

Retrogaming Times Monthly

Issue #49 - June 2008

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Attract Mode

by [Scott Jacobi](#)

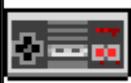
Well, the idea of pitching this editorial space to other readers didn't work out too well. Couple this with the greater difficulty that authors have been having in finding time to contribute articles spells an unfortunate future for this publication. I always assume that on some level, retrogaming will ALWAYS be relevant, just as old music and movies will always be relevant to their respective fields of entertainment.

However, this publication has always clung to its method of presentation. Some may call it quaint, and others may call it antiquated. The fact is, with blogs, wikis, and other Web 2.0 methods of presentation available, just about anyone can carve their own little version Retrogaming Times Monthly into the web. And that really brings RTM's relevance into question somewhat. Is RTM still relevant in today's ever expanding and exploding choice of web pages to choose from?

When RTM began, the notion of several authors contributing to and compiling their work in a single space was actually quite novel. Not only was it novel, it was successful. People could find articles of interest to them in one place without needing to search all over the web (before Google came around). Nowadays, people have become so efficient at searching for specific material that they are interested in researching, and blogs have become a way of life for many journalists, that RTM doesn't seem to offer anything that can't be provided or obtained in other ways.

Yet whenever I consider the fate of RTM, I just can't seem to find it within myself to want to part ways with it just yet. There's one thing that RTM has that the other more fluid and transient methods of web publishing don't have (yet). Legacy and permanence. These two aspects bless RTM with a uniqueness that I have yet to find anywhere else. Just as the saying "newer isn't always better" applies very well to video games, the same could be said of web publishing formats. No, we don't have blogs. No, we don't have comments. And let's face it, it's a small pain in the ass for me to compile all of the authors' work into one page every month, when clearly there is technology out there that can make collaborative projects far more automated and streamlined.

However, when it's all said and done and the issue is complete, and I send it to Alan to publish live online, there is a level of pride that everyone who contributed to the issue can feel. This issue, like all the others before it, will be "etched in stone" so to speak. It will contribute to the nearly 130 issues that every contributing author has helped develop, and which Alan has lovingly archived for every reader's benefit. For that reason alone, I will help continue the legacy of RTM, and I can only hope that some of the readers who have not thought of becoming an author will feel inspired to write their first article, just as Andrew did this month with his "Who'd Win" article, and become a part of this legacy. Having said all of that, I hope you enjoy the issue.



NES'cade -- Kung-Fu

by [David Lundin, Jr.](#)

In 1984, the same year that Technos released the first true strategic fighting game, Irem would release the first side scrolling beat 'em up ever to hit the arcade. Kung-Fu Master put the player in the role of Thomas, a master of the title Chinese martial art. Thomas' girlfriend Sylvia has been kidnapped by Mr. X and he has imprisoned her on the fifth floor of a pagoda, with a different fighting style master guarding passage to the next floor. In addition, a detachment of henchmen and obstacles have been dispersed throughout the pagoda to prevent Thomas from reaching the top. The game is based on the 1984 Jackie Chan film "Wheels on Meals" (also known overseas as Spartan X), however the pagoda setting and bosses are elements incorporated from Bruce Lee's unfinished film "The Game of Death." Kung-Fu Master did well in the arcade and introduced a genre that would become cemented with games to come such as Double Dragon, Final Fight, last month's NES'cade subject Teenage Mutant

Ninja Turtles and countless others right up until present day.

As Thomas climbs higher the enemies become quicker and more diverse. Simple henchmen known as Grippers first appear on the first floor but are present throughout the entire game. They attack in large groups and grab onto Thomas, draining his energy bar until they are shaken off. The best course of action is to defeat them with a single kick or hit before they get close enough to cause damage. Knife Throwers are also present throughout the game and appear on the first floor. They walk toward Thomas but stop before getting too close. Once stopped they throw a single knife at a time, either high or low, which must be ducked under or jumped over respectively. Knife Throwers require two hits to defeat and will throw additional knives shortly after their first. From the second floor on, small dwarf fighters known as Tom Toms join the battle which will sometimes flip up and jump on Thomas' head to cause damage. The second floor introduces falling objects which must either be destroyed or avoided. Green pots hit the ground and shatter, allowing a contained snake to be released that will slither along the ground. The snakes can either be jumped over or defeated with low level attacks. Red lanterns hang from the ceiling and must be destroyed before they burst into deadly confetti. Lastly, yellow eggs fall to the ground and hatch into fire-breathing dragons which temporarily block the way and can be defeated through conventional means, while avoiding their fiery breath. As with the second floor, the fourth floor contains special enemies, this time poisonous moths which fly out of openings on the wall. They can either be dispatched through normal attacks or avoided all together. Most of the time a combination of both techniques is the best way for Thomas to make his way passed them.

The staircase guard at the end of each floor has a unique fighting style, again paying homage to "The Game of Death." The first floor is guarded by the Stick Master, based upon the Escrima master from the third floor of the pagoda in "The Game of Death." Floor two leads to a battle with the Boomerang Fighter who is a unique character to the game. The third floor features Mr. Big, based upon The Giant who was played by Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. In the film he was at the top of the pagoda and fought with an unknown free-flowing style which represented the highest level of martial arts. The Black Magician waits at the end of the fourth floor and is able to summon a number of projectiles including the snakes and dragons from the second floor. At the end of the fifth floor Thomas finally reaches Mr. X, who fights in the same fluid style as Thomas, basically his equal. After defeating Mr. X, Sylvia is rescued only to be captured again as the game restarts with increased difficulty.



Eventually the arcade original would be ported onto the Nintendo Famicom using the Japanese title of Spartan X. When the Nintendo Entertainment System hit wide release in the USA, Spartan X was retitled and released as one of the original "black box" launch titles, dropping Master from the title and simply becoming Kung-Fu. The NES hardware was one of the first home game systems that could do the beat 'em up genre proud with detailed visuals and smooth movement. Kung-Fu is no exception. The backgrounds have been simplified, opting for solid blue opposed to the detailed purple walls with red pillars and woodwork as seen in the arcade. Compared to how the lighter colored sprites tend to look washed out against the detailed arcade background, I actually like the NES crispness against the solid blue. As for the sprites themselves, they are nicely detailed and representative of their arcade counterparts. Sprite colors are slightly reworked, more than likely due to NES palette limitations but again I think they snap off the background better colored the way they are on the NES.

The floors follow the same layout as they should with floors two and four offering the falling objects and moths as they did originally. Grippers, Knife Throwers and Tom Toms all behave as they should however I find them easier to wiggle away from here than in the arcade. Each of the bosses put up a good fight and are faithful recreations, right down to the laughs they have after defeating Thomas. The staircases aren't anywhere as detailed but considering the NES version lends itself to more of a straight on viewpoint instead of a slightly isomeric one, this is quite passable. I do miss the little animation of the door to the previous level falling down into the floor, blocking access back down that the arcade had. Aside from the close-up of Thomas reading the note from Mr. X and the attract

screens, the NES version has everything visually and mechanics wise the arcade does.

Audio is better than the original with the loud battle cries reworked to be quieter and more appropriate. The notes that loop in the background as well as the little level introductory and ending tunes are recreated perfectly. As has been said, the laughing sounds the bosses make if they defeat Thomas even make it over onto the cartridge, a nice touch. Control is simple with the directional pad used for movement, the B button for kicks and the A button for punches. Combinations of directional movement and attack type result in different attack heights and moves. I've always felt that the over all control was smoother and more responsive on the NES than in the arcade version, with quicker feedback. Additionally due to slight perspective differences, the player has more time to react on the NES as it takes longer for enemies to reach Thomas. This makes the NES port an all around better game in my opinion as the player actually has some time to make decisions, rather than just endlessly twitching back and forth to defeat enemies.

This really is a no-brainer. Kung-Fu on the NES is a great game, it's a lot of fun if you're looking for a classic arcade diversion and of all the ports that had come before or after it stands as my favorite. I feel that while the NES port is scaled down in terms of graphics, the changes suit the game better and what one is left with is a tighter package. The visuals feel more memorable and classic on the NES than they originally did in the arcade. NES owners more than likely have a copy of this game already or at the very least have played it as it is very common. However it can sometimes be hard to find as it's a game that doesn't leave libraries all that often. A sequel to the Famicom version was released under the title Spartan X 2, however it followed the more conventional beat 'em up formula and never saw release outside of Japan.

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



Apple II Incider: Karateka II: The Wrath of Dude

by [Donald Lee](#)

Well, this month's column is a little late getting into Scott's hands. At the beginning of May, the company I worked for (a small Internet startup) moved from Foster City (suburb 20 miles away from San Francisco) to Santa Clara which is in the heart of Silicon Valley. I've had companies move before, but they were big companies and the employees weren't too involved with the exception of moving your own stuff. With a startup, you're involved whether you want to or not. Safe to say, the first two weeks of May were hectic as my company settled into the new digs. Even after we all settled into the new place work got busy. I saw Scott's email but it just slipped my mind and next thing you know it's June! Fortunately, I already knew what I wanted to talk about this month. Thus, I can do yet another one of my short turnaround articles.

Last month, I talked about the game Karateka. As noted last month, Karateka was one of the early martial arts/karate games and easily one of the most popular games back in the 1980's. However, the game wasn't perfect. Despite the use of solid graphics and sound (especially for the Apple II), the amount of moves were a little limited. Also, if you were used to martial arts movies, you would notice that the original Karateka did not allow for the use of weapons.



Well, a creative type decided to try and improve on the original Karateka and created an unofficial sequel called Karateka II: The Wrath of Dude.

Karateka II was not a game that could be played. It was a movie that was created using a 1980's movie production system called Take-1 (produced by Baudville Software). The movie was so large that it required both sides of a 5 1/4 Apple II disk.

It's pretty apparent that whoever created the movie spent a great deal of time on it. The majority of the graphics for the movie are from the original Karateka. I'm not sure how one would re-use existing graphics back in the 1980's, but somehow it was done. Given some of the early splash screens in the movie, someone may have cracked the copy protection of the game.



But where this movie shines is in some of the little touches that differ from the original Karateka. The hero performs some spin kicks in the air, wields some weapons (spear/boomerang) and there's a lot more blood and guts spilled during the battles. Given the limitations of Apple II

graphics, these little touches took a lot of time and effort. They were very well done.

Obviously, the movie looks dated today. But considering it was created back in the 1980's, the movie holds up fairly well and brought me a few laughs.

If you want to take a look at the movie, it's on YouTube:

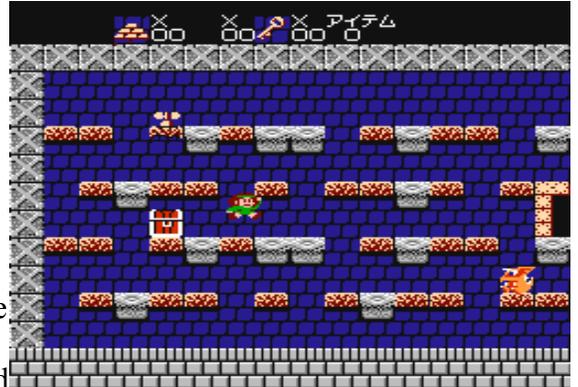
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PYhICoGTT2Q>

See you all next month!



Another month, another slight tweak in style. This time around: *blog style!* Yeah, that's the ticket. These are a little meatier than the earlier entries, but I think it adds something. So... I hope you enjoy it.

The guide for [Aigina no Yogen: From the Legend of Balubalouk](#) took me a little longer to complete than I had anticipated. I kind of lost interest in writing about the game about halfway through because all the walkthrough really consisted of was descriptions of room after room of largely the same points.



If you've never heard of this game, don't be surprised at all. It was only released in Japan, and even though it's pretty much playable by non-Japanese speakers, the gameplay is some of the most unintuitive around. I'm not sure what inspired the designers, but attacking the enemies is like a mutated cross between the original Mario Bros. and Bomberman without the bombs. You see, in order to attack the monsters, you have to jump up and smash certain platforms with your head. That makes a bi-directional weapon appear on the platform. Then you have to jump up and stand in front of the weapon. When an enemy gets in range of where you're standing, you jump up, triggering the weapon to fire to the left and right. Once you get the hang of it, it's not that bad. And you will get the hang of it, because you have to kill 8 or 10 enemies in order to escape from each room. There are other items that help, but this is how you'll deal with most enemies. Other less-than-intuitive aspects include the fact that in order to pick up an item, you must press down while pressing the A button. This one throws a lot of people because they can't understand why they managed to unlock a treasure chest, but they can't collect the contents.

A speed run of the game takes only 33 minutes, but there is particularly funny video of a player with a particularly bad microphone, demonstrating how some people just don't get the game. You can catch it [from this link](#).

[Mappy-Land](#) seems to have been an attempt to mix the arcade style gameplay of Mappy (which you can find quite commonly on many Namco Museum compilations) with the successful contemporary Super Mario Bros. formula. But it doesn't get the mix quite right.



In Mappy-Land, the player must collect 6 items from 8 differently themed stages in 4 different worlds. Each world features a different item that Mappy must collect. This means that one of the more interesting gameplay features from the arcade is missing. In the original, there were pairs of items, and you could drastically increase your score by collecting the items in pair order. In Mappy-Land, one pre-determined item will grant you a 5x multiplier for the remaining items on the stage, but only if you collect it first.

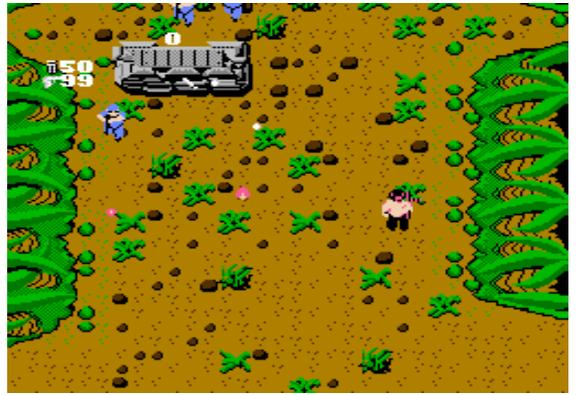
The different themes are definitely skewed to a younger crowd... Railroad Town, Western World, Pirate World, etc. Each theme provides a different object to utilize in order to attack the gang of cats that are seeking to end Mappy's quest for happiness. If you can't attack the cats in a particular location, you can employ one of the four distractions that you can collect throughout the game. For example, deploying a cat toy will cause the small Meowky cats to dance around the toy and forget all about Mappy.

Naturally, trampolines are part of this console only sequel. In addition to moving between platform levels by bouncing on trampolines, the game also features climbable objects like ladders and vines, but you'll mostly be dealing with the trampolines. The game does not allow Mappy to fall to another platform unless Mappy uses a trampoline to jump off of first.

The biggest challenge of the game is to determine what alternate methods are required to leave certain stages. Most stages in the beginning allow you to collect six items and immediately leave. As the game progresses, you will need to enter buildings to find and collect special items that are required to exit the stage. The worst way to

die is to reach the exit, only to find out that you can't leave, and you're trapped in by cats. One of the alternate interiors is a replica of the original Mappy arcade game.

I'll be honest, the [Ikari Warriors](#) guide isn't exactly finished. And the truth is, I don't really plan to finish it. The reason? I just refuse to do a walkthrough for that game. And I'm just talking about the single stage of the arcade version. Forget the NES version and it's four stages of pure torture.



Did everybody love this game in 1986? Hell yes. It was raw, it was gritty, it let you fire and walk in totally different directions. Letters appeared from dead soldiers bodies for no reason, and they powered you up. Everything exploded; your grenades, the tanks, the turrets, the gates, and probably a whole bunch of other things I can't remember. You could run out of bullets but unless you were retarded, you probably didn't. You could play at the same time as your buddy. Look, you could get inside the tank and run your enemies over. The tank even TOLD you to get inside. Commando never had that much power.

But what about today? Do you think you would see this thing on Xbox Live or the Wii's VC? Not if whoever is in charge of these decisions has a brain. Now, I know I will get shot for saying that, especially from all the SNK lovers, but let's face it. This is one extraordinary example of a game that was beyond hot in it's day, but simply hasn't stood the test of time. And to make matters worse, most of you will probably remember the NES version, not the original arcade version.

What went wrong here? Yes, the NES didn't have a rotary controller, so yes, the NES had to change the control scheme. But forcing the player to turn through every angle before facing the desired direction was like putting a "kick me" sign on the back of the player. Everything moved soooooo sloooooowly. The Atari 7800 version of the game was better, and that's not something you hear people say every day. (And the Atari 2600 version... what were they smoking when they green-lighted that project?)

So who was to blame for that monstrosity of unfortunatude? Not SNK actually. The game was done by a group called Micronics, the same group responsible for the NES conversion of Athena, and the abominable Super Pitfall. Now, not all of Micronics works were terrible. 1942 and Ghost n' Goblins stood the test of time alright, if you can overlook the cruel difficulty factor that makes beating the game without an emulator and save states virtually impossible. Thank goodness for that super quick and easy A, B, B, A continue code they added to Ikari Warriors. If not for that, I don't think most people would have made it out of the first stage before realizing that the game wasn't over and they had to do another level. I think most people turned it off at that point.

Thank goodness Ralf and Clark have moved on to bigger and better things, like competing in nearly every King of Fighters tournament for no apparent reason, and guest starring in the latest Metal Slug games. So if anyone is really still in love with this game, and would like to write a walkthrough for it, please be my guest. I just can't put myself through that kind of pain.

Next up is [Dragon Ball: Shenron no Nazo](#), better known in the United States as Dargon Power. Many people believe that this was the first Dragon Ball game ever made for a home console. In fact it is the second. But the first one was an arcade style vertical shooter made for the Epoch Cassette Vision, a system that you have to be so Japanese to even remember. So for all intent purposes, it's definitely the first Dragon Ball game that American players have access to.



Many people (or at least many Dragon Ball fans) also know that this was one of the only Dragon Ball games to be released in the United States for many many years, even though it was horribly localized and transformed into Dragon Power. The "why" in the decision is fairly obvious; no one in the United States had any clue what Dragon Ball was in 1987. The "how" is another story. Taking a character like Son Goku, and making him resemble more of a monkey-boy might make a little sense to some people, but changing the appearance of Master Roshi from the turtle shell totting pervert he is to, well, Gandolf the Wizard, was questionable at best.

(Ironically, Europe got the original game translated into French and unaltered graphically, but many years later when Dragon Ball had taken off).

Naturally, quite a bit of censorship took place, which is to be expected when the Japanese storyline involves bribing old men with a glimpse at a girl's panties, or touching a girl's chest (shirt on, of course). To prevent corrupting American children's youth, these bribes were changed to giving the old man a sandwich (which happened to be the panties graphic turned upside down), which of course made the whole joke about Bulma asking the shape-shifting pig Oolong to transform into her and fulfill the bribe make no sense.

Despite those criticisms, the game is... playable. As an early 80s license game, it does a surprisingly outstanding

job capturing the spirit of the first set of episodes of the cartoon series. Although a few changes were made to the story for the sake of motivating the player to get through certain sections, character portrayals are amazingly accurate, and the graphics capture the emotions and attitudes that are typical of each personality.

The game plays a little similar to the Legend of Zelda in terms of the overhead fighting aspect, but it has a few flaws. The most serious flaw of all is the constantly depleting life force. Throughout the game, Goku is losing about one unit of health every two seconds. Normally, he will max out at 150 units, although you can upgrade to 250 if you choose the best wish for your first of two wish selections. But this creates a serious problem since you do not receive more health for completing a stage, which usually concludes with a boss battle (which is played from the side view perspective), and health restoring items are presented pretty much randomly.

To make matters worse, normally you can continue where you left off, except for the last four stages. So if you manage to make it all the way to the final stage with only a few units of health left, you are inevitably going to have to repeat the last three stages over again just to make it back to the end. This has left a ton of players defeated and unmotivated to continue and beat the game. Emulators and save states can go a long way to making the game more playable, but it's a shame that you have to "cheat" in order to enjoy a single play through of the title.

All in all, the game will only appeal to die hard fans of the series. The official English translation is riddled with problems, but if you can't read Japanese, you only have one other choice: a ROM translation that converts the game into English, albeit just as poorly, if not worse than the official translation, but it does keep all of the original Dragon Ball references and context.

I know that the Gradius series holds a special place in peoples' hearts, but [Zanac](#) is one of those underappreciated gems that just has to be written about. I write guides for a lot of games these days. Some I like, and some I don't. I know that a game is really good when I push myself to keep adding pages to a guide, and with Zanac clocking in at 24 pages... yeah, I liked it a lot.



So what is it about Zanac that makes me think it deserves such a title as the best shmup ever made for the NES? Well, first off, let's start with the technology. When the Famicom was designed, it was engineered to push as many sprites as possible, and support scrolling to some extent at a hardware level. So any game developer can move little characters and scroll the background with ease. But what Compile, known today as one of the most legendary development house of all time, managed to do with that system was amazing. Bleeding fast scrolling, and tremendous amounts of moving on-screen sprites. If it weren't for the palette limitations, one might easily be convinced that the game was made for the Genesis or even the SNES. And all before November of 1986, when the game was first released for the Famicom Disk System.

Today, we live in a world of Ikarugas, Triggerheart Exelicas, and one of my personal favs, Ibara. These games, and even some earlier efforts like GigaWing 2, Mars Matrix, and DoDonPachi have pushed 2D scrolling shooters to their artistic limits, far outpacing what the humble NES is capable of. And yet, in many ways, Zanac still captures the intense spirit of these more advanced games. In fact, Zanac may outdo some of them in terms of opportunities and strategy variations.

Let's compare Zanac to Ikaruga. Not exactly apples to apples, I know, but just for the sake of illustration. Ikaruga is not really built on the same kind of power-up system that Zanac is. But looking strictly at the gameplay, you have three essential strategies to employ; stay mostly white, stay mostly black, or play as a even mix of both, whichever color best suits the situation. The rest of your brainpower is dedicated to dodging and surviving. Now look at Zanac.

In addition to the standard guns that Zanac provides you with, you may also employ one of eight different special weapons, all of which start out somewhat weak but still have their advantages, and most of which evolve into tremendous power-house weapons. This provides you with so many different ways to traverse through the game. You can stick to Special Weapon 0 and continue to collect Power Chips until you standard weapon maxes out with the Super Guns. You can level up Special Weapon 6 until you reach the point where when you fire it, it turns every enemy and bullet into an extra life and drops you back to Special Weapon 0. You can max out Special Weapon 7 which, even at it's lowest level, rips through enemies and bullets. Or you can suffer through trying to max out Special Weapon 5 which, as a laser, can rip through the mini-boss ships, but takes ages to evolve, and sucks in the process.

Many games that are built around power-up systems (such as Gradius or R-Type) really make you suffer if you ever build up your power to extreme levels, and then crash only to lose every bit of it. Zanac is not very different in this respect, except that it does sort of encourage you to keep trying. Extra lives are given out in heaps, so even if you lose a life, and you die five times trying to get back on your feet, you still have a good amount of lives to continue with. Even at your lowest level, you're still somewhat powerful enough to deal with what the game throws at you. Speaking of which, the game has always been praised for its "unique" A.I. and aggression system which ups the difficult the more aggressively you play. This was done before, way back in 1983 with

Xevious, and it's something that we all take for granted today as something a game should do.

Zanac is still available today in a couple of formats, most notably on the Wii VC. However, if you can manage to find a copy of Zanac X Zanac for the PlayStation (only released in Japan), you'll get a fully emulated version of the game, plus it's graphically upgraded sequel. The Guardian Legend for the NES was also loosely tied to Zanac, in that it takes place in the same universe.



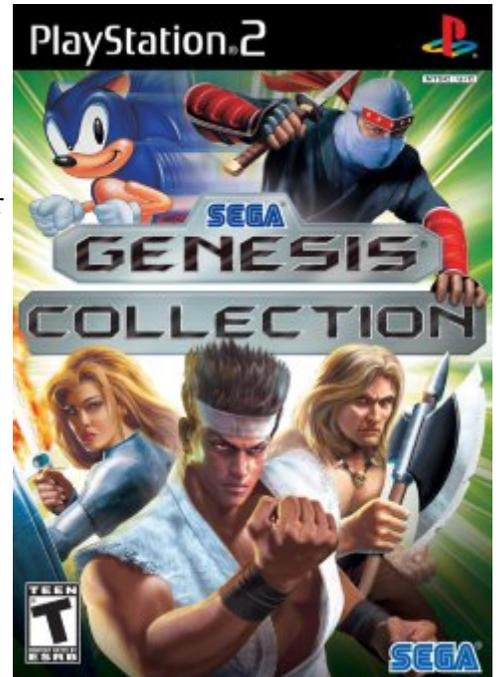
Old Wine in New Bottles: Retrogaming on Modern Hardware

by [Jonathan H. Davidson](#)

It has been an adventure-filled six-months or so since my last column for RTM. Amongst my other adventures, I have acquired a PlayStation 2 console so there is a whole new world of retrogaming compilations to explore (and review).

The compilation of the month, therefore is the Sega Genesis Collection for the PS 2. This includes 28 games, most of which were originally released on the Genesis. A few of the titles (e.g. Golden Axe III, Ristar) are Megadrive games that were never released in cartridge form in North America.

The collection skews very heavily towards action games and platformers, but there are a few RPGs - Phantasy Star II, III, IV, and Sword of Vermillion. The only really glaring omissions are Sonic and Knuckles (though this title appears in another PS 2 Sonic compilation) and the Shining Force strategy-RPG game. While Genesis sports games are ubiquitous at thrift shops, thankfully there are none included in this compilation.



In addition to the games, there is lots of bonus content, both open and ununlockable. For each game, there is a brief history available, as well as photographs of the original boxes (including Megadrive versions), and some game-play tips. The unlockable content includes several original Sega arcade games (including Zaxxon, Tac/Scan, and Future Spy) as well as programmer interviews (in Japanese, with English subtitles), and a trailer for the (then) forthcoming Phantasy Star Universe. Most of the content is easily unlocked; some is a bit more challenging.

I have almost no experience with the original Genesis, so I have no comment on how accurate the emulation is. All of the cheats and tricks from the original games still work. Happily the emulator allows players to save anytime, even in games where there was originally no save function implemented.

As with many retro compilations, the biggest weakness is the documentation. While that is not much of an issue for the simpler games like Golden Axe or Sonic the Hedgehog, it makes the RPGs much more difficult. Fortunately, all of the original manuals and other documentation can be found online.

Next month, we will review Midway Arcade Treasures (volume 1). Feedback on this column is always welcome; special thanks to everyone who have their sent comments and question. Please send e-mail to jhd@interbaun.com.



Who'd Win: Battlezone vs. Robot Tank

by [Andrew Vrba](#)

My name is Andrew Vrba, I'm 29 years old, and I've been gaming since 1984, I'm new here at RTM. This section called "Who'd Win" is also new! Since this is the first time around for me, I'm sure this inaugural issue won't have as much polish on it as sections like "The many faces of...", which is my personal favorite. If you have any suggestions for this section, feel free to email me at avrba@centurytel.net

"Who'd win?" is a comparative review of sorts. Each month I'll pit two similar games from the same time period, usually on the same system. This month I'll be looking at two of 1983's finest war games. The 2600 home port of Atari's own "Battlezone" vs. Activision's "Robot Tank", also on the 2600.



The sights:

Both of the games look good, while Robot Tank gives you more technically impressive feats, like an organized user interface, weather effects, and fog. Battlezone's graphics are just plain prettier looking! More impressive still is the fact that your tank's treads are animated properly! If you turn one tread will go forward and the other backwards! Atari sure made up for the fact that the system can't do vector graphics with this one!

The sounds:

Good sound design is much more evident in Battlezone. There's a little tune that plays when you start the game, the engine noise sounds better, there's even a "blip!" sound on your radar when a new enemy appears. Robot tank's sound design is very flat, and minimalistic. It's a bit hard on the ears as well, as most of the sound effects remind me of loud crashes of static.

The substance:

It's been a one sided fight thus far, but game play is where Robot Tank starts to really fight back! While Battlezone is your standard one-hit-you-lose-a-life affair, Robot Tank feels more like a simulator, in that you don't always die when you get shot. Sometimes you lose your radar, the main view screen, or your tank gets slowed down. You can still limp along though! I've beaten an entire wave before just going by the radar alone!

The cartridge:

One of the things I love about that by-gone era of gaming is the all of the pretty hand drawn artwork that graced the cartridges, manuals, and boxes.



Battlezone's cart has a really impressively drawn tank blasting something to kingdom come. Whereas the Robot Tank cart has a dinky screenshot, not that exciting...

Who'd win? Robot Tank.

While Battlezone is prettier than Robot Tank in every possible way, Robot tank is more impressive on a technical level. It does things that other games just weren't doing! What it lacks in flash, it more than makes up for in substance. Battlezone would probably take the first shot, but Robot Tank would get its second wind, and blast Battlezone into shouldering scrap.

Next month will be a battle that no self-respecting geek should miss! The arcade versions of Star Trek: Strategic Operations Simulator vs. Star Wars: The Arcade Game!

I'd like to Thank to Alan Hewston for encouraging me to write this, and giving me some pointers, as well as suggesting the title for the section! And to also thank the folks at Retrogaming Times Monthly, for adding it to the publication!

Game Over

This is unusual, but I'm going to give myself a pat on the back this month for finally going through this file by hand and cleaning the HTML up manually. WYSIWYG is great when you have to edit large pieces of web pages, but I can't believe how bad some editors are. Enjoy the leaner, cleaner RTM! See you next month.

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