RETROGAMING TIMES monthly

Issue #61 - June 2009

'70s

'80s

'90s

COVERING 3 DECADES OF GAMING

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How has classic coding changed from then to now? Not only have classic cheat codes been used in the past but are still being used and are becoming more advanced by the use of free QR codes. These codes can be found on many websites and magazines. Cheat codes used to be quite the secret, but with more and more technological resources on the rise, these codes can be found by those who generate QR codes to spreading these codes to fellow gamers. It has become quite easy to create QR codes and this may have an influence on the future of gaming. Every cheat code may be available to the public by some form of technological communication, but where's the fun in that?

Press Fire To Begin

by Bryan Roppolo

Now that it's June I'm sure everyone is getting ready to turn on that sprinkler out in their lawn, head to the beach, or just crank up the air conditioning and lounge in the house all day. Regardless of how you end up spending the summer, just be sure to have the latest issue of *Retrogaming Times Monthly* on your computer screen since there should be many interesting articles to help you get through the hot days ahead! Trust me, there's nothing better than catching up on the latest retrogaming columns while you are relaxing by the pool. I know that's what I'll be doing this summer!

As to what awaits you this month specifically, the most interesting items that retrogamers will find will be the "High Score Monthly!" and "Who Am I?" competitions. The prizes for both of these contests are in connection with the upcoming classic video game show in July called Video Game Summit 2009. The first competition will be played for free general admission, while the second will be for a free table at the show. There will only be one winner for the general admission contest, and 2 winners for the table contest. Everyone can find out more in the following two columns below. In addition, The "High Score Monthly!" contest will become a regular entry where *Retrogaming Times Monthly* will offer either free show admission (depends on if a show is upcoming) or a free homebrew cartridge from AtariAge! Considering there is no fee to compete in these contests, I am hoping every month we will have good competition and maybe even set some high score records for classic games in the process.

In other news there is what I believe will be the first '90s article written for the magazine since its

inception. As time moves on so do the decades that are covered in this magazine. When *Retrogaming Times* started 12 years ago in 1997 most people considered classic gaming to be those titles/systems that were released in the '70s and '80s. Now 12 years later not only does classic gaming refer to the '70s and '80s, but also to the '90s. It should be interesting, if this magazine lasts long enough, to see the systems that are currently state-of-the-art eventually considered classics by another generation of gamers. That's what classic gaming is all about...enjoying the games that you grew up with and having the feeling that they are in some indescribable way better than what is currently being offered for sale in video game stores. I am looking forward to seeing more '90s coverage in the coming months, as I'm sure are many of the readers.

Keep on gaming, especially Retrogaming!

Retrogaming News

Upcoming Retrogaming Events

California Extreme

This west coast classic arcade and pinball show is right around the corner! This year it will be taking place at a new location, the fantastic Hyatt Regency Santa Clara. Check out my show report of CAX 2008 back in RTM issue #51 for more information on what to expect, and of course take a look at the official site for up to the minute details concerning CAX 2009! The official site can be found at http:www.caextreme.org. Come celebrate your arcade heritage and join me at California Extreme's 13th show July 11-12 in Santa Clara! Pre-register today and support this excellent event!

-Submitted by David Lundin, Jr

High Score Monthly!

by Paul Zimmerman

Hello! Welcome to High Score Monthly! - Video Game Summit 2009 Edition! This is the first contest for the month. The high score will win one free admission to Video Game Summit 2009, which is July 18 in Lombard, IL. Bryan is doing the bio contest for 2 winners to win 1 vendor table each for the show. The tables can be used for anything you want. This is the very first of a monthly high score contest, and right now is a work in progress to see what kind of response we will get. Considering the incredible prizes, however, I am sure the response will be great!! Each month I will pick a random retro game to play and will try to make sure they are common so that the contest is open to more people. I will also take your requests if you have a game in mind, so email me your requests. The systems will be anything ranging from an arcade machine to a Commodore 64 computer to a Sega Genesis.

Here are the rules which are based on Twin Galaxies' http://www.twingalaxies.com/, the world's leader for video game rules. Be sure to read the rules below carefully!

1. Record your entire game. Start your recording before you power on your system and stop the recording when your game and/or time limit ends, and if applicable after the point where you enter your initials. Try to follow the following points:

- You should start the recording at least 5 seconds before powering on your machine.
- (For Computers) Allow the machine to boot normally. For more modern systems with ejectable media (CDs or DVDs for example), it is often a wise precaution to boot without the game inserted.
- Once the game is loaded, continue through the menu structure of the game to get it started.

2. We will only allow digital submissions. You will need to upload your whole game to YouTube http://www.youtube.com/ on your own channel. Each month RTM will include links to the submissions for the public to watch as well (they will not be voting, just watching). If you do not know how to use YouTube or you don't have an account, email your submission to me. We will then upload it to Retrogaming Times TV, which is on YouTube.

If you need to email your submission:

- You can use the following types of videos: Quicktime .mov and .mp4 files, Microsoft Windows Media Video .wmv files, Audio Video Interleave .avi files, and Moving Picture Experts Group .mpeg files. These types of files are generally easily played on any modern PC and the necessary players can be downloaded free of charge.
- Minimum video resolution must be 640x480.0.
- Frame rate should match the native frame rate for the type of video source you are recording to/from. What this means is that frames should be allowed to naturally record to the video and

no frames should be digitally removed or edited.

- It is advisable to make the codec that you used to create the video available to me. Please consider that it is the responsibility of the game player to create a video that I can watch on my computer. It is highly recommended that you create your video in a format that is PC friendly and can easily be viewed in either Windows Media Player or Quicktime Viewer.

- Hard disk drive camcorders typically record video/audio in a proprietary file format that cannot be read on a PC without being converted first. Please convert raw camcorder files into one of the user-friendly file formats listed above so that they can be readily viewed on any PC.

- **NOTE - Digital video submissions that are fraudulently altered for the purpose of cheating will easily be detected, the score disqualified, and the gamer banned from making any further submissions.**

3. For this month's contest you will need to name the video "High Score Monthly! - Video Game Summit Edition"

4. The recording of the game must be a new recording. Can't be a previous recording of the game.

5. You do not need to film yourself playing the game, just the game screen. Before or after your game you must either state out loud or hold up a sign saying your name and the date. After your game try to zoom in on your final score and state out loud what it is.

6. Emulators are fine.

7. NOTE - 500 bonus points if you are using the original system!! You will need to film the system as well, right before or after your game with no breaks between filming your system and your game.

8. You can only submit one score a month.

9. Deadline will be the last day of the month.

10. You can only play the game for a maximum of 10 minutes (of game play), anything more will be disqualified.

11. Include your full name and your real email address with your submission. Email your submission (YouTube link or file) to me, Paul Zimmerman - paul@retrogamingtimes.com. Only for the Video Game Summit Edition, Dan Iacovelli, founder of Video Game Summit, will send you an email if you do win with instructions on how to get your ticket. Make sure to put in the subject line "High Score Monthly - Video Game Summit Edition."

Starting with the July issue, in the subject line put "High Score Monthly - x" where "x" represents the month of the contest. Make sure that you include your name and e-mail address that you want to be contacted at, since I will have to contact the winner each month to let them know they won.

For all contests make sure you remember to put the correct subject title in the Subject Line, because otherwise your email might go to my junk folder. The subject title will help me spot your email. If you do not put the correct title in the Subject Line then your score submission will be disqualified, obviously, because I did not notice your message.

12. Now for the best part!! The winner each month will receive recognition in Retrogaming Times Monthly. We will publish a quick bio of the winner along with their picture (if they would like) and a website link to their site if they have one. In addition, a link to their YouTube submission will also be included.

As an example of how this would work: the winner of the June issue will have their bio published in the August issue. Therefore, there will be a 2 month gap between the contest first being mentioned and the time when the winner will get their name in the magazine. However, the actual prize will be mailed to the winner immediately upon winning the contest. The prizes will usually consist of either tickets to an upcoming classic gaming show (as is the case this month) or a homebrew game from our friends at AtariAge. AtariAge sells homebrew games for the Colecovision, Atari 800/XL/XE, Atari 7800, Atari 5200 and Atari 2600!

Where else can you win a retro homebrew game every month from a simple high score contest?! No where except from Retrogaming Times Monthly!!

What if you are a bad player or you are not really good at that game for the month? Well, you should still enter since many good retro-players might already have these homebrews! Therefore, you don't really have to be an expert to win by any means, since most likely the big collectors will not compete.

For the Video Game Summit Edition, the top score will win one free admission to Video Game Summit 2009 (along with the recognition prize), which allows you to enter the show at 9:00 a.m. (2 hours before the doors open to the public!) where you can witness my world record attempt from the

very beginning!!

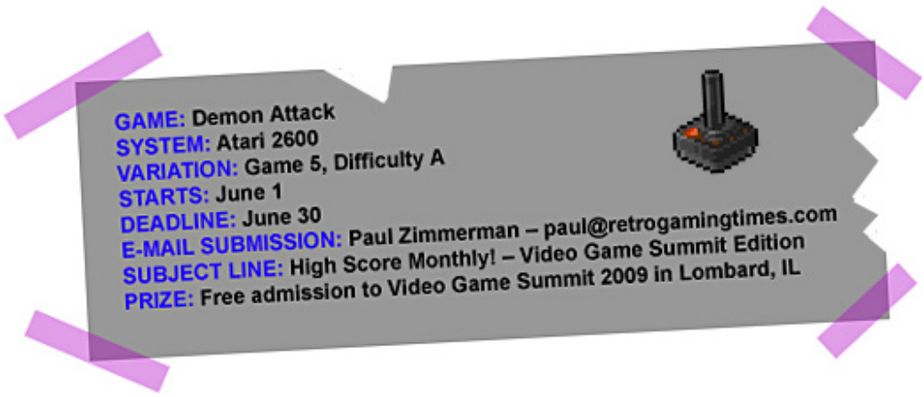
For the other contest this month (the bio contest that Bryan is doing), the prize will be 1 vendor table for 2 different winners.

13. The winner of High Score Monthly! - Video Game Summit 2009 Edition will receive an email from me within the first couple weeks of July.

14. Since play time is short and limited there might be some ties. If there is a tie the winner will be selected by whoever sent me their submission first.

15. Remember, YOU can request games to play!

THIS MONTH'S CHALLENGE TICKET:



Demon Attack for the Atari 2600 is a very popular game, especially due to the simple gameplay and the colorful graphics, which Imagic (the developer/publisher) was well known for. People had told me that Demon Attack is similar to "my game" Phoenix. Well, they both are shooters and you shoot bird-like enemies, but that is it for the similarities. Oh yeah, they are also both simple and fun games to play! But, besides that, they are both very much different games. Good luck and enjoy!

Demon Attack Fun Facts:

- Rob Fulop was the programmer. He also programmed Cosmic Ark, Fathom, Missile Command and Night Driver all for Atari 2600
- It was released in 1982
- Was one of Imagic's first three games
- Atari sued Imagic in 1982 for Demon Attack's similarity to Phoenix
- The game was also available for Intellivision and Odyssey 2

Who Am I?

by Bryan Roppolo

For this month only we are going to have a second contest which will be for a free table at Video Game Summit 2009 in Lombard, IL. There will be two winners, with each getting one table a piece. If one of the winners wants to get extra tables, they are available for $10.00 each through Dan Iacovelli. By winning a table the person not only gets the chance to have something setup at the show free of cost, but also gets free general admission! Therefore, you are basically getting two things for the price of one (which in this case is $0). If you are worried about what these tables can be used for, have no fear, they can be for anything you wish as long as it is video game related (although if you bring a pretty model in a bikini, Dan Iacovelli, the show organizer, probably will let you use the tables for anything you want!). Anyway, let's get onto the contest.

Here are the guidelines for "Who Am I?":

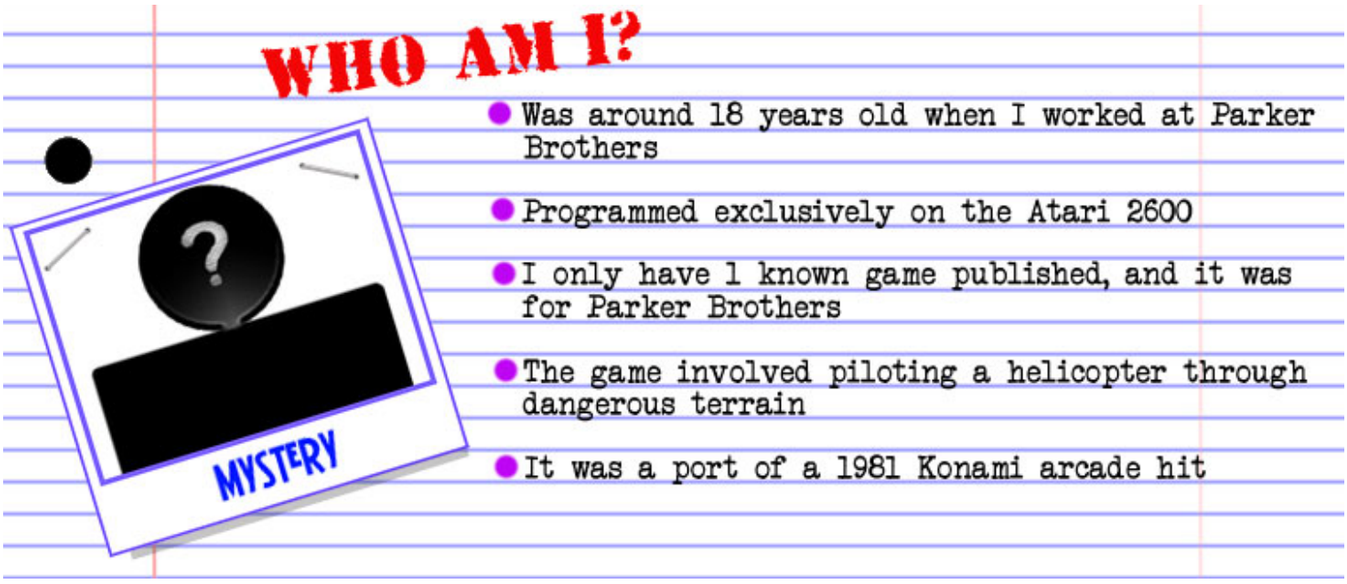
- Below there will be a description of a classic video game programmer from either the '70s, '80s, or '90s. Your job is to find out just exactly who that person is based on the information provided. No additional info will be supplied on request.
- When you think you have the answer, send an e-mail to Bryan Roppolo at bryan@retrogamingtimes.com with "Who Am I? Contest" in the message's subject line.
- You may only guess once. All future guesses will be disqualified if they are submitted. Therefore, think hard before sending in an answer.

- When you submit a guess, I will see if it is right and then let you know if you won or not. All winners will be put in touch with Dan Iacovelli so he can start setting you up at show as well as answering any questions you might have.

- The first 2 people to guess correctly will win 1 table each at Video Game Summit 2009. The Video Game Summit is being held on July 18th 2009 from 11:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. at The Heron Point Convention Center (adjacent to the Fairfield Inn and Suites hotel) - 665 West North Avenue, Lombard, IL.

- If it eventually turns out you can't make it to the show for whatever reason, let me know and I'll then e-mail the next person in line that submitted a correct answer. Therefore, even if you get the correct answer but are not one of the first two to write to me, there is still a chance you might win.

That's it! Pretty simple stuff really. Good luck to all those that take part in this contest. Now for the mystery classic game programmer:



Lunch With Paul Zimmerman

by Bryan Roppolo

With the contests this month for free admission/tables at Video Game Summit 2009, I figured it would be a good idea to give the readers a better idea on exactly what goes on at this show and what it would be like if you were to attend (either by winning free admission via the contests or just going on your own). Considering our staff writer Paul Zimmerman has not only been to VGS, but also has been actively involved behind the scenes with the event, I figured why get him to inform the readers on what it is all about. Therefore, I decided to invite Paul over for some virtual lunch and have a conversation with him about the show. I hope the below chat will be helpful to those thinking of attending or competing in the contest. Hearing about the show first hand from Paul made me interested in going, too bad I live on the East Coast!

Paul, Provide me with a little bit of your background and how you got interested in classic gaming shows

Well, as for my video game background, it all started during the Christmas of 1980 as I mentioned in my column last month titled "Phoenix Is My Game! What Is Your Game?" I have been playing video games ever since then! The Atari 2600 is my favorite system, then Atari 7800, then Nintendo Wii.

As for my professional background, I graduated from Columbia College in Chicago with a major in sound engineering. After graduation I worked retail jobs while trying to do sound for live theatre on the side. After doing that for a couple years with no success at finding a permanent, full-time sound job with benefits, I decided to make a career change. I worked with many major companies doing data entry which I still enjoy very much. I think it actually has something to do with my video game skills. I have excellent hand-eye coordination and my data entry is extremely fast and accurate. I love working with a computer. Right now, unfortunately, I am unemployed.

I got interested in classic gaming shows after learning about the Midwest Gaming Classic in 2002. I found out that it was a retrogaming event with vendors (which was key) and that it was in Milwaukee, WI which was not far from where I lived. Interestingly, that show was held in the basement of a Boy Scout building. I have went to every show since, except 2008, and each year it has gotten bigger and better. It was great to witness that show grow. During the one in 2007 I was even on staff where I was a referee for the first ever "Worldwide Shmup Open." In terms of other shows, it was in 2003 that I found out about Video Game Summit which was even closer to where I live! That was their very first

show. I attended and have went to each one since then. In 2006 I won the VGS slogan contest, which was "Chicago's Only Video Game Summit," and I was also on staff as the tournament organizer (and still am to this day). For this year's event I designed a cover for the Program Cover Contest, which was the first time I ever worked with a paint program. Hopefully in the future I will be able to go to many of the other gaming events throughout the country, especially Classic Gaming Expo and Funspot.

How many people usually attend the Video Game Summit?

It is small, but still great fun. It feels like your own personal show and that everyone there is your best friend. It actually has a great feel to it. It is very fun to hang-out, play video games, talk with people, trade games with attendees and vendors, buy from the vendors, sometimes listen to guest speakers or even a small band, play some tournaments, hopefully win something in the tournaments and raffles, etc. It is always a wonderful experience and the time zips by while you are having so much fun. Since it is a much smaller, more private show compared to all of the other retrogaming events, it obviously brings in a smaller amount of attendees. But, the ones who find out about it always have a great time. I would say there are less than 100 attendees each year, but last year I hear it was over 100, mainly due to our special guests and my VidPin tournament which attracted pinball and video game players. For the 2008 show I invited Todd Rogers, the King of Video Games (http://blogs.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=blog.view&friendId=43291986&blogId=144171471) to come. Soon after that Walter Day, the founder of Twin Galaxies, wanted to come and he brought along Tim McVey, the very first player to score a billion points on any video game (http://sprinter.home.mchsi.com/index.html). That was for sure the greatest show yet!! But, the 2009 show in July will be even better!!!

Why would someone reading this magazine be interested in attending the show? Meaning is there anything unique that makes it stand out from the rest?

Well, obviously the "retrogaming" theme. If you are interested in retrogaming, this is a fun one to go to. But, even if you do not like retrogaming you can still usually find modern games as well. Sometimes the vendors sell modern items and there are even modern consoles to play at the event. For example, last year for my VidPin tournament I used my Nintendo Wii which I will bring back again this year for attendees to play. Also, we will have another special guest this year, but he will be remote. Tim McVey will watch my world record attempt, so he will be in the chat room of the stream plus we will have him on Skype so people can listen to him talk. After my world record attempt attendees then will be able to play online Wii games with him (if my Wii can connect to the hotel's wireless internet), which will probably be Dr Mario Online Rx and Bomberman Blast. At the same time we will be using Skype with Tim so attendees can watch and talk to him while also playing against him.

Each year there is something unique that makes the Video Game Summit stand out from the rest and also different from the previous year. A very good example is last year, when Walter, Todd, and Tim came to the show. To talk to these celebrities at such a small event was something wonderful for all of the attendees. Usually Walter and Todd go to very big gaming events and it is hard to talk to them. You can't even play games with them. However, at the VGS last year attendees were able to play right along side them! We witnessed Todd Rogers playing Dragster for the Atari 2600 backwards, the debut of Tim McVey coming back into gaming, and there was even a Hollywood film crew at the event filming Tim for the documentary they are making about him! I also had a Video Pinball tournament, which I believe to be the very first video pinball tournament in the world. This year I am a special guest and am going to attempt to not only get the new world record for the Atari 2600 version of Phoenix, but also 3 million points and maybe some more live at the event! Dan, the organizer of VGS, is already offering me $50 if I reach 3 million. If anyone else would like to offer me some money I would be very happy to accept that offer (hey, a guy can try can't he?). My attempt will also be shown on UStream ((http://www.ustream.tv/channel/zimmzamm's-atari-2600-phoenix-world-record-attempt) for those who can't make it. However, we might change it to Justin.tv or Stickam so keep watching the Video Game Summit website for any updates. After my attempt I will play games with attendees and even sign autographs! So, bring in anything related to the following Atari 2600 games - Beany Bopper, Fantastic Voyage, and Fast Eddie, because I have the world records for those and I will sign them for you. Also, bring anything for Phoenix because I just might get the world record at the event. Besides my live world record attempt, there will also be a Jaguar Network Gathering, Jagfest Challenge, Atari 2600 Challenge, a Part-Time Staffer Program, and some other very unique plans and surprises. There will also be some that won't be announced, so the only way to find out about them is to come to the show. You can find out all about the show on the Video Game Summit's website, http://avc.atari-users.net/VGS.html.

If for some reason I can't achieve the world record for Phoenix at the event, right after my game there will be another surprise! I'll give you a clue - ever seen the movie King of Kong? Also, if an attendee buys a ticket online before the show at http://avc.atari-users.net/Events/VGS_files/register.html , they will be able to come into the event 2 hours before the doors open to witness my world record attempt from the very beginning! I will be starting the game at 9:00 a.m. central time.

How far is it from some of the major Midwestern cities?

Well, it is in Lombard, IL which is about 20 miles away from Chicago and about 90 miles away from Milwaukee, WI. The VGS is at the lovely Marriott Fairfield Inn & Suites.

Some extra info to point out:

For this month's bio contest, the winners of the tables can be a "vendor" if they want, bring a TV/console to play, have their own tournaments, or use the tables for any other creative idea. If they want it to be known what they will be using the tables for they should contact Dan Iacovelli and he can help promote that on the Video Game Summit's website.

Also, if an attendee has an Atari Jaguar and a way to network (Jaglink - 1 or 2, Catbox or homemade) and any or all of the three following games: Battlesphere, AirCars, or Doom, then they can participate in the Atari Jaguar network gathering that will take place two hours before the show closes.

All tournaments and raffles will have prizes and they are free to enter!

People of all ages with an interest in video games are encouraged to attend. Admission to the 2009 Video Game Summit is only $3.00 per person (kids under 12 with an adult is free) and vendor tables are only $10.00 each.

The Video Game Summit is being held on July 18th 2009 from 11:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. at The Heron Point Convention Center (adjacent to the Fairfield Inn and Suites hotel) - 665 West North Avenue, Lombard, IL.

I hope to see everyone at Video Game Summit 2009!! Or, if not, then at least during my live stream!

Show Report: CCAG 2009

by Alan Hewston

As I told our editor Bryan, this is my show, but oops not literally. It is the local show that I can most easily attend, always somewhere in North East Ohio which is right in my backyard. I've gone to every one that we have had - I think the first year was 1998. We've changed the name of the show a few times, but kept the same combination of letters C C A G and now a consistent web site as well (http://www.ccagshow.com).

A shot of the floor with many tables, 47 in all

For over a decade CCAG was held every year save for 2003, when our first show organizer, Jim Krych, was called into active duty to defend our borders during the US War on Terror. We also lost our venue that year, the Armory that Jim was able to secure as a reservist. Jim did a fine job back then with some help from a small committee of fellow collectors including "Sir" Thomas McLaren of Digitaldinos, Fred Horvat of FMH Games and Tom Zjaba to name a few. Readers here at RTM know Tom Zjaba, as he is both the founder of Tomorrow's Heroes and Retrogaming Times. Finally, we the NE Ohio gaming collectors, dealers, players and fans owe a big thank you to our current organizers Mike Gedeon of Video Game Connection - 4824 Memphis Ave. Cleveland, Ohio 44144 and Matt Teske of Osmodiar Games. With Mike and Matt's help we've had the same venue for the past three shows, and they'll strive to host 2 shows a year - on Memorial Day and Columbus Day weekends. The event is currently held on one day from Noon to 8 PM, usually on Saturday, but possibly Sunday depending upon the venue's schedule. The next CCAG Show is scheduled for Saturday October 24, 2009. Same time, same place. Tables RSVP start in 2 weeks.

During the first few shows our focus was primarily on classic computers, but we did not mind any consoles at that time either. Attendance was around 75 to 125 attendees, and the numbers gradually grew to where I think we finally hit 200 a couple years back. We eventually embraced the swarm of console collectors and game players alike, and in most cases we have joined them and they have joined us. So we have a good mix of dealers and attendees who sell, collect, or play one of the other or both. I guess you could say that I was always part both. After moving to our current American Legion Hall venue, the numbers approached 300 last year and we easily surpassed 400 this year. We ran out of the 300 copies of the special Video Game Trader magazine handed out to each dealer/paid attendee by 2 pm. Quite a turn out, and we're looking to grow a little further the next couple years.

Since my wife had our digital camera and was not with me, I had to rely on others for photos, so we do not yet have much here for this review. You can go check out the CCAG web site for past and (soon) present pictures.

Not yet shown in any photo here was a mini arcade inside a side room - off from the main hall. All told there had to be over 30 systems, from arcade machines, consoles, and classic computers on display and set for free play. As done in the past couple shows, we had skill contests with prizes and an official TG referee from TwinGalaxies. Besides the game contests there were other door prizes and chances for Chinese auctions held every other hour. Those are a lot of fun, and the donations for door prizes by our multitude of sponsor's helps to keep the cost down on admission to only $2 for adults and $1 for game players 12 and under. Tables are also fairly cheap at $2 per foot.

Brian Johnson standing next to his NES Controllers

The best display is shown here by local NES controller collector Brian Johnson (I've wanted to interview Brian a few times in RTM and still never have - too many other things to do - but maybe some day I'll get to do that and make a list of every controller he has). He may have the greatest number of unique NES controllers in the world, and if not, he is probably in the top 5. Brian comes every year and has a couple more new controllers to show off.

Since I had 2 tables and was selling items, I was fairly busy all day, so I did not get to cover the show much better than this report. And as you can tell, this is more history than just a report. Although, I did make sure to buy and trade from several other collectors and dealers. So my collection grew an infinitesimal amount, but more importantly (to my wife) is that I brought back less stuff than I took, and so there is a little less bilk of my (mostly common) duplicates that get stashed back into the attic until the next show. I also finally broke down and sold some of my own collection, a few rarer C64 boxed complete adventure games, such as Planetfall and Hitchiker's Guide to the Galaxy. Alan "Pitfall Harry" Hewston, that's me, did show up a few times and met up with one of our newer RTM staff writers, Derek Slaton. See us posing in the Jungle.

We expect to have to have some fantastic video coverage provided by VGATV host and curator, Derek Slaton. I also need to mention and give thanks to Derek as all of the photos here were taken on his camera. Oh yes, and Derek says not to forget to mention in my review that he won the Hero Quest reproduction cart door prize - sweet! I'm sure that he'll show that off sometime soon on his site. Hopefully Derek's videos and interviews all turned out well and he'll have a great review of the show in a week or two. He'll have that announced inside RTM next month, so I do not want to spoil anything more from what he will cover. If you want to see some of his quality work then check out his current episodes, and if you keep checking back you'll see his CCAG show footage, interviews, etc. before everyone else. Visit http://www.thevgatv.com/.

Allan "Pitfall Harry" Hewston and Derek Slaton

Free Plug: The next show in my area is coming on 9/12/09 in Columbus, Ohio by the ACEC (Atari Computer Enthusiasts of Columbus) who have had a swap meet or show for about a dozen years as well. They too embrace the consoles in addition to computers. More info on the ACEC 2009 Vintage Computer and Video Game Swap Meet can be found at: http://www.angelfire.com/oh4/acec/acec.html.

Be sure to check out your own local show and provide a report of it here at RTM, as I'm sure all of our readers would love to hear about it!

Signing off from Cleveland, Alan Hewston

Dinosaurs, Algebra, And The Three-Handed Controller

by Paul Inglehart

March 1, 1997. The atmosphere was thick and humid, almost to the point of being unbearable, like an invisible cloak wrapping itself tighter around me. It was only 72 degrees, but my palms and forehead were drenched in sweat, and the distant distress cries of monkeys confirmed that I was, in fact, completely lost in the jungle. The incredibly dense fog which seemed to permeate the very trees and rocks only added to the feeling that something was not quite right. There was only one way out of this Lost Land, and that was into the concealing mist. I proceeded toward the bridge in the distance, not knowing what lay in wait beyond. A lone pistol and a full box of ammunition lay on the ground, begging the question "What is this doing here? Whose is...or was...it?"

This place was like a Japanese tea garden gone horribly wrong. It was perfect and beautiful, with an almost forced naturality, but the dense fog and vicious screams of distant, unknown creatures lent the

place a sinister feeling. The monkeys had gone silent. Rounding a corner, I suddenly saw a ghostly figure disappear into the fog, but it was not the shape of a friendly human ally, or even one of the many monkeys I had seen chattering and playing on the jungle floor. This one was slightly shorter than a human, bipedal, but the long tail and snout and the murderous claws on the feet revealed the identity of my new discovery. There was a live Velociraptor loose in the jungle, less than fifty feet away from me. This was what I had come for. I wiped my hands on my pants and took out the pistol I had found just minutes before. Lucky me, I had a...pea shooter. I didn't know how well a little pistol would fare against a 500 pound killing machine like a raptor, but I had no other option. A chilling scream, followed by fast, pounding footsteps that shook the ground, announced that the raptor had become aware of my presence. It was coming. It would kill me and eat me if it could. I fired off two rounds into the fog, but the footsteps kept coming, and the raptor emerged from the fog at an incredible speed heading straight towards me. Leveling the pistol directly at its head, I started pumping round after round into the raptor's skull, but it kept coming, and as it leapt towards me, teeth bared, I heard a distant voice...

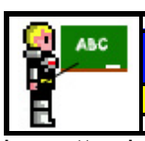
"Are you playing that stupid video game again? You're supposed to be doing your math!"

The game in question, of course, is Turok: Dinosaur Hunter for the Nintendo 64. Seizing on the dinosaur mania of the mid-90's, this was a perfect case of the right game at the right time. It was my first foray into the wide, and sometimes terrifying, world of first-person shooters, and well before the age of ID checks for M-rated games. Renting it from the local video store was no problem. Playing it until all hours of the night, or when I was supposed to be doing homework, was a big problem...according to my mother. I had never experienced anything in a video game even close to the realism provided by Turok, and surprisingly, the gameplay and graphics hold up nicely, even in the age of Blu-ray and High Definition. The graphics, while still blocky and not quite natural-looking, were far ahead of anything else released on the Nintendo 64 at the time, especially when considering the weapons which have always been, in my opinion, THE reason to play any of the Turok games.

While the first entry in the series lacked some of the more entertaining weapon offerings that came later (we all remember the Cerebral Bore from Turok 2: Seeds of Evil), there are some fun ways to kill dinosaurs in the original. Topping the list is the Chronoscepter, the "ultimate gun" of this game, which effectively rips a hole in the space-time continuum, causing a massive explosion and usually killing anything, even some bosses, with one hit. Unfortunately, without a cheat code (hint: NTHGTHDGDCRTDTRK) you have to assemble the weapon using parts scattered across the entire world, and the last part is in the tunnel leading up to the final boss, so its potential is somewhat limited. The Fusion Cannon is almost as useless, but you know as soon as you equip it that you're dealing with some massive firepower. Blasting a swirling red ball of nuclear energy into a crowd of tribal lunatics and watching it explode, sending said tribesmen flying into the stratosphere should not be this much fun. Unfortunately, the Cannon itself only appears late in the game and ammo is incredibly rare. For my money though, my favorite weapon from the original Turok has to be the Tek Arrows. They were incredibly useful, fast, and a stash of them seemed to be around every corner. I liked them so much that I attempted to make my own, which was a disaster best left to the ethers of history.

Turok's control style, which was at first a cause of major concern among some of the publications of the time, turned out to be a stroke of brilliance. Unlike every other N64 game at the time, the analog stick was not used for movement, instead being replaced by the four C buttons. The stick was relegated to aiming duty only, but after playing for ten minutes you'll never want to play a first-person game any other way. I still think that Turok has a better control scheme than the ubiquitous two-stick method used today. Progress, it seems, is not always a good thing.

Sadly, the Turok franchise seems to have fallen from its once-legendary perch as King of the first-person shooters. Recent outings on the XBox 360 and the PlayStation 2, while decent, are not as much fun or as well-crafted as the originals. The fun, the fear, the real Turok can only be found on a cartridge in my opinion. So let me turn off the high-def machines, take up my battered, half-dead Nintendo 64 controller, and go have some fun with dinosaurs.



How Phantasy Star II Taught Me To Spell

by Derek Slaton

No matter how many trips to the mall we took as a family, the song and dance was the same every time. My mother and step-father would wisely forgo dragging my twelve year old self around from clothing store to clothing store, instead opting to drop me off at the arcade with a couple of bucks in hand. Knowing full well that I would blow through that money in no time, they would let me wander up the hallway to Babbage's video game store to gaze at all the shiny Nintendo and Sega games while they finished shopping. Like many kids who were several years away from being able to work, and therefore having money to buy the games they wanted, the scene that ensued was undoubtedly duplicated all across the country every day.

Upon every trip to the mall I would find a game that I absolutely could not live without, and when my parents came to pick me up it was my own personal version of Let's Make a Deal (sadly Monty Hall was unavailable). I would try everything in the book, promising to mow the lawn or do the dishes for a month, anything to be able to walk out with a game in hand. More often than not, my offers of a deal were rejected soundly. One night, however, my mother threw out an offer that I could not refuse.

The game in question was Phantasy Star II for the Sega Genesis. Now, Phantasy Star II was unique in the fact that it came with a 110 page hint guide that would tell you step by step how to get through the game. Because my mother was fearful that she would spend fifty bucks and I would run through the game in no time since I had the hint guide, she agreed to buy me the game on one condition, that I got the game and she got the hint guide. Not knowing just how difficult a game Phantasy Star II was, I agreed without a moments hesitation.

Fast forward a few months. Despite putting in some sixty or seventy hours into Phantasy Star II, I was stuck roughly a quarter of the way through. To say this game was beating me senseless would be a gross understatement. One of the side effects of spending so much of my time trying in vain to rid the Algo System from the control of the Mother Brain was that my attention to my school work was fleeting. I was heading into the final grading period of my sixth grade year and I was on the verge of getting an "F" in spelling. Seeing as how one of the greatest inventions in the history of mankind, Spellcheck, was a few years away, it was once again time to play Let's Make a Deal.

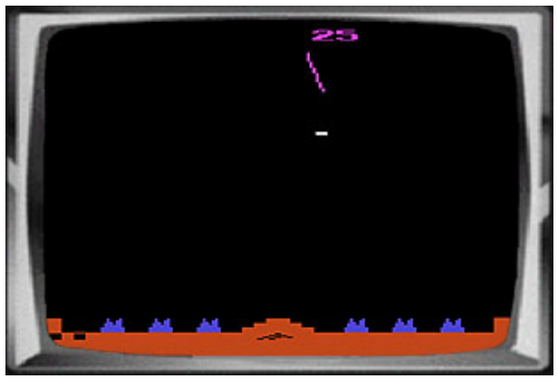
My mother opened the bargaining session with a strong offer, either I pass spelling or I would have to go to summer school. While that was basically the only offer I was going to get, I decided that I had nothing to lose and tossed out the hint guide as a prize if I passed. It remains a mystery to this day if she accepted because she thought I actually needed the extra incentive or if she was calling my bluff, but the end result was me doing something that I had never done before or since, I spent my nights studying. I even studied so hard some nights that I didn't even turn on any of my game systems, which is like an alcoholic saying he studied so hard he didn't have time to open a beer.

Week after week I was learning words that I would never ever have a need to spell again in my life. But after nine long weeks of studying obscure sixth grade level words, the moment of truth finally arrived. Instead of the "F" on my report card, there was a big "A" beside spelling, which I practically threw into my mothers face as soon as she walked in the door, which was followed by me yelling "gimmie gimmie gimmie, for the love of god gimmie the Phantasy Star II hint guide!"

So at the end of the day Phantasy Star II had essentially taught me to spell at a sixth grade level, and thanks to the insane difficulty of the later mazes, by the end of summer I was also proficient in advanced map reading.

How I Discovered THE SECRET Of Missile Command

by Dave Mrozek



This is the story of how a kid single-handedly discovered THE SECRET of the Atari 2600 Missile Command cartridge, and in effect prevented some kind of global catastrophe.

Rewind back to the early 1980's - a golden age for video game fans. Gamers of today are jaded with the never-ending parade of WWII shooters, but back in 1982 there was a real sense of anticipation and discovery. Every month a new arcade hit pushed gaming into new territory and captured the hearts of millions.

In the summer of 1982, Missile Command was the hot cartridge for the Atari 2600. The neighborhood kids would congregate at my friend Billy's house to takes turns decimating waves of ballistic missiles with - (duh!) - antiballistic missiles. Any gamer worth his salt was skilled in both the arcade and home versions of this classic.

It was a hot summer day when I finally obtained this "must-have" Atari cartridge. Word on the street was that the local 7-11 was now selling Atari games. The implications of this were huge. Now I didn't need to nag my mom into driving me to the store, where she would admonish me for blowing my hard-earned cash on video games. I immediately called 7-11 and inquired if they had Missile Command. "Yes, it's $22." That wasn't a bad price, and the fact that it was within walking distance sealed the deal. I broke my piggy bank and made the mile-long trek in the blistering Maryland heat.

Missile Command was a great addition to my collection. Owning my own copy meant I could explore all 28 game variations, instead of just the "easy one" Billy always insisted on (lame!).

One bright summer morning I was just about to start playing variation #13 when my mom called down from the kitchen. Why do mothers always bother kids when they're trying to play games? This had better be important! When I returned to my game a few minutes later, I was in for the shock of a lifetime. In place of the far-right city were the initials "RF"!

I immediately showed it to my mother, partly so I would have an official witness to this unbelievable phenomenon. It was like seeing a flying saucer or something. Limited by my public school vocabulary, it was difficult for me to convey to her the gravity of the situation. Granted, I had previously discovered a secret in my Adventure cartridge, but everybody knew about that one. I was the ONLY PERSON IN THE ENTIRE WORLD to have the inside scoop on this hidden gem. All you had to do was play variation #9 and score zero points! Who could have known??

My mom recommended I write a letter to Atari, who was probably completely oblivious to this incredible secret. Using my best penmanship I explained the situation in lurid detail and dropped the letter in the mailbox on the corner.

For those of you who weren't around in the 1980's, you need to understand that if you did anything by mail back then, there was a mandatory six to eight week waiting period before you heard anything back at all. It was a law or something. Let's say you ordered a toy out of a comic book ad. By the time it landed on your doorstep you had long forgotten about the thing. That's just how it was back then.

It wasn't until the end of summer when I finally heard back from Atari. That's right - the REAL ATARI from Sunnyvale, California! The letter featured their official letterhead and some typed text that was worded something to this effect:

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Dear David,

Congratulations on finding THE SECRET in your Missile Command game
cartridge. Be sure to look out for more secrets hidden in other Atari
video game cartridges.
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That was it. No cash reward. No box of games. Not even a coupon! My mom thought that was pretty lame, but she wasn't seeing the big picture. By capitalizing the words "THE SECRET", Atari was clearly sending me a message that my discovery had major implications. They obviously couldn't go into detail due to national security concerns, and I could respect that. This probably had something to do with NORAD. The piece of mind of knowing I had probably foiled some diabolical plan was enough for me.

Fast-forward 13 years to the mid-1990's. Now I have my own place and I'm sifting through boxes of junk I've accumulated over the years. There are old trinkets, magazines, and loose papers. I stumbled across that old letter from Atari, smiled briefly, and proceed to toss it into the trash pile with everything else.

In retrospect this was the worst mistake I ever made in my entire life. Little did I know that only a few years later my love for classic video games would return. If I only had that letter today, it would be framed and proudly displayed as the centerpiece of my game room. But all I have left is the memory and this amazing story.

Dave Mrozek AKA The Video Game Critic (www.videogamecritic.net) is currently celebrating ten years of writing classic game reviews on his site.

Never-Lander: A Programming Odyssey

by Marc Hull

I'd like to state for the record that I am a HUGE fan of video games (80's genre anyhow), so apparently this is the right place! When I was asked if I would write an article detailing my experiences during a recent video game programming endeavor, I had to say yes as it is the fulfillment of my teenage dream to be a rich (HA!) and famous (among 3-4 people anyway) video game developer. Heck, I've even been pirated which my wife thought was just hysterical and after it was resolved, so did I. The game I created is called Never-Lander and runs exclusively on the expanded TI99/4A (haven't worked out the contract details with Commodore yet).

For the 5.9 billion people who have never heard of nor seen Never-Lander, perhaps a brief description is in order. It is a vertically scrolling, meteor dodging, fuel cell grabbing, seat of your pants flying , white knuckle, thrill a minute (sorry marketing took control). It's your basic Lunar Lander type theme except you...don't land. You simply have to traverse meteor laden zones and survive for a specific amount of time. Your life is dependent on your fuel supply which decreases with the use of your thrusters and by contact with a meteor. Occasionally you will see fuel canisters floating in space. Contact with one of these will replace some of your spent fuel. There are 5 levels to the game and 5 zones of increasing difficulty per level. Each level adds in a new element to keep your frustration level at a maximum and your hands cramping. In typical 80's fashion there is no way to win the game, but a score of 350,000 is very respectable.

I never really sat down with the intention of writing a game. In fact the whole thing started with my trying to make a Galaga-type star field that scrolled vertically in the TI's "bit map" mode (incredible genius, I know) and it grew from there. I wish I could say that the game was planned with precision and mapped out in fine detail, but the truth is that it was written in disjointed segments and went straight from my noodle to the keyboard. If you saw the source and you were a coder then you would probably chuckle politely and say, "yea that's quite a piece of...work...you got there..." The completed game is more like a hundred different routines fitted together, glued, and duct taped to make the bigger whole work as it should. Not exactly an efficient and well thought out project but the end result is pretty good (if you were to ask me anyhow).

The process was (more or less) figure out what I wanted to add to the heap, read the TI manuals (not helpful unless you are the engineering type), ask a question on the TI On-Line Users' Group (usually helpful), attempt the code, attempt the code again, rinse, repeat, etc. There were several times when, in total frustration, I would change the game plan to eliminate a part I couldn't get to work only to reinstate it after an appropriate cool down period. When it came to programming the game, my philosophy evidently was, "If you can't knock down the wall by beating your head on it then you need to beat your head on the wall harder and more often." In fact (a little side story) a friend of mine asked me at last years Chicago TI Fair what debugger I used when I was writing Never-Lander. Although I had a pretty good idea what a debugger was and had every intention of faking it, I decided to admit that I didn't know how to use one (Still don't and really don't care to learn how. That would make this too much like work).

At any rate the monster (by my standards) was eventually completed, or more accurately declared done when my patience finally came to an end. It took about 6-7 months to do on some evenings and weekends and as they say the rest is history. If you are so inclined you can download the game from The TI Game Shelf (specifically http://tigameshelf.net/Files/Emu/NeverInd.dsk) or The Hidden Reef, 718-448-9402 (A BBS that I connect to at a blistering 1200 baud). I am not sure if it is up anywhere else. Sometime in the near future it will be available in cartridge format as well.

There are some definite pros and cons to programming on the TI with the biggest knock being the cryptic architecture of the machine. I spent as much time learning the quirks of the computer as I did earning my knowledge of the language. On the plus side though is the fact that there have been very few of the arcade originals ported over to our side of the fence. That leaves the field wide open for those who are interested in "the good old games." As a matter of fact, Retroclouds (a TI-99/4A Enthusiast) has just ported over a very good rendition of Pitfall! for the TI and is working fervently (I hope anyway) on a conversion of Time Pilot. Thus far his efforts look very promising.

So to all you MSX guys who already understand the 9918A VDP (the most confusing part of the whole deal for me), come on over and take a walk on the less traveled path...The TI-99/4A path! Until next time (if there is one)...

RTM Idiocy: Blissful Ignorance And Dangerous Knowledge

by Mark Sabbatini

A Play in Three Parts

ACT ONE

(Various people are seated at desks in front of computers in small separate rooms throughout a multistory structure. At the bottom center are the two main inquisitors, CHEMDE and CAROLYNA, who are asking advice from a group of fellow TRS-80 computer users on an electronic bulletin board about buying their first MS-DOS PC. In a space directly above and between them is COCOWIKI, a fanatical devotee of TRS-80 computers. All rooms are dark except for the person typing the messages as they are read aloud by the narrator.)

The play begins on Sept. 15, 1990, and lasts for several months, although passage of time is not

observed or remarked upon. Also, it should be noted this is the abridged version of the play, with about 98 percent of the original text removed (mostly detailed technical specs and repetition), but all misspellings and questionable use of grammar intact.

From: CHEMDE To: MARTYGOODMAN

I am considering POSSIBLY getting an IBM PC. I still (and always will) use my Coco, even if it is discontinued as rumors have it. However, I recently saw (and heard) a terrific program for synthesizers which needs an "IBM PC and MPU-401 board". This program is exactly what I need, and I doubt if it ever will be available on the Coco."

After looking at all that the Computer Shopper has, I am MASSIVELY CONFUSED!! My head is spinning with choices (literally!). I have followed some of your forum messages in the past about staying away from the TANDY 1000 series (which I will do) and you suggested getting a "generic Taiwan or Korean 640K XT clone."

I really need help on this one because, honestly, I had no idea that the IBM PC world was THIS complicated!!!

From: MARTYGOODMAN To: CHEMDE

In the $1000 to $1300 price range for a system, where that "system" includes a monitor, keyboard, but NOT a printer, you should at this time NOT consider an XT clone, but rather either an "AT clone" (80286 macine) or an 80386SX machine. Get at least 1 megabyte of memory... you might want to consider getting four later... memory prices are dropping...Get at a MINIMUM a "fast" (better than 30 ms average track to track acess time) 40 meg hard drive....I would say, before yu get too mired in terms and specs, do the following: GET FAMILIAR with the softwre you intend to run on this PC.

From: CHEMDE To: MARTYGOODMAN

If I get a 286, is it easily "upgradeable" to a 386, 486, etc.?

From: COCOKIWI To: CHEMDE

Wot! About a MM/1 ! I now have spec sheet ! beats the Mac and Amegia! 15meg clock,DMA. Signetics 66470 vsc chip with REAL TIME RLE image decoding 256 colors, Brooktree TRIPLE 8 bit DAC for 16.7 millon colors. REs 320*210 <256>colors 720*540 <16>colors with a Multisync monitor. Res 640*420 <16>colors with mag or cm-8 monitor max. 1meg on board,3.5 floppy 1.44 meg NETWORK Int Built in! wil run 127 mm/1's ,cable & driver option.2 serial ports , one is configed MIDI PC key board port. RGB analog input;expandable.net is 100k baud. expanded unit.added card. 1 powered serial, <mouse>expands to two added ports,2 parallel,DMA scsi port; STEREO SOUND ; JOYSTK ports ; sockets for two simm boards 2 1megs or two 4meg simms.make the total memory of 9 meg. real time clock on board.and you can hook up the MM/1 to the CoCo-3 via the OS-9 Lv II Gate Way! one of the par ports is used as a link! Use BOTH. you get with it! OS-9 68K with WINDOWS. C Compiler. Basic<ala Basic-09> TEXT EDITOR ala tw128.I think!graphics editor.demos and ful utilitys inc.

Now! NOT MS-DOS you say! OK! included is ; PC File Manager Sequential Block File Manager,Network file Manager. Print spooling. So file transfer between computers should be no problem! So! For $1125.00 it beats out ! the heavies! and has some link between Ms-Dos and this! if you have a CoCo-3 and have used Os-9,Then why go to a clone!This one is beter by far! there are to many problems that I've seen with Ms-dos clones,None are complettly Complatable to IBM a program will work on this but not on that! this progam will not config properly,etc etc etc. Even the New WINDOWS has bugs! Not unusual for Microsoft!os-2 what a joke! Os9-Lv II on a CoCo-3 beats it! Who needs these memory hogs!

I would love a MM/1 except I don't have $1125.00 floating around right now<a denotation would help>to the poor Discontinued Computer user)There's a lot of those out there! I should start a new church<tax deductable> <grin>

From: CHEMDE To: COCOKIWI

One simple LITTLE question though: Is the MM/1 IBM compatible?? If I MUST buy another computer it MUST be IBM compatible!!

From: COCOKIWI To: CHEMDE

Hoe I did'nt get too deep! Yeh! wwellllll to answer your question!
1 NO! It is not!

It is a joke! trying to program that thing! The 68000 is a lot easier to program,You could problably WRITE your own program using BASIC - 09 on the os9 68k that comes with it! I am shore that programs will be there for it,It has a MIDI port so software would be there for it.

Don't let a CHEEP program Make you buy a Cheep computer!

I'm on my bended knees <DON'T BUY IT>!!!!!!!! stick with it.Don't weaken! IBM ANON IS HERE! WE will help you over your craving! cover your eyes when you see a Clone! Lock you into a room when you start! I must have it,I must,I must!! lock away you check book!<grin>

From: CHEMDE To: COCOKIWI

Thanks for your very, VERY convincing dialog! At this point I am not sure what I will do. I probably should check things out more.

From: CHEMDE To: ALL

After reading the ad for the MM/1 I have several questions that hopefully someone can answer for me (in simplistic terms please).

1) The ad states that it has "built-in IBM PC style music hardware". I hope that this means it has an MPU-401 compatible midi board in it.

2) How easy is it to port a IBM PC program?

From: COCOKIWI To: CHEMDE

Look at it this way!If you had 3 good programs and they worked on only 3 differnt computers!you would not go out and buy 3 computers would you! But if I said look you like these three programs what say we run all THREE on your computer the MM/1 You see if you have a Clone you will NEVER SEE a PROGRAM from a MAC,ST or an AMEGIA. But you can go the other way!So!Now you get the benefit of the MANY programs written for the 68000 computers!that are BETTER than the S-DOS ones.

From: 6809ER To: CHEMDE

The MMU does not use the same CPU as the IBM PC, so any programs writen to run on an IBM will not work on the MM1. The IBM PC file manager is for moving data only, it does not convert programs to work on the MM1.

From: COCOKIWI To: CHEMDE

As far as PORTING is concerned, The C Compilier is what allows this. It is a Language. the source Code is written in TEXT ASCII. If you have a compilier on your computer you can take a program written in C and rewrite it So that it works on your computer! a C Compilier Comes with the MM/1. All they have to do is get the source code from the programer who wrote it<and his permision to work on it>.

From: CAROLYNA To: MARTYGOODMAN

Hi, Marty. I haven't been on for quite a while because I did what you advised against -- I bought a 1000HX. I just couldn't pass it up for $259. And...I love it! I've jumped right in to MS-DOS and have learned a lot. At work, we've switched to IBM's and everyone is bewildered, so I'm really ahead of things there.

From: CHEMDE To: COCOKIWI

I think what you said has clarified things tremendously for me. So, first I must check to see if the program which I wish to purchase is written in C AND to see if the author of the program will allow it to be ported to another system. If it can be done, then GREAT... I may soon be the owner of an MM/1!!

From: COCOKIWI To: CHEMDE

Heh!heh! you are getting it now! Then with some help from your friend write your OWN program! Then MAKE MONEY SELLING IT < Now you are recooping the money you payed out>. There will be others who would like a program like you want!Not to mention you could make it better!

From: LINLEE To: COCOKIWI

I have been so thoroughly disgusted by your hype... your " if I like it its the greatest thing since sex ... if I don't it's worthless and only a moron would use it" attitude that I've just pretty much ignored your messages. However with the amount of hype you've put out I've finally decided to offer a little sane objective view of some points counter to yours.

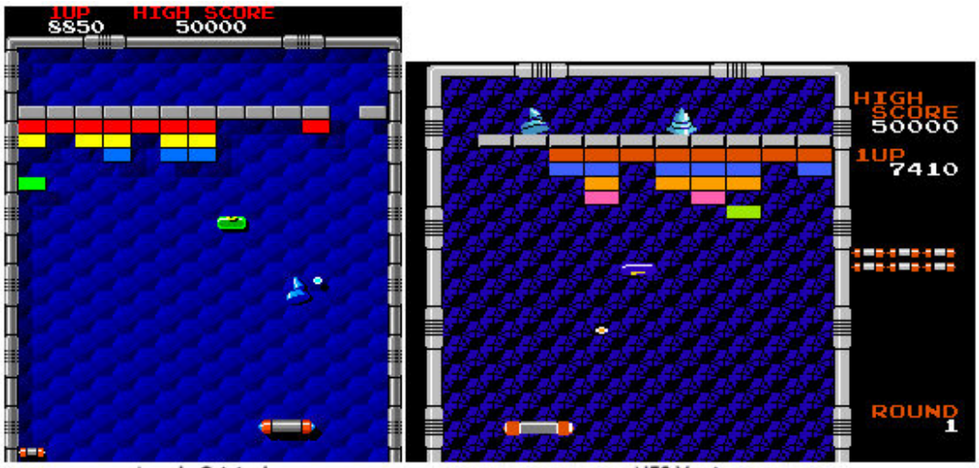
First let's tackle this idea that any program ever written in C on any machine can be easily ported to the MM/1. How about programs written specifically to run well under a particular hardware setup? Second let's tackle this issue of MSDOS being nothing but trouble. I've run hundreds of programs while changing my hardware setup at least a half dozen times, and practically every program has performed flawlessly.

From: CBJ To: COCOKIWI

Oh have you asked for it!!!!!!!! You are out of line ! Not only are reccommending a computer, but you are demanding that somebody buy it becvause YOU like it. HOLDF ON!!!!!!!!!!!!!! We who use our computers everyday; be it under OS-9 or MS-DOS or RS-DOS don't need MISINFORMATION!!!!!!!!!!!!!

survivors is to flee in the spaceship Arkanoid. During their search for a new home the Arkanoid comes under heavy attack, and in a last ditch effort of escape the survivors launch the Vaus spacecraft. However, the Vaus becomes trapped in a deadly space labyrinth. Using an energy ball, it must smash its way through the the labyrinths and return to safety. That's a lot of backstory and imagination for a game that honestly, at its core, is all about the classic objective "avoid missing ball for high score." However, that is what makes Arkanoid fun, introducing new variables that spice up the game play yet retain familiarity that pretty much anyone can grasp.

The Vaus acts as the player's paddle and sits at the bottom of the screen. It is controlled via a standard paddle spinner, clockwise and counterclockwise - right and left. A button is used for service as well as for activating special functions the Vaus can become equipped with. The energy ball always begins each round sitting atop the Vaus so service can be released to the player's advantage. The objective is to destroy all the destructible blocks on the screen, and once this is accomplished the next round begins. Eventually space debris will begin to appear, drifting around and wreaking havoc on otherwise perfectly placed shots. If the energy ball hits a piece of debris it will destroy the debris, however, the resulting explosion will change the direction and angle of the ball. Sometimes this is beneficial as the debris can angle the ball back up toward the blocks or hold the ball in a block filled area longer. However, most of the time ricochets off space debris cause the ball to abruptly change course when heading downward, requiring faster than usual reflexes to keep it alive. Space debris can also be destroyed by simply hitting it with the Vaus once it gets low enough on the screen.



Arcade Original NES Version

Some of the blocks contain power-up capsules that roll down the screen once smashed free. The power-up capsules play a very important role in Arkanoid and are one of the main features that make the game stand out above the standard notion of a ball and paddle. For the capsule to be used it must be touched by the Vaus. Regardless of any power-up, the ball must still be kept alive as allowing it to fall to the bottom of the screen will still result in destruction. However, there is no penalty for a capsule rolling past the Vaus, in fact picking and choosing which power-up to use and when to use it is a crucial part of success in the game. Capsules are the same between both the arcade and NES versions and contain the following functions:

(S) capsules slow the movement of the ball, very important during frantic action or to set up critical shots.
(B) capsules break open the side of the screen and offer an instant warp to the next round.
(C) capsules catch the ball when it comes into contact with the Vaus, it can then be moved and released by pressing the button.
(L) capsules enable the Vaus to fire laser beams with the button, allowing rapid destruction of blocks but the ball must still be kept alive.
(D) capsules disrupt the ball, splitting it into three. At least one of the balls must be kept alive.
(E) capsules expand the Vaus, making it wider so that hitting the ball is easier.
(P) capsules award the player with an extra Vaus.

Some capsules cannot be used in conjunction with others. For instance, if a (C) capsule is being used and the ball is on the Vaus while it picks up a (D) capsule, the (C) power is lost and the ball splits into three back upward. Obviously the (B) and (P) capsules become the most important to grab once they make their rare appearances. Without a doubt the most important thing to learn early when playing Arkanoid is to not attempt to grab every capsule. Regardless of any power-up, keeping the ball alive is the most important task. Even when a (B) capsule is collected, the ball must always remain in play if the warp hatch to the right is to be used. It is often best to make sure the playfield is calm and the ball in good position before making the quick spin to the right through the warp. Nothing is as frustrating as picking up a (B) capsule on a difficult round only to miss the ball.

The NES version is pretty much an exact copy of the arcade original, within the color palette of the hardware. As the arcade version used a vertical monitor, the home release had to be reworked in the usual way. Rather than stretching out the playfield horizontally, the NES version uses the tried and true method of using the empty space for game statistics. The blocks are slightly wider than in the arcade but it's not a difference that causes any changes to how the game is played. Sound is also pretty much dead on with the Arkanoid musical tunes sounding almost as good as they did originally and all sound effects

being replicated well. Good sound is critical in a game like this where you are always hearing the ping and pop of the ball off different objects. Input method is the one aspect of paddle games that doesn't tend to transfer well on home consoles after the joystick era. Lack of paddle controllers on the bit era consoles could be considered one way of attempting to widen the gap of pre-crash and post-crash video game systems, leaving the past in the past if you would. However, paddle games require paddle controllers and while Arkanoid supports standard NES control pads, Taito was kind enough to include a special paddle with each copy of the game.

The Vaus controller, specially made and branded for Arkanoid, brought the arcade experience home. If it wasn't for this beautiful controller, Arkanoid on the NES would border on unplayable. The device is a little thicker and a little shorter than a standard NES control pad. It has a button on the top used for service, game start, firing the lasers, and catch release. At the bottom is a small spinner that is used to move the Vaus. To the right side of the spinner is a capped off adjustment dial that can be used to calibrate the spinner so that it matches the Vaus' range of motion within the boundaries of the playfield. The Vaus controller is plugged into the Player 2 port of the NES console and is used for both players in a two player game. The two player option is selected at the title screen via a standard control pad plugged into the Player 1 port on the NES console. Incredibly, considering the wear that paddles are known to suffer, these controllers were never sold separately. Since they only shipped with the Arkanoid game and so many have worn out, Vaus controllers are somewhat hard to come by these days. However, if you desperately require one there's usually always someone online willing to sell one at a hugely inflated price. If you already own one, please be very careful with it as they're known to break easily.

With a Vaus controller the game plays smooth as silk. In fact I'll go on to say that there is no arcade port on the NES that feels as arcade accurate as Arkanoid with this controller. The game creates its own class in that everything is really done so well, it truly is the most perfect conversion that could ever be hoped for on the NES. To think, that little controller makes all the difference. Without use of a Vaus controller Arkanoid on the NES is still a very competent game, however, you simply can't move the Vaus fast enough without it. While certainly not a must have, the NES port of Arkanoid is superb for those who enjoy the game and can scrounge up a Vaus controller. Arkanoid continues to be a very popular game with tons of different versions and releases, right up to the current crop of home consoles. Even one of the original Game Boy's launch titles, Alleyway, was an Arkanoid clone with Mario piloting the paddle. Simply put this game continues to stand as one of the finest, if not the finest, NES port of an arcade game ever created.

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

Apple II Incider - Computer Baseball (Revisited)

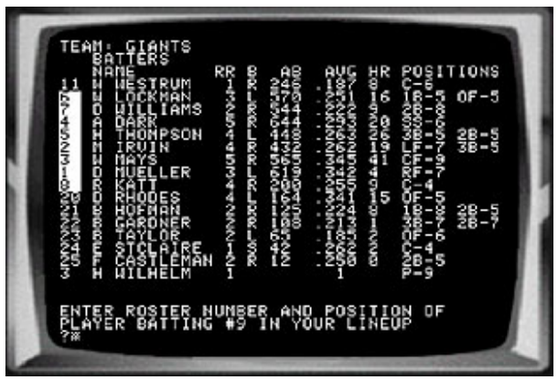
by Donald Lee

Happy Memorial Day! I write this at around 7:30 PM Pacific on Monday, May 25th. I had a fairly quiet weekend to myself, unlike many who may have had BBQ's or other activities. Instead of doing the traditional Memorial Day things, I stuck to playing basketball with some buddies on Saturday and did a little shopping Sunday.

This month, I'm going to revisit a game I talked about in my first ever column for RTM back in issue #31: Computer Baseball by Strategic Simulations Inc. (SSI). In reading what I wrote about the game the first time around, I felt I hadn't done it justice and decided to talk about it in more detail this time. Plus, we're about two months into baseball season and it's a perfect time to talk the sport as we enter the summer.

As I mentioned in issue #31, I picked up Computer Baseball at a local Sears that was across the street from my high school. The copyright date of the game manual (yes, I still have the manual) is 1981. Considering I did not enter high school until 1988, the game was fairly dated when I purchased it.

Upon booting the game you have various options, such as the choice to play against another human player or the computer (for myself, I've always played against the computer). Also, you can enter data for a new team if you don't like the included teams or revise data for a team you previous created. Lastly, you can choose to have a demonstration game which the computer runs and shows you the various aspects without user interaction.



From here you have the option to start a new game or continue a previously saved one. The save game feature is pretty unique for something that is now almost thirty years old. I took advantage of the save game feature occasionally, but in general most people would select the new game option.

Next, you are asked if you want the computer to control the home, visiting, or both teams. Obviously, if you are interested in playing the game, you would choose to have the computer control either the home or visiting team. From here, you are asked to pick the teams you and the computer will play. The game disk comes with 26 teams that played in various World Series over the years. The earliest teams are the 1906 Chicago Cubs and Chicago White Sox, with the latest teams being the 1980 Kansas City Royals and Philadelphia Phillies.

Optionally, you can also load some of your self created teams from another disk. This is where I had the most fun with the game. As many baseball fans remember, the San Francisco Giants and Oakland Athletics played in the 1989 World Series (interrupted by the infamous Loma Prieta Earthquake). Using baseball magazines I collected at the time, I entered the stats for both teams into the game and engaged in many battles for years. I even had both teams battle some of the classic teams on the game disk as well.

Back to the game itself. Once you have selected both teams, you then have to set a few game options:

- Use designated hitters
- Enter the number of days since each pitcher has pitched
- Have the computer set it's own starting lineup

As the computer prepares to select it's starting pitchers and lineup, you will be asked if you wish to designate any of the players/pitchers to be unavailable. Generally, you would say no, but I will explain later why you might use this feature.

Once the computer has selected it's pitcher and generates it's starting lineup, it's the players turn. You start by selecting the pitcher you want to begin and then creating your own lineup. Creating the lineup is not as easy as one might think, especially if you're using a team you're not that familiar with. Of course, most teams want speed at the top of the lineup with some power in the middle and the rest of the hitters at the end, but you are free to choose. If you want Babe Ruth batting leadoff, you can do so if you wish, which is one of the best things about this game. Once you've got your lineup, you're ready to play the game.

This is where something has to be mentioned. Computer Baseball is a true simulation where the player acts as a manager and makes various decisions based on the circumstances going on in the game. If you're looking for a program where you are batting and pitching, then this isn't the one for you.

With that said, game play is relatively straight forward. Offensively, the manager can tell hitters to hit, hit & run (in appropriate situations), and bunt. Base runners can be instructed to steal, run conservatively, run normally, or run aggressively.

In defensive/pitching situations, the manager can tell pitchers to pitch normally, pitch around batters, or do intentional walks. Defensively, infields can be positioned normally, in double play depth, or guard the lines. Outfielders can be positioned in normal depth or shallow (for those late game situations when the game is tied and the winning run is at third base).

One of my favorite aspects of Computer Baseball is that relievers have to get warmed up in the bullpen. You can't just bring in a pitcher cold and expect him to do well. This is one of more realistic parts of the game.

So this column has gone on fairly long, but I wanted to cover all the options that were available. As you can see, despite the game being released in 1981, the developers did their best to simulate baseball as accurately as possible.

A few things that are missing (and the developers note this in the manual) is that they couldn't account for the effects of different ballparks or track a full season of stats. HOWEVER, the developers did incorporate the ability for players to MANUALLY track and update their stats for a full season. That is the reason why if players wanted to track a full season of stats that they could designate certain players being unavailable while they were doing lineups.

Computer Baseball is a dated game, but considering it was released in 1981 (and presumably developed for some time before that), it packs a ton of features that make it very playable today. I had a great time revisiting this gem for the column and I strongly urge any baseball fan to give it a spin.

The Thrill Of Defeat: ZX81 Games That Mostly Rock, Part 1

by Mark Sabbatini

Sometimes the smartest move is admitting you were really stupid.

After dragging both of my regular readers through months of memory-crippled games for the Sinclair ZX81 (a.k.a. the weakest computer to sell in decent quantities), it's time to abandon the exercise and look at stuff actually worth playing. So the mini-reviews of games running in 1K, 2K, 4K and other limited amounts is officially junked and the focus shifts to the relatively spacious 16K most users expanded to.

Furthermore, to make everyone's lives easier, it starts by looking at what's immediately playable online in a browser without having to download and configure emulators.

By far the best site to start is www.zx81stuff.org.uk, which has the largest collection, small and large screen sizes, and scanned images of the instructions in all but a few instances. The big drawback is not being able to save games in progress, so if you find yourself hooked by one of the adventures below you'll need to go the download route.

There's a lot of debate about emulation verses the real thing, but in the case of the ZX81 I'll take emulation every time if only to play old favorites without worrying about crashing the machine every time it's nudged (Google "ram pack wobble" if you want to learn about this particular form of misery).

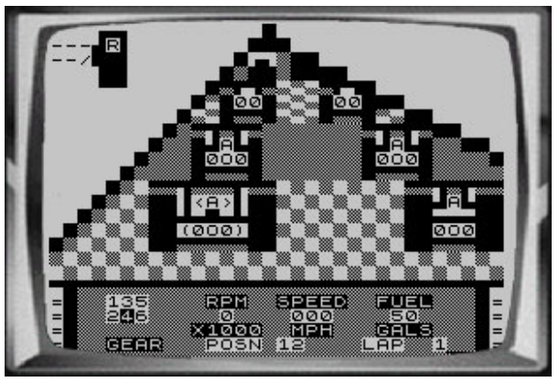
Grades, as usual, are strictly relative to other 16K ZX81 games. The very best of them might get a C-minus on a Commodore or Atari if the reviewer feels generous. Those looking for a quick evaluation of the ZX81's potential might try 3D Monster Maze (included in this month's reviews), which many loyalists consider one of the top two or three games for the machine. My personal favorites back then (excluding chess games that dominated my time) include Mazogs, Flight Simulator, Merchant Of Venus, Sabotage, and Frogger, roughly in that order. It's worth noting plenty of games in these reviews rank as high or higher, and I'm still impressed by what programmers back then managed to squeeze out of black-and-white ASCII graphics.

On to the reviews:

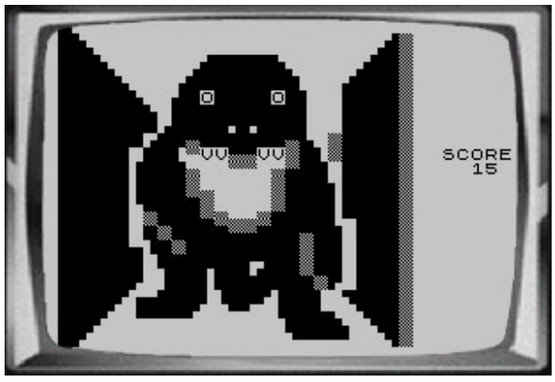
3D Defender (B-) This ranks as one of the top ZX81 games in one online poll, but I'm less enthralled since it's monotonous once you get past the initial 3D flying thing. You control a ship flying over a landscape from a first-person perspective, trying to shoot flying saucers before they land on the planet. You lose points if they land, although it's possible to gain lost points back by flying low enough to the ground to get an alien to attack you. You have a shield that can take 10 enemy hits, although colliding with the ground costs you two of those hits. Controls are similar to a real flight stick (down is up and vice versa) and well thought out with the player having multiple keys to choose from for each direction the "stick" moves in. The action moves speedily, the graphics are decent and there didn't seem to be any quirks with collision detection. The game has fairly long play value, in part because it takes time to learn the controls and read the radar indicators. Another boost is the instructions provide POKEs

to modify the overall game, change player and alien speeds, alter high score saves, and a "for cheaters only" tweak. It's those touches that put this title in the above average category. One nuisance - there doesn't seem to be any way to skip the scrolling instructions when you start the program.

3D Grand Prix (B) This is an impressive racing game if you can deal with the learning curve, somewhat confusing graphics and mediocre choice of keyboard controls. The player tries to complete a five-lap race, complete with pit stops, driving a car with six gears, an accelerator and brakes. The steering and acceleration keys are too close together for rapid and precise use, an obvious problem at high speeds. It also takes a while to learn the gearing (controlled with number keys 1-6). If you've ever tried playing Dragster on the Atari 2600 and blown out your engine dozens of times before getting across the finish line for the first time, you'll have an idea of what getting to used to driving this car is about. The graphics are OK, not great, feeling blocky and pixilated even for a ZX81. But there are useful touches like signs with speed recommendations going into curves. Also, the game has instructions built in and there's also an option to repeat a track or generate a new one after a race. That last feature in particular gives this game considerable staying power.



3D Monster Maze (B+) As mentioned above, a lot of people consider this the best ZX81 game ever (some breathless types even get into "DOOM before there was DOOM" rants, which is pure malarkey). It's got its own Wikipedia page, complete with a lengthy discussion, and YouTube videos of the action. As with 3D Defender, I'm not as mesmerized, but it's certainly a fun game worth playing at least a few times. You're trying to escape randomly generated 16X16 mazes before a T. Rex eats you (the opening storyline/instructions from a carnival barker about Rex being thawed from preservation in silicon for your amusement is a nice touch). The game is real-time and the screen flashes various messages about T-Rex's status from "Rex lies in wait" to "Run!" depending on how close he is and if he can see you. The "Run!" message means he's right behind or beside you, but quick reflexes will save you since you can run faster than him - unless you run into a dead end, of course. You get points for each step you take, so people obsessed with such things may not want to find the exit as soon as possible. The action moves at a decent clip (six frames a second, according to the Wikipedia page, which was actually pretty good back then) and the graphics are well above average, especially Rex when he approaches and eats you (but no, this isn't the one game I'd use to show off the machine's so-called capabilities, as some reviewers would). Two big problems: 1) the controls are the wretched 5-8 number keys and 2) instead of a "play again" option at the end of the game, there's an option to play the last maze or a quirky "appeal" option that has a 50-50 chance of a new maze or restarting the computer. Given that it took four minutes to load the cassette, this seems like an insanely stupid thing to include given how well everything else is coded.



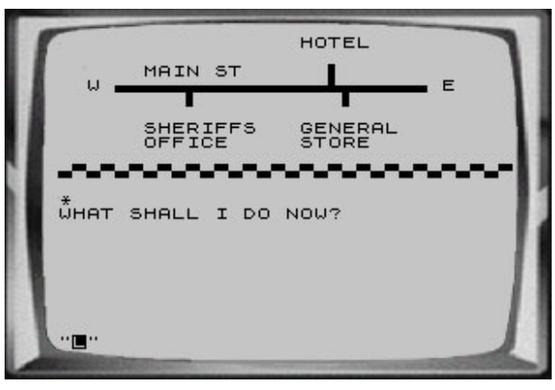
Admiral Graf Spree (D) Call me twisted, but I generally enjoy wargames more when I'm the "evil" side, be it the Ruskies or Galactic Empire. Here the player controls a historic German warship trying to sink Allied vessels in the Atlantic, but that isn't enough to generate much interest in this slow and hard-to-follow game. Your ship is a blinking pixel trying to sink other blinking pixels, but moving around the screen is slow and it's not at all clear how you do basic things like fire torpedoes and adjust what are supposed to be seven levels of difficulty. Even if those problems didn't exist, this is far too shallow a concept to be considered an engaging war game.

Adventure C: Ship Of Doom (B-) Let's use this for another

installment of my endless maniacal rants about Things Not To Program Into An Adventure Game. You start out on an alien ship (goal: escape) where your only option is to walk into an adjacent room where there's a handle. First, all this does is frustrate the new player because there's no initial sense of storytelling and exploration. I've played numerous adventures where you start in a jail cell or similar and I've hated nearly all of them because there's nothing to do but solve that one puzzle (at the other extreme is the Babel Fish in Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy which, as soon as I solved it, immediately caused me to stop playing it out of fear I'd have to deal with further such nonsense). OK, so there's a handle...you can't PULL, PUSH, MOVE, GRAB or EXAMINE it. The magic word turns out to be TURN. How many times have players abandoned games like this before successfully playing mind-reader with the programmer (I wasn't able to BREAK and look at the listing, which seems to be largely in machine language anyhow). Once you get past that bit of misery things open up into a pretty good adventure with a lot of locations and a decent vocabulary. There's a hint system and you can save games in progress, which is a good thing because this game also commits the cardinal sin of the undeserved death (i.e. just entering a location for the first time is lethal). Also, the descriptions are extremely sparse, which is all too common on the ZX81. Finally, not all the solutions are logical, but make it past that dreaded handle and the rest will probably be solvable in the end.

Adventure One (B) This isn't the best ZX81 adventure out there, but it earns this grade by packing an amazing amount of the original Colossal Cave Adventure into 16K. Supposedly all the locations (more than 140, according to the author) and objects seen on other microcomputer conversions are there, although I can't verify this since I never actually solved it (I'll boot it up in an online emulator from time to time, get stuck in the maze and vow to try again some day). This version is a tad slow responding to your typing and providing responses, only a minor nuisance to anyone who deals with a ZX81 regularly. More bothersome, but inevitable, is descriptions have been shorted considerably which will make an already tough adventure a lot tougher for people new to it. You can save games on cassette but, like other ZX81 games, it's not something you want to do frequently because you need to spend several minutes saving the entire program (a strange quirk I'm not sure I've ever seen on a non-Sinclair computer). Sentiment and historical value alone make this worth playing.

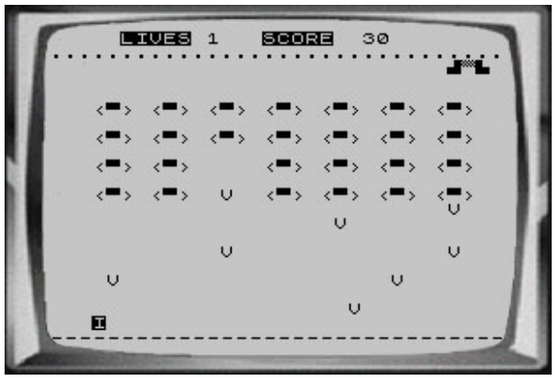
Adventure Tape One (C+) This is a mixed blessing, offering three adventures written in BASIC in one package that are diverse and interesting, but also plagued by some not insignificant nuisances. The author provides instructions in a separate program at the beginning that are worth reading so you don't get stuck in that "guess the word" trap (I skipped them and then wasted time using the wrong phrases to ENTER a building). Greedy Gulch is a Wild West gold hunt that doesn't have a lot of locations, but does display a simple map of where you are and has a fairly large vocabulary. The big problem is even in the maddening screen flicker of FAST mode it often takes 10 to 15 seconds for the computer to process your commands (presumably to draw the map, even after an invalid command or one where you don't actually move). So trying several words for ENTER is going to rob a few minutes of your life that you will never get back. Pharaoh's Tomb is a typical treasure hunt with the ability to save games and a vocabulary of more than 70 words (according to the author). It's average for the genre (in ZX terms) although you still have to suffer through the FAST flicker and slow response times (slightly less than Glitter Gulch, but there's also no maps). Magic Mountain is a fantasy quest for the Scroll of Wisdom that, like the original Adventure, contains a maze that caused me to bail out in search of an entertainment title that wasn't likely to end in



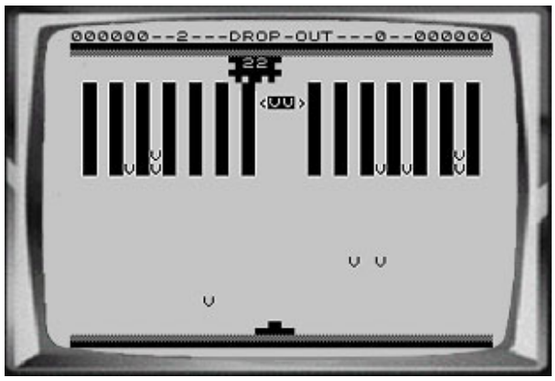
prosecution.

Alien (D+) Call it a hunch, but I'm guessing this "action" game isn't a licensed take-off of the movie even if the theme is similar. You're job is to rid your spaceship of an Alien before it infects your crew by picking up various weapons (cleverly disguised as letters of the alphabet) in various rooms and then firing them at the alien to see what effect they have. The screen provides an overhead view of the entire ship, and of flashing dots representing you and the alien. You move in eight directions and automatically pick up a weapon by passing over it. You then need to move two spaces away from the alien, shoot, drop the weapon and get another one until you've drained it of its 200 hit points. Meanwhile the alien pursues you and if it catches you without a weapon, it will cost one of your four lives. All of this might be interesting if the game wasn't absurdly slow and unresponsive. It's written in BASIC and part of a bargain-priced multi-game package, so anyone expecting different is probably buying their first software program.

Alien Attack (D+) Space Invaders for the really talented. That's probably the nicest way of explaining one of the weaker examples of this genre, due to mediocre graphics even for a ZX81 and invaders that rain such a heavy barrage of missiles it's virtually impossible to make any progress. Also, the game offers nine speeds, but even the slowest is much faster than most will be comfortable with. And when you're hit there's no pause - the assault continues and more likely than not you'll be facing death again if you're unfortunate enough to still have your fingers on the movement keys. Speaking of which, the programmer opted for an odd choice of "6" and "9" for movement, which probably irritated people with joysticks preprogrammed to use the default "5" and "8" keys that nearly every other game does.



Alien-Dropout (B-) Ending things on a positive note this month is this simple but fun shooter that gets kudos for its ability to individually customize the speed of your movement and shots, as well as those of the alien meanies out to get you. A mothership passing overhead drops aliens into a series of slots across the screen, where they'll pause and sometimes stack up for a brief time before plummeting toward the bottom. If they hit you or too many reach the bottom you lose a life. The mothership also occasionally drops a larger alien down a gap of the middle of the screen which instantly kills you upon reaching the bottom. The action is fast, but not unfairly so, especially since you can give yourself far greater power than your enemies. A very simple game that's usually short in duration, but the type you keep trying again.



Videological Dig

by Bryan Roppolo

When it came time to sit down and write another Videological Dig column, I was not sure what I wanted to cover. However, one night when I was laying in bed the thought occurred to me that maybe I should try and find a transcript from either a radio or TV program that dealt with video games. I figured since I already did a sound clip from a radio commercial last month and a TV clip before that, why not try and find a transcript from a program instead of posting the actual audio/video? Not only would that be different than what I have already done, but the text would be searchable for anyone that might stumble upon this magazine in a Google search.

The first thing I knew I wanted was a transcript from a program that talked about a groundbreaking video game of the time period. At first I searched through some '70s transcripts to see what might lay there, but found nothing. After coming up empty I then started thinking about specific games that I would consider groundbreaking, and the game Doom came to mind. Considering how popular/gory Doom was back

when it was released in 1993, I figured many radio/TV programs must have done a report on the game talking about how they thought it was a bad influence on kids or something. That's when I ran across a transcript from National Public Radio in 1994 that not only talked about the game, but also sat down with people from the company and a had a bit about the Internet as it was back in 1994. Hearing from the people that were involved with the creation of Doom, and getting it from them when it was still a new game, made me decide to use this transcript for this month's issue. Hope you enjoy it as much as I did, since Doom was an awesome game that greatly helped propel the realistic/immersive 3D world and multiplayer games that would follow.

NPR Public Radio Transcript

September 29, 1994

All Things Considered (NPR 4:30 pm ET)

'Doom' Becomes Digital Game World Phenomenon

HIGHLIGHT: "Doom", a computer game by Id Software, has become a huge success. Despite its violence, the game seems to have an addictive quality, especially for those who spend their time on the Internet.

LINDA WERTHEIMER, Host: There are demons loose in cyberspace - green monsters heaving fireballs, pitiless pink chomper demons that will bite the life out of you if you stumble on one of them in the dark corridors of the computer game Doom. Doom has become a digital world phenomenon. Advanced sales of the new version out this weekend have hit half a million. The game enjoys almost cult-like loyalty and is making its creators rich. NPR's John McChesney survived a bout of Doom recently.

JOHN McCHESNEY, Reporter: Welcome to the mayhem of Doom. It's hell on Earth, and hundreds of thousands, some say millions, of people are rejoicing. Parents worry about it, grown men ponder their addiction to it, and corporate executives have had to ban it from company computers so that employees could get some work done. Doom is the story of an errant Marine who ends up on the one of the moons of Mars. Actually though, 'story' may be too strong a word here. Jay Wilbur [sp] is marketing director for Doom.

JAY WILBUR, Marketing Director, Id Software: There's really two stories. There's the real story, which is if it moves, shoot it. And then there's the story that you have to put in there just to fill up the pages of the manual. It's actually pretty good. You play a hero who's stationed on Mars. And the moons of Mars, the military is conducting inter-dimensional experiments. One of the experiments goes nuts. A gateway or dimensional rift opens between our plane of existence and hell, and the demons are coming through. You're the only one left. All you have is a pistol. But of course, your friends have scattered their weapons on the floor, and you can pick them up. Stop the bad guys.

McCHESNEY: In truth, the most interesting Doom story is about the handful of young men who created it. Their small cluster of offices is located in the placid Dallas suburb of Mesquite, Texas, but they started several years ago in an apartment with a shoestring budget in Shreveport, Louisiana. Their first game was called Commander Keen [sp], subtitled Aliens Ate My Babysitter, and the name of their company is Id. That's right, Id Software. Jay Wilbur says originally Id meant In Demand.

Mr. WILBUR: That gave way to the Freudian joke. If you look at our game Doom, you'll get the joke. Without the ego or the superego to keep things in check, our games are basically the id gone wild.

McCHESNEY: The nine Id employees, all between 23 and 30-years-old, are Netheads, people who hang out on and know their way around the network of networks called the Internet. And that's where they sell their games, out there on the Net. They put a game's first chapter out on the Net as shareware. Anybody can download the game and play it for free. But if they get hooked, they have to buy the other chapters from Id for $40. By the time Doom came out, Id had already developed a reputation on the network, and the Doom download was a cyberspace event of the first order. Jay Wilbur says Id used a server at the University of Wisconsin to download the game, and the game freaks were waiting to pounce.

Mr. WILBUR: My understanding was about 8,000 to 10,000 of them logged into the University of Wisconsin at once, a load that it had never seen before and just didn't know how to deal with. So when the computer gets that, it just shut off. I was on the phone with the guy from the University of Wisconsin as it happened. He said, 'Oh, my God. I've never seen this.'

McCHESNEY: Wilbur's company has developed the art of on-line sales perhaps better than anyone else. And because of this kind of on-line marketing, Id has virtually no advertising or retail overhead. Profit margins are exceptionally high.

Mr. WILBUR: We have margins that make most of the investment people just smile and beg us to take their money.

McCHESNEY: Id also uses the Net as a testing ground to work out the bugs in a game before the commercial version is issued. Thousands of players send e-mail messages detailing problems and making suggestions for changes. This can even lead to a kind of oneupmanship between producer and

customer. When one group of players boasted that they had easily beaten the game, the Id developers added a level called Nightmare, which is so patently unfair that even Sandy Peterson, one of the game's designers, can't beat it.

SANDY PETERSON, Game Designer, Id Software: The first time I played Nightmare and met one of the pink demons, I had my shotgun out. He charged me much too fast for me to shoot. So he's charging me, and I get my shotgun ready to shoot, and I shoot. And just before I shoot, he runs around to my right side and bites me so I miss. So I swing right to shoot him, and he instantly runs around to my left side and bites me again. And when he did this, actually dodging my shots and biting me, I just cracked up laughing and dropped the mouse. It was just too- it was just too unfair and gross.

McCHESNEY: The principle technological reason Doom has caught fire is the speed with which it allows a player to tear through its three dimensional world. This is a very fast game, fueled by testosterone and adrenaline in equal parts. Players dash down darkened corridors and race through a hellish landscape, ambushed and assaulted from all sides by fiendishly conceived monsters. Players fight back with a small arsenal of weapons - a pistol, a machine gun, a rocket launcher, and a strange looking weapon called the BFG-9000. Id's Kevin Cloud [sp] tries to explain the BFG.

KEVIN CLOUD, Id Software: Well, the BFG- we'll just say it's a big gun. That's it. That's it. It does lots of damage, and it's a pretty great weapon to have.

McCHESNEY: Oh, yes. And there's a chainsaw. As you probably gathered by now, the guys at Id don't harbor too many reservations about the violence of their game. One game designer named Tom Hall left Id over differences. Jay Wilbur describes the split this way.

Mr. WILBUR: Tom was more slapstick, fun loving, comedy type stuff, and we were generating more shotgun in your face, blow the back of your skull off type games.

McCHESNEY: The official line at Id is that violent games don't create violent people. Everyone here mentions Japan, where violent game design is an art form yet Japanese society is not nearly as violent as our own. The Id workers say that they support game ratings and that most players of Doom are people who haunt the network and own PCs, in other words, grownups, not kids. And games like Doom, they say, allow people to vent their frustrations on pixels, not people. Ads for Doom II will include the admonition 'Don't bother with Doom if on-screen violence sends you screaming to a Senate subcommittee.' And Doom is addictive as well as violent. Jay Wilbur says that a writer at Byte magazine coined the named heroin-ware for Doom.

Mr. WILBUR: He analogized us to drug dealers. We'll give you the first one. Here, you know, try this one. If you like it, you know, come back. We've got some more. You got to pay now.

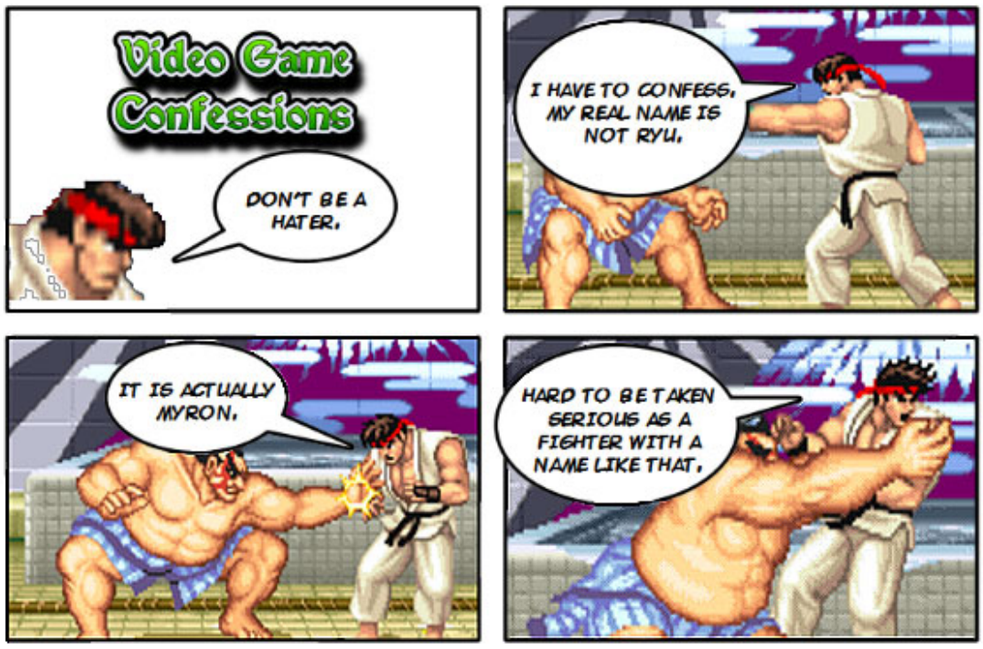
McCHESNEY: One of the features that endears Doom to enthusiasts is that you can play it over a network and stalk your colleagues, or their icons at least, through the hallways of hell. The Id staff gave this reporter a demonstration of what's called Deathmatch, four players sitting in different offices, banging on the walls, pitted against each other on their computers. This quiet little demo match went on for nearly an hour and a half, which gives you some idea why Doom has been banned on a lot of corporate networks. That doesn't bother the Doom makers, though. A couple of Ferraris and a new Dodge Viper in the Id parking lot bear gleaming testimony to their sudden financial success. But according to John Romero, one of the company's founders, Id will stay small and concentrate everyone's energies on only one game at a time. That way everyone stays happy.

JOHN ROMERO, Id Software: All we really cared about was making really cool stuff for people to play and just games that we really want to play ourselves, you know, just the ultimate games that we want to do. We don't want two products going on and a whole bunch of people want to work on the cool product and the one that's not as cool gets run off. We'll never do that. With us, we're always throwing everything into one game, and it had better be the coolest thing or we're screwed.

McCHESNEY: The pressure to expand will be hard to resist, though. Universal Studios has just bought the Doom film rights. A publisher is planning four books on the Doom story. Microsoft is developing a version for Windows. A Macintosh will be out soon. And competitors like Star Wars creator George Lucas are beginning to roll out Doom look-alikes. The Id boys, meanwhile, are hard at work on a new game called Quake, which promises new heights of technical virtuosity and wanton destruction. In San Francisco, I'm John McChesney reporting.

Laughing Pixels

by Tom Zjaba



Tom Zjaba is the founder of Retrogaming Times and is both a video game and comic book enthusiast. Be sure to stop by his Arcade After Dark site to see a plethora of video game related comics which are not published in Retrogaming Times Monthly.

Game Over

It seems each month *Retrogaming Times Monthly* keeps getting better and better. Where else can you read about hunting dinosaurs in a humid jungle, a sixth grader learning to spell, and hear confessions from Ryu of Street Fighter fame all in the same place? Nowhere else but *Retrogaming Times Monthly* that I know of! In my opinion that is what makes this magazine standout from the other retro gaming publications out there...the wide range of subjects that are covered, while never taking itself too seriously. Therefore, I again want to salute the columnists of the magazine for making this all possible! On another note, I also want to wish everyone that competes in this month's High Score Monthly! competition, as well as all future competitions, good luck. It should be fun seeing the response we get to the contest, which hopefully will lead to more competitions in future issues. See you guys in July!

- Bryan Roppolo, Retrogaming Times Monthly Editor

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