merry Man".
- If bored, you can keep killing enemies outside the castle, after about 36 have been killed they stop coming and you can then only shoot the castle archers - which if you shoot lots of them, they too slow down their replenishment rate.
- I was one of several C64 owners who played this game back in the day and ditched it because it made no sense. Glad that I gave it a proper review to figure out on my own how to play and successfully complete the game.

Come back next month for another 1983 review - the Many Faces of "Sir Lancelot" on the Atari 2600, Commodore 64, Vic 20 and Colecovision. Contact Alan at: Hewston95@NOSPAMstratos.net or visit the Many Faces of site: <http://my.stratos.net/~hewston95/RT/ManyFacesHome.htm>



Apple II Incider: Space - The Final Frontier

by Donald Lee

Happy Easter all! As I write this, it is March 27th and Easter had just passed. Hope everyone had a good safe Easter. If you're on vacation, I hope you're having a good time.

I had originally planned to write an article on some text based sports games from Lance Haffner. I had acquired some copies of the games in the late 90's and had a good time playing them. Unfortunately, my Apple IIe has fizzled and I couldn't find the games available for an emulator. It appears Lance Haffner may still be selling his games (check out <http://www.lhgames.com>) so maybe I can go that route.



In any case, I looked for a fallback and went for one of my loves after sports: Science Fiction. Yes, I am a geeky fan of Star Wars, Star Trek, Battlestar Galactica, among others. Given my love of Sci-Fi, it would be appropriate to look at the game star Fleet One: The War Begins. Online sites note the game was released as early as 1982 by a company by Cygnus but most people are probably more familiar with the 1985/1986 release by Interstel and this is the version I am covering.

I ran across the game around the early 90's and fell in love immediately. I personally have a pretty vivid imagination and always imagined being my own "Captain Kirk" and commanding my own starship. I originally got a chance in the mid 80's when I played the Star Trek: Strategic Operations Simulator (star Trek: SOS) in the arcades.



Star Trek: SOS was entertaining enough, but it was just a lot of button pushing and there wasn't a ton of strategy involved. You were there to just blast ships, save and dock with the starbases. Star Fleet One offered a lot of what Star Trek: SOS offered, but just in a much more advanced form. Essentially, in Star Trek: SOS, you were the navigator and the weapons officer. In Star Fleet One, you were the Captain.

Star Fleet One was easily one of most advanced and complex simulations produced in the 1980's. Despite the well known Apple II weaknesses in graphics and sound, the authors did the best they could. The graphics were simple but done well. There were displays of your ship and enemy ships. The screens reflected all the various systems of your ship. The sound effects were simple but done well enough to cover the bases (torpedos/phasers firing, shields getting hit, etc, etc).

But the thing that stands out is the simulation of a starship. You have full control over your navigation, shields, weapons, tranporters, engineering and other systems that make a starship run. For a game that was produced in the era before computer mice became popular, the user interface was fantastic. The game offered an option to use a joystick, but since you weren't playing an arcade game, you could easily use a keyboard. In fact, I personally preferred a keyboard over the joystick.



The purpose of the game was essentially to knock a certain amount of enemies in a given period of time. If you completed your mission, you would get rated and eventually get promoted. While it would be tempting to just blast all your enemies away, there were certain strategies that would improve your ratings. Plus, as you got promoted to higher levels, the enemies got smarter and smarter. It got difficult for your ship to simply stand toe to toe against five enemy ships. Sometimes, retreating and getting your ship repaired might be the best answer.

All in all, Star Fleet One was one of my favorite games from the 80's era. Even today, I can sit down and play the game on an emulator and have a good time. It's worth playing if you have not played it before.

See you all next month.



Game Archaeologist

by Scott Jacobi

Alright, I must say that March was a pretty productive month. I manage to cover quite a lot of ground, and wrote guides for 9 different games, and stubs for a few more. In addition to that, StrategyWiki had a banner month with the release of Super Smash Bros. Brawl for the Wii driving in lots of traffic. Lets take a look at some of the info that I uncovered during my authoring efforts this month.

Let's start with Musashi no Ken, a game that I didn't right a guide for, but I did do a little research, and I found out more about the game than I knew when I wrote my review for NES Realm just a few months ago. It turns out that I was completely wrong about the game, both in terms of story and content. The game is actually based on an old anime about a family of Kendo practitioners. The game focuses on the son of two Kendo champions and his effort to match the accomplishments of his parents. The side scrolling bit where he races against his pet dog, collecting weapons along the way is only one half of the gameplay. After racing through a couple of courses, he must enter a Kendo tournament. It is here where you realize the importance of all those weapons he is collecting along the way; they give him access to special strikes which he can use against his opponents for decisive victories. It's still not an outstanding game, but it makes a lot more sense given its story backdrop.

Next up is Jajamau no Daibouken, which is the sequel the second game in the "Jajamaru" series, and the sequel to Jaleco's earlier game Ninja Jajamaru Kun. There is a much more noticable influence from the popularity of Super Mario Bros. on this game. It takes concepts from the earlier Jajamaru

games and tries to infuse it with more side scrolling elements. I have always enjoyed the Jajamaru series, but this mix of gameplay styles unfortunately misses the mark a little bit. It doesn't force you to deal with the enemies like the earlier games did, and it really doesn't reward you for exploring the stage like Super Mario Bros. does. In the end, it really compels you to simply rush through the stages instead of taking your time to enjoy them. This would not be the last outing for Jajamaru Kun, as he would continue to appear in a few more games, even as late as a release in 2004 for the Game Boy Advance which included five of Jaleco's earliest Famicom games on the cartridge along with a brand new adventure for the little ninja.



Musashi no Ken

Jajamaru no Daibouken

Next up comes Sky Kid. Sky Kid has always interested me a little bit because before I dove into research for the game, I could never quite figure out if it was intended to be a shooter that just kept going and going and getting more difficult, or if it had an ending. It turns out that it does end! But reaching that ending takes a fair amount of skill and a good helping of patience. There are actually three different Sky Kids that can be found in the arcades. The original game was made by Namco in the end of 1985. Less than one year later, they released an updated version of the game called Sky Kid Deluxe, which contained four extra "X" missions inserted between the original missions which introduced new landscapes like snowy regions, and new mission targets. And finally, there was Vs. Super Sky Kid, which was the arcade conversion of the Famicom/NES version of the game. This one departs from the original in terms of mission layout, but is otherwise quite faithful to the arcade game, albeit with less colorful graphics. It's funny to note how the Japanese designers intended for the pilots of the bi-planes (Red Baron and Blue Max) to be two birds, and how the American publishers of the game pretty much down-played this fact to the point where it's barely noticeable.

I ended up writing a small guide for the Gundam license game Kidou Senshi Z-Gundam. This game contained a rather interesting attempt at a first person perspective on the Famicom for two portions of the game, one on earth and one in space. What is little known about this game is that it was designed by the famous Xevious designer Masanobu Endoh, and he only designed the game with these two first person perspective portions in mind. Unfortunately, the execs at Bandai thought that the game needed more, and they tacked on this Thexder-inspired side scrolling maze portion which weakened the game overall. One could argue that it's a bit disappointing to play a Mobile Suit Gundam game without ever being able to see the mobile suit, and that the side scrolling portion was necessary to help bridge that connection between the game and the anime, but players disagreed. They disagreed so much that Bandai would later go on to publish a limited run of the game in a gold cartridge with the side scrolling portion omitted! All in all, if you're not a fan of the Gundam series, you may find the gameplay a little hectic and confusing, but it's still fairly enjoyable.



Sky Kid

Kidou Senshi Z-Gundam

ASO, or Armored Scrum Object, is better known as Alpha Mission outside of Japan. It is a fairly typical vertical shooter with a wide array of power-ups. Other than the fact that it was made by SNK, who would go on to make the famous Neo-Geo platform (on which a sequel, Alpha Mission II, would make an appearance), there is very little of interest or consequence to say about the game.

The same cannot be said, however, for the ill-fated Super Pitfall, a game so notoriously bad that it almost destroyed the license, and a sequel would not be heard from for over ten years. But what exactly was it about this game that people felt was so bad? Was it the fact that Pitfall Harry inexplicably underwent a transformation that made him look like Mario? Was it the less than smooth scrolling or jerky controls? Was it the decision to give the otherwise peaceful archaeologist a gun, a la Indiana Jones? Some of these points may have had something to do with it, but I contend that it was the gameplay. Specifically, it was the fact that you had to jump in completely arbitrary locations in space to reveal the most useful items in the whole game. Symbols and ammunition were hidden from sight unless you knew precisely where to jump inside of a fairly large map, making progress a tedious chore of jumping everywhere to reveal location of items you haven't yet found (provided you were keeping a map of items you previously found.) This in the end is what killed it for me, and why I decided against writing up a walkthrough for the game. Surprisingly, I found a couple of Japanese websites that go into a great amount of detail on how to complete the game, with fully diagrammed maps.

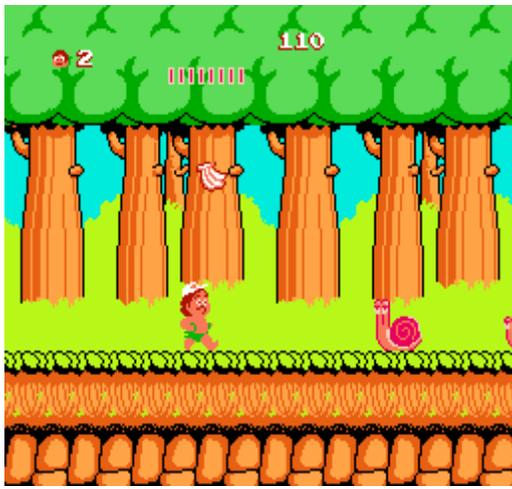


ASO / Alpha Mission

Super Pitfall

Moving on, we come to Hudson's Adventure Island, a game whose origin is quite muddy. Any fan of the game will probably already know this, but the resemblance between this fondly remembered, yet frustrating NES game, and Sega's arcade game Wonder Boy is not coincidental. Wonder Boy was developed for Sega by a development team known as Escape (who later became known as Westone OneBit Entertainment). As was the case in the United States, the Japanese version of the Sega Master System, the Mark III, was not selling nearly as well as its competitor, the Famicom. Therefore, Wonder Boy saw comparatively few console sales. While Sega owned the rights to the title and the character of Wonder Boy, Escape owned the rights to everything else pertaining to the game, so they were free to market the game as something else on another system, and that's precisely what they did. They ended up teaming up with Hudson Soft, and converting the main character to Takahashi Meijin, who was a game player of some notable fame in Japan, and who later became an executive at Hudson Soft. With a few necessary extra tweaks, and a title change, the game was ready for consumption on the most popular platform in Japan, where it sold quite well. It's ironic to note that both the Wonder Boy series and the Adventure Island series gained sequels which developed along entirely different paths. While Adventure Island was the second instance of the original game, its sequels remained truer to the side scrolling format than the Wonder Boy sequels, which took on more Adventure/RPG elements as it evolved.

King's Knight is another head-scratcher. Here we have a game developed by Square, a company known throughout the world for its tremendous influence on the way RPGs have been developed throughout history. Many people get excited about finding this historical gem when they find out it was made by Square... until they play it. With a name like King's Knight, you may envision medieval warriors, wizards, and captured princess, and you'd be right on the money if you anticipated these elements. What you may not be prepared for is the fact that King's Knight, for all intent purposes, is a vertically scrolling shooter. That's right, a shooter, not an RPG. And it's a fairly nonstandard one. In the game, you are given control over four different characters, all of whom must make it all the way through their respective stages on one health bar and no extra lives. Upon completing these four stages, you are given control over the entire assembled party of survivors in an attempt to defeat the dragon that has ravaged the land and kidnapped the princess. Of course, if any one of the four characters has perished, the final stage is nearly impossible to complete. In addition, if you failed to collect certain symbols from each of the first four stages, then members of the assembled party will not be able to cast the spell that they would otherwise have access to which substantially aids your progress to the final boss. In order to complete this game, you must truly dedicate some time to it and become good enough to survive each of the first four stages, collecting each of the magical symbols along the way, and learning which character should be brought to the front of the party (by way of rotation tiles) in each portion of the final stage.



Adventure Island



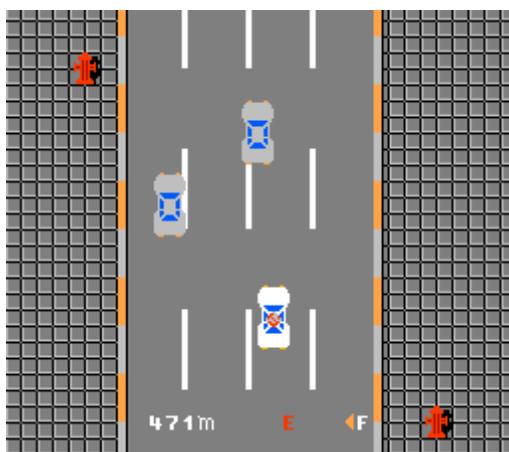
King's Knight

The next game is Super Xevious: Gunpu no Nazo, which roughly translates to the Riddle of Gump. This is something of an oddball title that never quite reached the majesty of the original. That was probably due to the fact that the designer of the original, Masanobu Endoh (second mention this month) felt that his original creation Xevious did not need a sequel. But the game was so hot and popular that it's hard to blame Namco for wanting to cash in on its fame. So they made the Riddle of Gump which looks and feels a lot like its predecessor, but plays a lot different. You were no longer drifting passively along a predetermined course, travelling from one stage to the next in traditional shooter style. This time, there were small puzzles to solve, or rather, unique actions that had to be taken to trigger consequences that would permit you to advance to the next stage. Without doing one of these steps, such as flying through a particular cloud, or destroying all ground targets of a particular variety, you would be doomed to repeat the same stage over and over again until you figured out (or stumbled upon) the correct action that would carry you off to the next stage. It's not necessarily a bad game, and the power-ups that the Solvalou can collect are a nice upgrade from the original, but the gameplay isn't entirely compelling, so you may decide that you don't care why you can't advance to the next stage after a while.

And finally for this month, one last game that I'm sure is near and dear to a number of retrogamers' hearts: Ghostbusters. You've probably played this numerous times on your home computer (i.e. Atari 800, Commodore 64, etc.) and if you were like me, you probably loaded it up just to watch the bouncing ball announce the lyrics to the Ghostbusters theme song Karaoke style. Now, you're probably familiar with something that gamers of the NES period referred to as the "Nintendo effect" or "Nintendo-ized." This was when games were somehow transformed for their appearance on the NES. Games like Double Dragon, Ninja Gaiden, and Bionic Commando were given different level arrangements than their arcade counterparts, and games like Commando and Ghost & Goblins were made a little harder but with more bonuses sprinkled around the game for players to find. Ghostbusters was far from perfect, but it was a surprisingly well done movie license game, so you would think that the union of this game and the NES would be a pretty solid combination. You'd be wrong. The NES game, which was developed in Japan by a group known as Tokuma Shoten, a magazine publisher, ruined just about every existing aspect of the game, and added an intolerable section of gameplay before the final encounter with Gozer. It's so bad, most people have not even seen Gozer. Imagine having to press the A button to move one single step. Imagine having to do that to walk across the screen and up a flight of steps. Imagine having to do that for 22 stories of a building. And imagine having to avoid ghosts that move freely and randomly throughout the screen while you attempt to do this. If you imagine all of this, you'll pretty much have an idea of how excruciating it is to play Ghostbusters on the NES. Don't touch this version and stick to your favorite computer version, so as not to tarnish your memory of David Crane's classic.



Super Xevious



Ghostbusters



by Craig Morris

Before I get to far, let me state - for the record - I prefer hardware. Given the option I prefer to experience a game in its native habitat. Part of the fun of the old games are the old systems themselves and their unique features and quirks, like getting off the couch to pause the game or struggling with an ornery cart to get it to seat.

For many reasons we don't all have access to oem hardware. Emulation allows many people to try games and systems they may otherwise never be able to experience. Let's not discount the historical aspect as well. As time marches forward oem consoles get more difficult to find. Emulation preserves these old systems so future generations can experience technology from times past, and perhaps gain greater respect for the systems they have now.

I use emulators for several reasons. Primarily I use them to capture the screen shots in my articles. Other times I find them useful when I have an hour to kill in my increasingly rare time on the road (oem SMS - not so portable). I also use them to 'preview' games I'm looking for in the wild. There's a lot of chaff in the classic gaming world and emulators help me weed it out.

The SMS doesn't see a great deal of emulation, probably due to its lack of popularity in North America. However, 2 emulators stand out for the SMS - [FreezeSMS](#) and [Meka](#).

FreezeSMS

This is a fantastic emulator that not only supports the various versions of the SMS but also the Game Gear and the ColecoVision. It has a great interface and loads of functionality. I especially like the feature that allows you to download info related to the currently loaded game. Box art, cheat codes, walkthroughs, etc... are available for many, many games and can be downloaded and displayed directly via the application.



Another excellent aspect of FreezeSMS is the control configurator. Clicking on the image of the controller you would like to emulate will load the corresponding button assignments. Each button can be mapped to a key or 3rd party controller/gamepad.



My only real issue is its lack of cross-platform support. This is hardly a criticism; most people have Windows on their desktop anyway. I have had some success running FreezeSMS under [wine](#).

Meka

Meka is typically my favoured SMS emulator; mainly because it's been ported to various operating systems, specifically Linux - my day-to-day operating system of choice. Meka is stable and easy to use and like FreezeSMS also supports the ColecoVision and the Game Gear.

Meka doesn't have a lot of bells and whistles. It's an emulator that focuses more on completeness than features. It appears to support most/all the Sega peripherals including the light gun and the 3D glasses. Unfortunately I haven't had the time to test this. Plugging the light phaser into my notebook holds a strange fascination for me.



My only real issue with Meka is that it needs a graphical update. This is not a criticism of the 'look' of Meka, but of usability. It runs full-screen only and does not make use of standard window 'widgets' of the supported operating systems. This is probably due to Meka's legacy as a DOS application. However, the source code has been opened and allows contributors but I'm a bit murky on the licensing. It does not appear to use the somewhat standard [GPL/LGPL](#).

I've only touched on some of the major features of each emulator. Each has its own features and

touches that are worth exploring in greater detail. I encourage you to try them out for yourself, if not for the emulator but for the games.

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

Game Over

Sorry for the shortened issue this month. We hope to be back in full force (and health) next month. See you then!

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