Retrogaming Times Monthly

Issue #65 - October 2009

COVERING 3 DECADES OF SPOOKY GAMING

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Press Fire To Begin

by Bryan Roppolo

Ahhhh!!!! It can't be...It's the scary October issue of Retrogaming Times Monthly. Actually, this issue is not really all that scary. I tried to get most of the columnists to do some type of Halloween themed write-up, but many just did their own thing. Therefore, there is no need to be afraid of diving into this issue as most of it is pretty tame. However, a new monster does make his appearance in the murky depths of this magazine...that being the infamous Vectrexenstein (a relative of Frankenstein no doubt!), who I must add is much scarier than any other monster I've ever known.

With that aside, I do want to mention that this issue contains the last "RTM Idiocy" column, as many people have voiced their dislike of it and so I decided it would be best to let it die off. However, Mark Sabbatini should be back with something even more interesting that will make RTM an even better magazine. I do know I loved hearing some of his personal tidbits that he jotted down in his farewell Idiocy column, so I know he has some good classic gaming stories to tell us about. One of the other things that I heard being voiced was that people wanted to see "The Many Faces Of..." make a comeback to RTM, since it had been the backbone of the magazine for many years. All I can say in response to that is it depends on Alan Hewston. He's been meaning to continue the column as there are still a TON of faces that he has yet to write up about. However, his time has been constrained because of his current job. He says he still brings his "Many Faces of..." material to work everyday in hopes of getting some free time to write something up, so those of you out there that think the column is dead, I can assure you that it is not. It will be back and Retrogaming Times Monthly will have its backbone once again.

Anyway, I hope everyone has a great Halloween and gets to devour a lot of candy! Whether you are a mummy, ghoul, pirate, or even Vectrexenstein, I am, sure you all will enjoy this latest issue of Retrogaming Times Monthly. Feel free to continue to send in comments on what you like and dislike as well, since it will only help make the magazine better in the future. Now, off to the ghoulish columns!

Retrogaming News

Upcoming Retrogaming Events

The Pacific Pinball Expo

The world's largest pinball show takes place October 2-4, 2009, at the Bay Area's Marin County Civic Center in San Rafael, CA. With nearly 400 playable machines ranging from 1930 to 2008, the PPE is the world's largest pinball show, and perhaps the world's most beautiful. It is not just about playing pinball; it's about learning, too, with placards highlighting each machine's historical and cultural significance. The PPE also features exhibits and seminars on the History, Science, Physics, and Art of pinball…including seminars on how to become a pinball wizard! Take a look at their website at http://www.pacificpinball.org.

-Submitted by David Lundin, Jr

America's Video Game Expo
America's Video Game Expo is three days of videogame revelry. Their convention is an annual gaming festival - where gamers and industry insiders can come together to celebrate videogames. Attendees go to VGXPO to experience games, encounter game industry legends, compete in tournaments, buy games and meet with friends. For Classic Gamers, there is the Retro Con section where all of the classic gaming enthusiasts can meet, trade, play, and even view an art gallery featuring retail, promotional, and design art from the glory days of gaming. The Expo is being held at the Pennsylvania Convention Center in Philadelphia, PA from October 9, 2009 - October 11, 2009. See http://www.videogame.net/ for more info.

-Submitted by Bryan Roppolo

Pinball Expo 2009
Expo 2009 is being held in Wheeling, IL from October 14-18 at the Westin Chicago North Shore Hotel. It is the must-see pinball exposition of the year with many events, including the Flip-Out 2009 Pinball Tournament and a group tour of the Stern Pinball factory. Other attractions include the Expo Bumper Blast free party, PinBrawl 9.5, Pinball Circus tournaments, and many seminars. To check out more on this event, visit the official website at http://www.pinballexpo.net/.

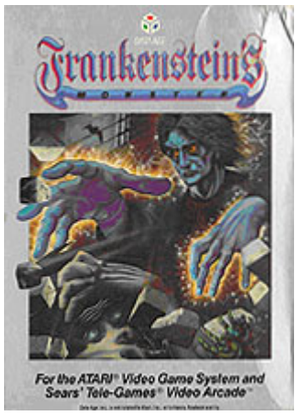
-Submitted by Bryan Roppolo

CCAG Show 2009.5
The second CCAG of the year, and it's bound to be just as good as the previous one! It is being held at the American Legion Hall--Clifton Post in Fairview Park, OH from Noon to 8PM on Saturday, October 24. There will be 3 Video Game Contests held (NES Nintendo World Championship, SNES Donkey Kong Country Competition & XBOX 360 Guitar Hero 5). A Chinese auction will be held for some really neat prizes and of course there are the arcade machines which can be played by all those that attend. One other thing to note is that there will be a Video Game Rap Artist performing some songs live! Where else can you play classic games, take part in a Chinese auction, and hear a guy rapping about video games all in the same place? Nowhere, but CCAG 2009.5. To read more on the show visit the official website at http://www.ccagshow.com/.

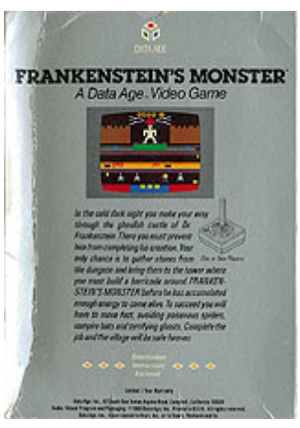
-Submitted by Alan Hewston

High Score Monthly!

by Paul Zimmerman



GAME: Frankenstein's Monster
SYSTEM: Atari VCS/2600
VARIATION: Game 1, Difficulty A
STARTS: October 1, 2009
DEADLINE: October 31, 2009 @ 11:59pm Central
E-MAIL SUBMISSION: Paul Zimmerman – paul@retrogamingtimes.com
SUBJECT LINE: High Score Monthly! – October



New to High Score Monthly? Click here for the rules.

PRIZE:

1st Place:

- A surprise homebrew game from our friends at Atariage.

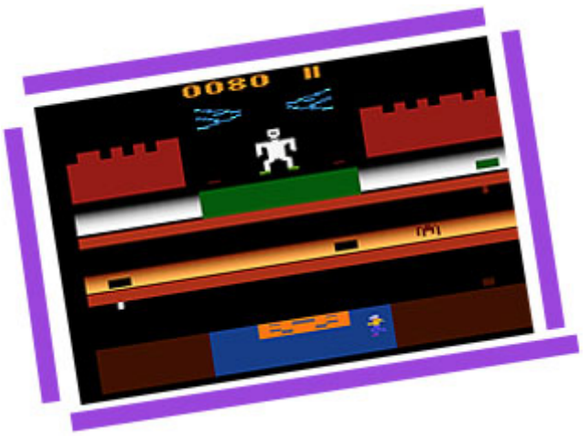
- Recognition in Retrogaming Times Monthly. We will publish a quick bio of the winner along with their picture (if they would like) and a website link to their site if they have one. Also, if the winner wants their picture posted, we can do that as well. In addition, a link to their YouTube submission will also be included.

2nd Place:

- A $25.00 gift certificate to Atari Video Club Online's news stand at Cafepress.com.

GAME DESCRIPTION:

"Macabre Mission Beyond the Grave"



"In the cold dark night you make your way through the ghoulish castle of Dr. Frankenstein. There you must prevent him from completing his creation. Your only chance is to gather stones from the dungeon and bring them to the tower where you must build a barricade around FRANKENSTEIN'S MONSTER before he has accumulated enough energy to come alive. To succeed you will have to move fast, avoiding poisonous spiders, vampire bats and terrifying ghosts. Complete the job and the village will be safe forever."

Frankenstein's Monster, released by Data Age in 1983, is another interesting game for the Atari VCS/2600. It is a platformer, similar to Pitfall! and Pitfall! 2. You control the "player" and must make your way to the third lower level dodging and jumping over Ghosts, Tarantulas, Spiders and Deadly Water to get a piece of the wall that you need to build around Frankenstein's Monster to win the game. Once you bring it back to the top floor, the screen changes to an open area where you need to dodge tons of zigzagging Bats in order to place your piece of the wall. To win the game you must repeat this whole process 6 times, within a very short time limit and increasing difficulty. The game has an unusual scoring system where you start out with 500 points and each time you hit a creature or lose a life you lose points. You only gain points on the 2nd screen if you make it to the top. Frankenstein's Monster has colorful graphics and a great effect when you fail. It reminds me of Dragon's Lair, the laserdisc coin-op classic, when Dirk loses a life, and just as cool. Unfortunately there is no music whatsoever, but the fun game-play makes up for that.

Play the game then go see the 1931 classic!

The International Video Game Museum And Hall Of Fame Party

by Paul Zimmerman

It is night. Pitch black. It is raining. It is cold. Winter is in the air. You come to a corner. Alone on the corner is a small, brick building with the lights off inside. However, there is a "glow" peaking through the cracked door and the windows. You walk inside. Against the walls are video game machines with their glowing screens and musical noise. In the center of the room is a machine with a very, very, very tall person playing. No one else seems to be in the building. Familiar sounds are coming from the machine. Excited, you move closer. The person is dressed in black with very long, pitch black hair rolling down to the floor. You move even closer. Now the screen is in complete full view. You notice the score, 1 million points! And then out of nowhere the plumber dies! The kill screen! You just witnessed a kill screen! The player slowly turns around to face you. No!! It is not human!!! It is some sort of gruesome monster with a butcher knife. And he stabs you over and over while repeating: "Kill screen… kill you, kill screen… kill you, kill screen… kill you!!"

Boo!!!!!!!!

Happy Halloween everyone!

And now for something truly scary…

There I was, standing with a microphone in hand on a stage in front of thousands of people with Billy Mitchell, Tim McVey, Steve Sanders and many others to my left and Todd Rogers and others to my right, along with Walter Day in front of me. Yes, I was very afraid….

The scary event I just mentioned above was only a very small part of the "International Video Game Hall of Fame and Museum" Launch Party which was held on August 13, 2009. It was an event that I will never forget.

Here's a brief history about the reasoning for the Hall of Fame and Museum:

In 1982 the mayor of Ottumwa, Iowa, Jerry Parker, proclaimed that the town was the "Video Game Capital of the World" after the famous Life Magazine photo was taken in front of the Twin Galaxies arcade (which included the top game players, their machines, and some cheerleaders as well!). In 2009 the governor of Iowa, Chet Culver, issued a proclamation, restating that Ottumwa, Iowa was indeed the "Video Game Capital of the World." Soon after that proclamation they held an Opening Ceremony motioning towards making the town the home of the International Video Game Hall of Fame and Museum. As he did 27 years earlier, Walter Day, the founder of Twin Galaxies, returned to Ottumwa to endorse this proclamation. The Launch Party was a huge all day event where thousands of players and attendees from all over the world came to support the making of the International Video Game Hall of Fame and Museum and endorsed Ottumwa towards becoming the Video Game Capital of the World. At the event the organizers had many home video game consoles, computers, and arcade machines for everyone to play. Plus there were tournaments for Guitar Hero and Halo, as well as a wonderful multi-media display documenting Ottumwa's legacy as the "Video Game Capital of the World."

My understanding is that the Hall of Fame part will be just that, a Hall of Fame for the greatest players and designers from the video game industry. On the other side of the coin, the museum part will be fully interactive; with playable video games covering everything from the very beginning to the very latest.

I arrived at the Bridge View Center in Ottumwa, Iowa at 10:30 in the morning. The convention center is very big and the main room is huge. Against the walls they had various consoles from retro to modern, computers and even coin-ops. Sadly, I had no time to play any of the games. They also had various side rooms which contained even more things to game on as well as the tournaments. Against the walls there were a bunch of historical posters and news articles about Twin Galaxies and video games. In the center of the room artwork was hanging depicting what the Hall of Fame and Museum might look like.

I had a great time talking to all of the players and attendees. It was exciting to see that I have fans. Walter Day made a poster for each of the players as well as trading cards which we signed and gave to attendees and of course traded with each other. Those are great, even though my card picture is blurry. Seriously, Walter Day is the greatest! The morning of the event he asked the artist for the cards. Sadly, the artist forgot to make cards for me and Greg. So, Walter had to quickly drive to the office, scan some unfortunately low resolution pictures (which is why they are blurry), then drive to the print press to make them. He got to the event 4 minutes before he had to cut the ribbon! What an incredible man!!!! He did this all for only two people!

At lunch all of the players went to the Canteen, which is a landmark. It was established in the 1930's and everything is original. It probably holds 50 people and was packed with us, the fans and the camera crews. Billy Mitchell and Tim McVey even had a "canteen" eating contest, which is exactly like something you might see on the Food Network or Travel Channel. But, who won? You will have to ask Billy or Tim to find out!

At night in the auditorium we watched a preview of Frag and tons of never seen video of Twin Galaxies plus behind the scenes footage of the famous Life Magazine picture. That stuff was great! Afterwards, all of the players went up on stage and got a medallion, which brings us back to the beginning of my article. Walter handed us the microphone and wanted each one of us to talk about ourselves. Let me tell you, I was very nervous. I wanted to say so much, but I did not know quite how to get the words out of my mouth. I ended up talking about donating my Phoenix cartridge (I was there due to my Phoenix world record) and Beany Bopper manual (I have the world record for Beany Bopper as well) and then quickly gave the microphone to Todd Rogers.

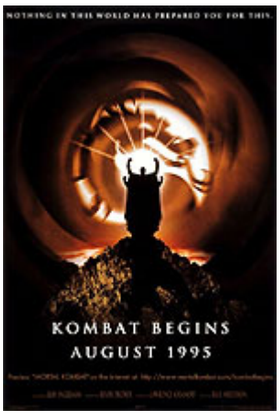
After the event, Tim McVey brought me, Trickman Terry, and Ken Williams (both from vgevo.com and Electronic Gaming Monthly fame) to the original location of Twin Galaxies which is now an eye-glass store. It felt great to be standing on that street, right where the famous Life Magazine picture was taken!

I want to say thank you to Tim McVey and Walter Day for your generous hospitality and kindness. Also, I would like to say thank you to all of my new fans and friends that I never knew I had until I attended this event!

Game On and I will see you in Ottumwa next year!!

Movies With A Byte: Mortal Kombat

by James Sorge

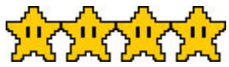


Hello, and this is James Sorge again with this month's "Movies with a Byte." The victim for October is…"Mortal Kombat," starring Robin Shou as Liu Kang, Christopher Lambert as Rayden, Cary Hiroyuki Tagawa as Shang Tsung, and Bridgette Wilson as Sonya Blade.

The movie basically follows a crossover plot from the game Mortal Kombat 1 into Mortal Kombat 2. Shang Tsung kills Liu Kang's brother, Sonya Blade is after Kano, Johnny Cage is looking to make bigger movies, among other backstories from the video game. It all eventually leads to the characters from Mortal Kombat being brought on a boat to a tournament that will determine Earth's fate. The Outworld had won 9 out of 10 tournaments, and if Earth looses this tournament, then Shang Tsung, Shao Kahn, and the Outworld would have free reign over the world. Led by Rayden, the Earth forces hold off the Outworld forces and Kano. Johnny Cage and Shang Tsung make a deal that Johnny Cage would fight Goro, Outworld's champion, and then Shang Tsung gets the choice of who he wants to fight for the final event. Eventually it turns out to be Liu Kang vs. Shang Tsung, and Shang Tsung gets the Pit Fatality (if you don't know what this is, watch the movie!).

Overall, this is probably one of the best, if not the best , video game to movie conversion that has ever been made. It is accurate to the story of Mortal Kombat, and does have the Pit Fatality which everyone was looking for. It does not go soft, with people getting killed left and right on both sides. American theatre prevented the graphic fatalities, but the stage fatality made up for it.

While Mortal Kombat the wasn't the greatest game ever made nor was this movie, it was important to the industry in that it showed a video game motion picture could be made right. Too bad the sequel didn't live up to expectations, but Resident Evil and Silent Hill wouldn't be here if it wasn't for this one. While Mortal Kombat the movie might not have been the best of all time, it was the most influential movie in video game history.

Movie Rating:  **(4 out of 5 stars)** **Industry Impact:** **(5 out of 5 mushrooms)**

Modern Retro - Metal Gear Solid

by Patrick McClellan

1998 was without a doubt a very important year in video game history, as some of the most well-known, and well-liked titles of all time were released for the very first time. Final Fantasy Tactics, Parasite Eve and Tekken 3 were all released for the Playstation 1, with other massive titles such as Starcraft, Pokémon Red/Blue, Half Life and The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time being released on other consoles, including the recently launched Gameboy Color. For any game to stand out during this period would rightly be seen as a massive achievement, and Hideo Kojima's 'Metal Gear Solid', a follow-up to the original Metal Gear games created many years prior, is seen by many as not only the best game released on the Playstation 1, but one of the greatest games of all time.

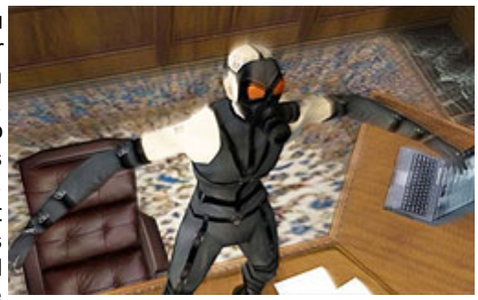
Metal Gear Solid was incredibly well received by critics, and sold over 6 million copies worldwide. There have since been expanded versions of the game, and a remake on the GameCube, but for many, the original title is seen as a personal favorite. The game has recently come back into the spotlight, as it was released in America on the Playstation Store for a bargain price of $9.99.

Developed and published by Konami, Metal Gear Solid features a clever combination of action and stealth gameplay, which was a huge step forward from the original Metal Gear games, yet remained faithful the these previous titles. Voiced by David Hayter, the enigmatic protagonist Solid Snake (a retired soldier) is on a mission south-west of Alaska in the Bering Sea, as he aims to end the threat of terrorist organization FOXHOUND, a group Snake had formally been a part of that had since turned rogue, who aim to launch a nuclear strike. Gameplay is open in that you have the ability to complete the entire game without killing a single enemy (except for the bosses), but you are also offered a range of weapons enabling you to kill anything that moves. Weapons in the game include a .45 caliber pistol, a FAMAS and a stinger amongst others. Each of the weapons is useful in respective areas, particularly in boss fights. For example, when Snake encounters his arch enemy Liquid, who is controlling a powerful HIND D Russian attack and transport chopper on the roof, the stinger (a heat seeking missile) is incredibly useful in winning the battle.

You control Snake with the left joystick, but with no control over the fixed camera – except when you're in first person mode. The stealth mechanics involve Snake taking cover on the corner of any object, peering round the corner to check for enemies and other obstacles ahead. The rigid and often predictable enemy AI is one of the most charming factors of the game, as large exaggerated question marks appear above an enemy's head if they hear a noise or find unknown footsteps. If they encounter Solid Snake face to face, a large exclamation mark appears in the same manner (before they start shooting wildly at you, that is!). Enemies enter alert mode when they encounter Snake, causing a 99.99 timer to appear on screen. When this timer runs out, the enemies will forget about ever seeing Snake, and will return to their normal patterns. However, if Snake successfully eliminates all of the enemies in close proximity without dying himself, then the timer will end immediately, allowing him to continue on his journey. There are other methods of not being seen however, such as equipping

the now infamous cardboard box (night vision goggles) which enable Snake to see enemies hidden in the shadows. In addition, close inspection of the radar shown in the top right side of the screen proves to be a very useful tool in both sneaking past your enemies and remaining aware of just where they've slinked off too during a boss battle!

Whilst the gameplay in Metal Gear Solid is varied and action packed, it is the cutscenes and incredibly in-depth storyline plots that have been the appealing factor to many down the years. Cleverly intertwined with gameplay, the cutscenes help introduce and explain the character's personas, as well as help the storyline progress. For the time period, the cutscenes were impressive, especially considering they were using the in-game engine. Codec conversations also take up a good chunk of the time you'll spend playing Metal Gear Solid. They feature Snake and another character talking, with a written log of the spoken dialogue under pictures of the characters. These conversations can range from 20 seconds to several minutes, yet remain interesting throughout, with the help of a genuinely intriguing storyline.



One of the most memorable scenes is the boss battle with Psycho Mantis. You enter a seemingly empty corridor with newfound acquaintance Meryl, only for her to become possessed shortly thereafter. When you enter the next room, an office, Meryl proceeds to seduce you (albeit while aiming a gun at your face). You soon discover that Psycho Mantis, a floating man who wears a gas-mask to help him to prevent people's thoughts from "forcing their way into his mind", is behind the attack. He proceeds to ask you to put your controller on the floor, as he moves it from side to side with the power of his mind. "Big whoop, it's not that cool". He then reads your memory card, commenting on your saved games – Awesome. It's one of the most creative boss battles I've ever encountered and amazes me to this day. I've had people tell me they bought the game simply on a whim after having heard about this particular boss battle.

As well as the impressive story mode, Metal Gear Solid offers a training option. This gives players the chance to improve and perfect their sneaking skills, use of weapons, and other hiding techniques. There are many challenges in the standard version of the game, but more VR (virtual reality) tasks were made available in the updated version. Also, as much as I want to go into great detail about the storyline and fascinating characters, both on Snake's side and against, I really don't think I could do it justice in just a few short lines. They have been created with great care, and characters like the aforementioned Psycho Mantis, Sniper Wolf, and Otacon really break the barrier between a game for a child, and an adult-experience, causing the player to feel sorrow, joy, or anger on the character's behalf.

You can't have a review for this game without discussing the music. Much of the music was composed and performed by the Konami Computer Entertainment Sound Team Japan (consisting of Takanari Ishiyama, Gigi Meroni, Kazuki Muraoka, Lee Jeon Myung and Hiroyuki Togo). Released as a separate CD, the music has a fast-paced synthesized feel to it and is very catchy and memorable. The music featured in cutscenes was more cinematic, with orchestral elements. The main theme song proved to be a big hit, with the talented 'Video Games Live' orchestra recreating the music live on stage.

Metal Gear Solid holds up very well to this day, with the unique gameplay still proving easy to play, but hard to master. The series has continued to gain popularity, with further games in the series continuing to be released on a fairly regular basis to very impressive critical reception. Definitely worth buying at just $9.99, and the ability to take it on the go via the PSP/PS3 connectivity is just another added bonus. You'd be mad to pass this one up!

Dual Perspective - Ninja Gaiden II: The Dark Sword Of Chaos

by James Sorge

This is James Sorge debuting with "Dual Perspective." This column will review games both as a standard review and from the World Record standpoint of playing the game. This first column looks at one of my personal favorites, "Ninja Gaiden II: The Dark Sword of Chaos", which was released on the NES in 1990 by Tecmo, as part of the Ninja Gaiden Trilogy in 1995, and more recently on Virtual Console.

Graphics: C
The graphics do their job. They accurately display Ryu Hayabusa in his environments as he goes after Ashtar, the Dark Lord who was supposedly in charge of Jaquio from the first Ninja Gaiden game. It features some nice levels like flashing lighting (unfortunately taken out of the SNES version), brilliant fire, flashing ice, and even a hovering castle, which still hold their own in today's world.

Sound: B
Some of the tunes in this game are well-known and still stand the test of time. They can be found on places like www.vgmusic.com, and the music to Stage 1-1 is still one of my unofficial theme songs. 20 years later I still remember these tunes like the back of my hand. I can't say that about every game.

Difficulty: A
Ninja Gaiden II is pretty difficult, and many players who played only the original can't convert to this one because of no Jump and Slash. While arguably not as cruel as the original, the game's technical requirements keep it on top of most Top 25/Top 100 Difficulty Lists.

Reply Value: B
The game challenges you to where you'll be replaying it quite a bit. It's also kinda short, so you can probably finish this title at lunch if you're proficient, making it a good break filler.

The World Record Perspective:
If you can beat the game, you will probably have a very respectable score on the scoreboard. If you want to go for #1 though, the points and speed records are very close to human perfection. Depending on various rules, the official high scores (such as what is reported on Twin Galaxies) are close to being topped out. The points record is 973,000, but there is a new score pending verification. The speed runs are approximately 13:30 on Twin Galaxies and 11:21 in the Speed Demos Archive. If you're doing speed runs on the SNES or Virtual Console: Beware, the reload glitch on the bosses has been taken out, so you might be slowed down on Funky Dynamite among other places.

The Penguin Says:
"This is one of the better games that has come out. While it's not killer material, it is a crowd pleaser as long as you can get over the Jump and Slash loss. If you're looking for a game that plays clean, few glitches, and is difficult, this is the one for you."

"Overall, I give the game itself an **8.5/10**. However, the World Record is **EXTREMELY** hard to obtain, so I'll give that a **1/5**."

All Eyes On Mega Man: The Wily Wars

by Daryl "Zeo" Kiddey

Mega Man: Wily Wars is a unique Capcom release. It is the only Mega Man game collection ever put out that has updated graphics and redesigned boss patterns. It is also the only game that has a mode where you can mix and match weapons from other Mega Man games in it.

Graphics: 10 / 100
The game's graphics sets are MORE than impressive. There is almost nothing that could be done better graphics wise. However, this makes them significantly harder because they lack the static background/foreground "landmarks" to make the pixel perfect execution that was possible on the NES much harder to time, AND the Genesis controls are not QUITE as "tight" or "free" as the NES was.

Sound: 9 / 10
The sound on this is slightly less then stellar. While it attempts to remix the NES sounds, it fails to improve them. Its a case of its different, not better. Most of the weapon sounds are not noticeably improved at all.

Controls: N/A
Very little to state here as Wily Wars was never officially released state side, hence, given the playing conditions, you can use any controller you want. However, as game controls are slightly "looser" or "rigid" than the NES, I'd strongly suspect that "losing control" of Mega Man is easier to do. I've not had too hard a time with my experience, however, I cannot speed run MM3 on a whim either. Also, having the ability to use a button to enter the menus can help or hinder you based on your personal playing style.

Game play: 8 / 10
Things are bit biased against the player (i.e. Needle Man can shoot more needles in a pattern, some of the other bosses can add to their patterns, etc.). However, this just makes the game more difficult, and not just a port of the 8 bit originals.

Replay value, longevity: 8 / 10
The ability to mix and match weapons inside Wily's Tower makes the game repayable many times over, and with several different challenge levels you might find yourself always coming back for a greater challenge. This is something you cannot find in the original NES versions.

Overall rating: 8 / 10
I would recommend you somehow get your hands on this game. It is extremely fun, and has a very nice graphic appeal. Heck, nag Nintendo to release this on virtual console. While you can't really play competitively at the moment, you can make challenges for yourself in Wily's Tower and spice things up.

Thanks to UsaSatsui for providing the video above

Apple II Incider - Uninvited

by Donald Lee

Before I turn my attention to our Halloween themed Apple II game, some personal news to report. Several weeks ago, I received a call from the former manager of my most recent job (where I got laid off in April). He asked me: "Are you working yet? If not, would you be interested in a job where I have some influence over the manager?"

Given that I wasn't working, I told him I would be interested in hearing what he had to say. He then continued: "Well, our company is hiring a Sales Engineer out in your old office." Before I let my former manager go further, I told him: "Oh, I see that YOU ARE the manager and that's why you have some influence". He then belted out a good laugh.

To make a long story short, I have been rehired by my old company at my old position. As I write, it's been a week since I went back to work. The transition hasn't been too difficult and I enjoy getting back into the work routine.

Switching gears, Bryan announced several months ago that the October issue would be Halloween themed. Unfortunately, I had already talked about Nightmare Gallery in a previous issue or otherwise, that game would have been perfect for this month.

Luckily though, there are plenty of other games out there. The one I'll be focusing on this week is Uninvited. It was written by ICOM Simulations and published by Mindscape and was originally released in 1986 for the original black and white Macintosh computers, then later translated to other platforms including the Apple IIGS.

I definitely didn't play the Apple IIGS version back when it was released. However, I seem to recall having some experience playing the Macintosh version at various computer stores. At the time, the gameplay wasn't the biggest attraction. It was the fact that the Mac version had good graphics (albeit black and white), plus the graphical user interface was smooth and easy to use. For those of us who grew up in the 1980's using keyboards, the Macintosh graphical interface was a revelation.

Back to the game, because I didn't own a machine that could play Uninvited, I never played it to completion. Thus, when I played the Apple IIGS version to write this review, I had no idea of the game's premise. After getting killed a few times quickly, I decided to look up the game on Wiki. According to it, Uninvited's premise is: "The unnamed hero must find the way through an abandoned house in order to rescue a sibling. The quest involves magic and solving logical puzzles while discovering sinister secrets of the house's former inhabitants."

Given that I am still working on getting through the game as I write the review, there is no way I will be able to finish it soon. However, even to this day, I remain impressed with its user interface. Objects can be open, read, or examined, and all it takes is a point and click on doors to open and go through them. Smaller objects such as books and other items of interest can be dragged into your inventory for use later.

Uninvited makes good use of the Apple IIGS's graphics and sound capabilities. The graphics, while not spectacular, are colorful and detailed, while the thunder, creaking doors, and other great effects help add to the atmosphere. The only thing missing really is some music, though this might have been because I was playing it on an emulator rather than the real thing.

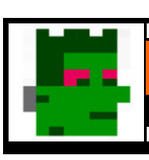
All in all, it was good thing to revisit Uninvited. While my time is lacking these days due to work, I may try to see how far I can progress sometime in the future. It may be old but it's still quite playable and worth checking out again.

SIDENOTE

Bryan had asked if I could squeeze in a column on Atari 5200 games since there isn't a lot of current focus on 80's video game consoles in RTM. This was right around the time I found out I was going back to work, so for this month I couldn't squeeze it in.

Given it's not easy to write multiple columns, I have added coverage of Atari 5200 games (when appropriate) to the Apple II column in the past. I may continue that instead of a completely separate 5200 write-up.

I will mention that I suddenly had the urge to explore the old Vectrex system. I'm working on getting an emulator running on my PC. I won't promise anything for now, however, I am interested in trying out the games on the Vectrex and I will see if there's anything I want to write about down the line.



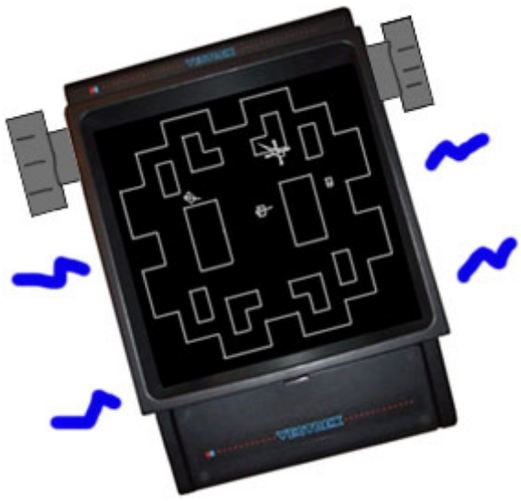
Vectrexenstein - Armor Attack

by Donald Lee

Bringing the Vectrex to Life on Retrogaming Times Monthly

I originally was supposed to do something at 7 PM Friday evening. Alas, at the last moment, those plans fell through. That left me getting home a little earlier than expected. Since there has been some clamoring for RTM to feature more 80's video game systems, I decided to give a little attention to the Vectrex system.

I had played the Vectrex (as many did) in stores when it was first released in the 80's. The system was quite a novelty due to it's built in monitor. Since I already had the Atari 5200 and the Apple II at home, there really was no motivation for me to purchase a Vectrex.



Recently though, the thought suddenly crossed my mind that I should try to play some of the games for this system. Given that emulators exist for just about every platform, I decided to find one for the Vectrex. It took a couple of tries before I got one that worked, that being "VecX/GL" Version 1.2 and it runs well on my PC.

The default game that comes with the emulator is Armor Attack. After giving the game a few spins, there doesn't appear to be a lot of depth here. The goal of the game is to try and maneuver a tank around and shoot other tanks and helicopters before they shoot you all while using walls for protection. A big drawback to the game though is that the screen is static, so the playfield doesn't change. All I noticed is that the number of enemies slowly increased the further I got into the game, but I will admit that I didn't get to the highest levels, so perhaps it does change as you progress.

As for the gameplay itself, my PC's keyboard substituted in place of the original Vectrex controller. The arrow keys turned my tank while several other keys fired my tank's weapon and moved it forward. It took a little while to get used to the setup, but once you get the hang of it it's pretty easy to play.

If you look at the screenshot for the game, it's in black and white. There were screen overlays available in the emulator package but I didn't quite figure out how to make them work. However, it would have been a nice touch.

Overall, Armor Attack is a nice little game but may not keep your interest in the long term. While I won't make any promises, I will try to squeeze in more Vectrex game reviews in the future.

The Thrill Of Defeat: Plodding Back To School With The ZX81

by Mark Sabbatini

Educators can be frighteningly stupid.

Not all of them and not about all things, having been a teacher myself at times and marrying someone who at this moment is teaching geology to kids by having them dissect chocolate chip cookies. And I have no use for people who go on rants about "useless" public schools. But there are times I'd rather pull my hypothetical kids from certain "educators" and let them gorge on Playstation and Froot Loops (learning moment: intentionally misspelled to resolve lawsuit noting the cereal contains no fruit).

There's the Texas people who want to delete Ceasar Chevez and inset the bible into textbooks. The zero-tolerance people who expel honor students for nail clippers. The people who think "edutainment" makes learning fun.

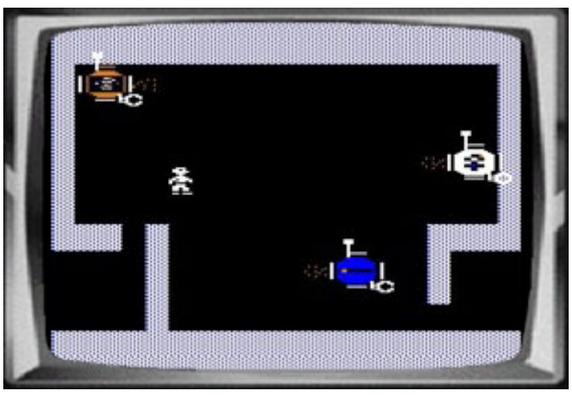
Our priorities being what they are, it's that last one that's a real disgrace.

Things are vastly better today than the early days of computing when programmers thought kids would wax euphoric at "adventures" where monsters were slayed by answering grammar questions and "football" where "plays" were subtraction problems. Did anyone ever have fun in "The Oregon Trail" beyond shooting animals for food?

As this column's tour through video gaming's failed platforms lurches into fall, the good and awful edutainment efforts on our current platform - the Sinclair ZX81 - gets a turn at the head of the class. To avoid inflicting the punishment of so many misguided parents and instructors back in the day, I'm also throwing in a few massively fun classics from other platforms (mentioned in earlier columns, although it's been a few years).

Since I'm assuming I have no audience to lose, the good stuff first (these games are not for the ZX81, but are worth noting):

Robot Odyssey (multiple platforms) Everybody has favorites they enjoy more than the at-large gaming crowd; this arcade/adventure involving the programming the hardware of three robots is mine. The central character is a nightcap-clad guy who looks a little like the star of Mr. Do who, after falling into a pit that mysteriously appears next to his bed, finds himself in a city sewer with three robots and a soldering iron. You need to wire their circuits so they're able to overcome various challenges in the five-level mystery place. These can include opening doors, operating transportation systems, getting past sentries and many other things. The robots have things like sensors to detect objects, claws to grasp objects, bumpers to rebound off walls, and when things get complex it's possible to burn a limited number of custom chips. Know nothing about soldering, logic gates and the like? No problem - this game has one of the most thorough and user-friendly tutorials ever. There's many quality games involving robot programming in the world, but I like this as a starting point because it's easy to learn and really covers a lot of ground by the end (the same company made a simpler game called Rocky's Boots, but even youngsters ought to be able to handle the more difficult sequel. The original Robot Odyssey can be played in emulators for computers like the Apple II and TRS-80

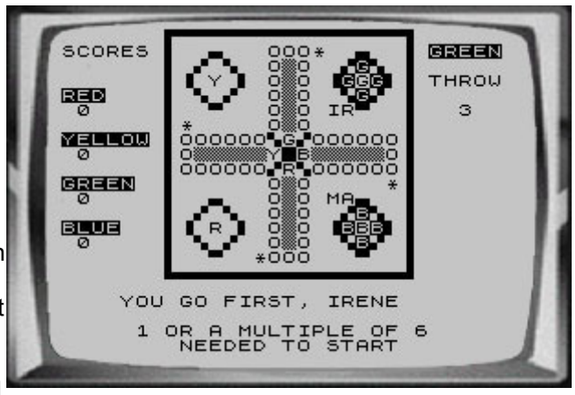


Color Computer, but the simpler method is the modern Droid Quest (www.droidquest.com), an exact remake in Java that happens to include a bonus level. There's also a more modern Windows/Mac "tribute" called Gate at www.quinndunki.com/gate/index.html.

MasterType; Typing Of The Dead (multiple platforms) Does anyone even take typing classes any more? I remember sore fingers from hours on a manual typewriter during a semester-long class in junior high at the beginning of the '80s, probably one of the last classes to do so. Shortly afterward we had a pure vanilla Typing Tutor program on the TRS-80 at home, but these days I think tots pick it up by instinct. In-between some programmers figured out how to turn the drudgery into fun, the first early success story being 1981's MasterType, a Space Zap-type game where the player types letters and words to shoot rockets and other things coming in from the four corners of the screen to ram your spaceship at the center. It starts with the home-key stuff and progresses logically (you can also customize lessons, including adding your own words). Obviously the faster they come, the higher your words-per-minute. A bunch of other games followed, including some lame stuff that sounded highly promising (i.e. Mario Teaches Typing). One that most definitely did not suck was Typing Of The Dead, a PC (and Dreamcast) adaptation of the first-person shooter where the keyboard is mightier than the BFG. Zombies bearing letters and words do their thing and the whole escapade is so amusing you tend to overlook that purely as a stand-alone game it's a little lame. You move automatically between locations, and the PC graphics and sound aren't great (the Dreamcast is more impressive). I'm guessing this didn't make it into a lot of classrooms due to a different type of PC shortage, which is a real shame.

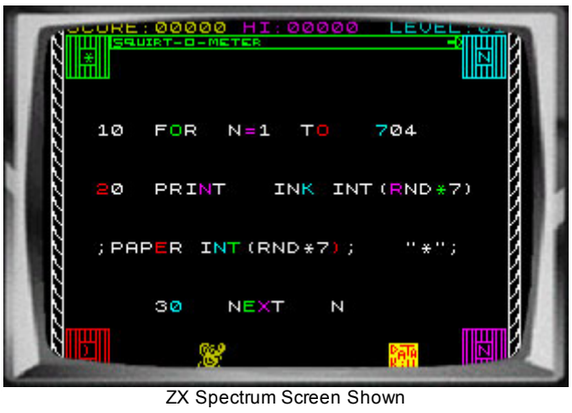
OK, now that your tolerance for pain is hopefully somewhat higher, on to the mixed blessings of the ZX81's options. Grades are relative to other ZX81 games, meaning there is no curve allowing for the lameness of most edutainment. This is, after all, a gaming column.

Clever Clogs Whizz Quiz for ages 7+ (C) Since Trivia Pursuit and its ilk was becoming a fad back then, stuff like this might have been greeted with less misery by kids than usual. But while it's got a nice gameboard display, it's more tedious and less fun than some well-designed programs that simply ask trivia questions. Setting up is unnecessarily slow (and on a ZX81 that's bad), then you have to wait until somebody "throws" a multiple of six before moving. I sat for several minutes during my first game doing nothing but watching the computer fail to throw multiples of six for all the players. The "game" involves moving four pieces around the board to a "home" space and the only really interesting part of that as far as most kids go is they can send an opponent back to the start by landing on their space. That makes an already marathon game longer and in this case that's just not a good thing. Also, for an educational game, there's some odd mistakes - the instructions refer to running the program on a Spectrum computer and there's minor punctuation errors in the screen and printed instructions.



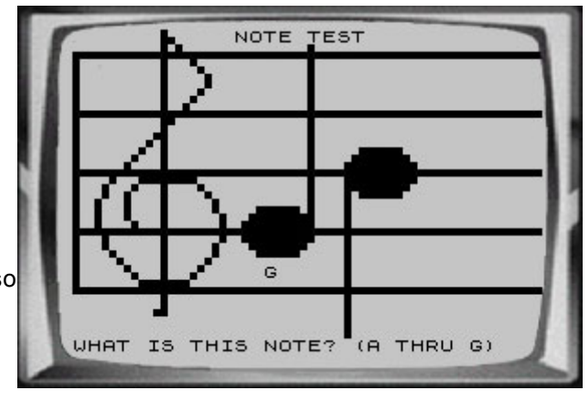
History 1: Fun To Learn (C-) Continuing with the trivia thing, this quiz about British history incorporates an OK, if simple, game for up to four players. There's two single-person teaching modes and two game modes (events and dates), plus the ability to select eras from ancient to modern history. The games are six-option multiple choice questions and scores are kept on a bar "graph" (made of text characters). U.S. audiences would doubtless fare better with in-country questions - if they struggle to identify what half-century the Civil War was fought, one can only imagine their gap in British history - but the flip side is picking up some fun tidbits for parties (hey, we are talking computer geeks here). There's a number of other tapes in this series such as math, literature and inventions, plus some reviewed below that deviate from the trivia formula with varying degrees of success.

Micro Mouse Goes Debugging (A-) WOW! This isn't just great edutainment, it's a great game, especially for the geek types most likely to be using computers back then. The player controls Micro Mouse, who has to get letters from cages at the corners of the screen and carry them around repairing lines in a BASIC program listing. Meanwhile, there's a couple of software bugs trying to steal the letters and put them back. Too many missing letters and the program "crashes." The player can fight back by spraying them with the Datakill at the bottom of the screen, but can't carry letters while doing so. Great concept, but what makes it shine is it's one of a miniscule number of

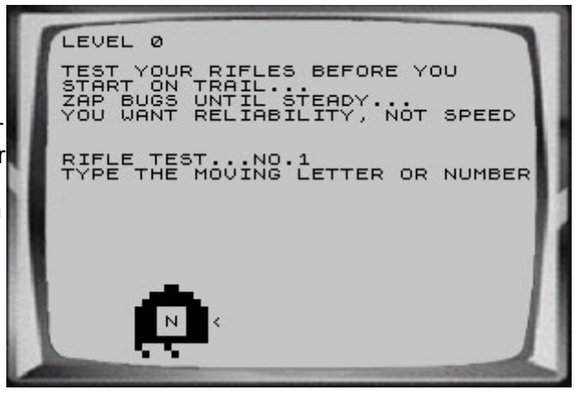


ZX Spectrum Screen Shown

programs that uses some incredibly complex programming to display hi-res graphics, and it does so speedily and mostly flicker-free. Interesting, versions of this exist for the ZX Spectrum and Commodore 64 that are much more elaborate looking, where Micro Mouse is repairing hardware circuits, but they got panned by reviewers. How many chances does a ZX81 owner get to legitimately argue their version was more fun?



Music Educator I (C-) Not bad at what it does, but severely limited in value since its content can be learned in a single sitting. The program tests note names and lengths using a large graphics display that is reasonably responsive and user-friendly, offering a decently paced tutorial beforehand. But one short quiz of each and that's it. Also, the program allows all keys to be pressed - not just those for notes - and anything outside the range is a wrong answer. Little error checks like that are important for these types of programs. Good for a class, not so much for home unless your Octomom.



Pioneer Trail (C+) Such is the obscurity - or commercial insignificance - of this computer that the on-screen instructions can refer to this as "'Oregon Trail' for the ZX81" and nobody apparently cared or sued. It's a playable adaptation, but nowhere near flashy or fun as the Apple II version I was weaned on. You start with some shooting practice, typing letters that appear in the middle of targets instead of words like "bang." Then you buy oxen, food, bullets and other supplies with your initial cash outlay (it'd be nice to have some idea of how much use you get per unit of something). Then you set off, getting the option of hunting or moving on each turn, plus perhaps a chance to stop at a trading post or deal with approaching travelers who may or may not look hostile. You also have to choose how much to eat on a scale from one to ten (again with no idea of how many actual units you consume or what consequences may result). Various random events like storms and getting stuck pop up and slow your goal of covering 2,000 miles in 40 turns (weeks). Hunting, shooting bad guys and warding off attacking animals is exactly like the initial target practice, and one problem with the game is the key response is slow, so you often have to hold it down for a second or two before a shot registers. There's 20 selectable levels of difficulty and, in truth, I expected this to be a lot worse than it was. A gamer who enjoys Hammurabi- and Camel-like text games probably would find this a tiny step above those.

Coming next month: The fun of learning by playing roles such as a tyrannical dictator and sports franchise owner (if that's not redundant).

RTM Idiocy: A Final Farewell

by Mark Sabbatini

I thought the Coleco Adam was the greatest computer ever.

From the moment I saw a blurb about the "integrated" package for a breakthrough $600 I was in love. I devoured every printed word, never minding phrases like "written from spec sheets" because the demo units were hidden "behind darkly tinted glass." When they finally reached stores I ogled the boxes and pestered my grandparents, who'd spoiled me a time or two, to buy one during a visit.

Even though my grandfather never used so much as a typewriter in his life and still hadn't 15 years later, it's clear he was a lot smarter than me in this instance.

This month we're dealing a messy execution to this long-running column about the more obscure moments of retrocomputing stupidity, due to what I hear are a few too many complaints about the bitterness of it all (not to mention weariness at having nostalgic favorites mocked). I agree negative and bitter people are a drag, so I'm willing to cave for reasons of taste (but certainly not political correctness which, after all, has been one of my primary targets). So, in a twist stolen from an old Trevanian thriller, the guns for this final episode will be turned on the executioner.

But to repeat a tired disclaimer one final time: I'm writing about stuff I mostly owned and loved, often in lieu of far superior and more popular gear. I beat up the Radio Shack Color Computer while having purchased more than 20 of the machines,

the majority of which I still own (along with most of its magazines, software and accessories). I also owned a decent collection of Sinclair machines, and bought vast numbers of other obsolete computers and consoles from garage sales , thrift stores and Third-World countries (seriously - I spent more shipping most of the latter from places like Guyana and Siberia than I paid for them). That doesn't mean I'm above recognizing what the masses thought of the gear I had a crush on or needed their approval to feel fine about using those kludges of chippery.

Anyhow, what follows are just some of the many, many, many stupid and incorrect things I've done and thought with old machines:

- I loved the original Atari 2600 Football game and was bummed nobody ever wanted to play it with me. A few years later I also thought 10-Yard Fight was pretty good.
- I traded a handheld game now capable of getting decent bids on eBay for a bag of M&Ms at summer camp.
- I paid $70 for Coleco's tabletap Pac-Man - about six months' allowance - and was shocked and disappointed to find out it wasn't a miniature clone of the real thing. Never occurred to me to take it out of the box or look at a display unit at the store.
- Like some of the worst people from retrocomputing, my screw-ups also include the criminal. I did 60 hours of community service for trying to shoplift a couple of games to go with the Colecovision I just bought (had enough money for the console, but not the games).
- Despite being repeatedly and massively disappointed, I kept forking over $50 for the black-and-white Mac adaptations of Laser Disc games such as Dragon's Lair and Space Ace. Owners of the Amiga, Apple IIGS, Atari ST and a few other machines may understand when I say this had to be one of the most misguiding porting concepts of all time, putting a few snippets from scenes on a stack of floppy discs, totaling maybe two minutes of gameplay and 20 minutes of disc swaps. Yet they got a couple hundred dollars from me even though I knew I was being suckered.
- Similarly, while I never came across a BASIC listing in a type-in magazine offering the fast, arcade-like action promised by the author, I still spent a dozen or so hours every month keying in stuff anyhow hoping this time things would be different.
- I once bought a pallet of ancient, mostly broken dot-maxtrix printers from a state surplus warehouse just to get the used Power Mac 6100 that came with it. Taking them to the landfill would have cost hundreds, if not thousands, so it took me three months of dumping them one at time in Hefty bags in the trash to get rid of them. Granted, the whole thing cost only $50 and I kept the computer for three or four years.
- I submitted roughly half a dozen Timex-Sinclair programs to a type-in magazine with less than elite standards. All were rejected.
- I've never beaten any computer chess game at any level without undoing a few moves.
- I've never made it past wave four of Galaga. I also can't get past a couple waves of Asteroids, Defender, Space Invaders and many, many other icons of the era.
- The cement factory level on Donkey Kong was always my favorite.
- I thought the Macintosh was an overpriced novelty that would die a quick death at The Sharper Image. I also never thought the iPod and iPhone would amount to anything.

And perhaps the biggest screw-up of all: I decided in high school to abandon my aspirations of being a computer programmer because I didn't want the negative stigma. Instead I became a journalist.

Video Game Tattler

by Tom Zjaba

Video Game Tattler
Issue #1
by Anita Beak

Welcome to the first issue of the Video Game Tattler. This is a monthly rag that is dedicated to telling the juicy stories in the video game world. We dig for the dirt that is not covered in the other magazines. If there is an outrageous story out there that no one else will touch, you can be sure that we will cover it. So if you want to know the most salacious stories in the entire video game market, then here is your source.

Villains Turn Table on Mega Man

After years of defeating the the most dangerous criminals in the world, Mega Man has finally met his match. Knowing that they could not defeat him alone, Mega Man's most wanted criminals teamed up to take him out. But unlike a comic book, where they all teamed up with some diabolical plan to defeat him, they instead turned to an unlikely ally, the law. That's right, a collection of his most formidable foes, led by Cutman, Fireman and Elecman have hired a legal team to look into the legality of Mega Man taking and using their weapons. When we asked attorney Irvin M. Flint about it, he had the following to say "It has become apparent that Mega Man does not possess the proper license to carry these weapons. No paperwork has been filed. We are working with the police and FBI to have these illegal weapons seized and criminal charges be brought

against Mega Man." Things are not looking good for the blue hero, who declined to comment on the story.

Jeff Gordon Seeks New Race

Once the darling of Nascar, Jeff Gordon has decided to retire from the racing that made him a household name. When asked what brought upon this decision, Jeff stunned the press with the following answer "I feel that I have gone as far as I can in Nascar. I need a new challenge, a new kind of race to get my competitive juices flowing again. I have decided to walk away from Nascar and join the Omega Race." The press went wild with this as they scrambled to find out more of what the Omega Race is. Jeff gave one more newsbyte before embarking on his new career "My decision to switch to the Omega Race has to do with the new challenges that I will face. The addition of guns to a vehicle is an experience that I cannot get in Nascar. It adds an element of danger that I feel will challenge me like never before."

Donkey Kong - The Other Story

Everyone knows the story of Donkey Kong, giant gorilla grabs girl and takes off while plumber chases after her to save her. Right? Wrong. It appears that there is more to the story than we were led to believe. VGT hunted down former love interest of Mario, Pauline, to get the true story. We found her waiting tables at a greasy spoon, looking tired and depressed. Years of heavy drinking and chain smoking has taken away her beauty and made her anything but the damsel in distress we all fell in love with. It took some convincing to get her to spill the beans, but some cheap booze and a wad of bills got her to sing like a canary. "I never told anyone this before, I was too scared of Mario. But he never took care of me like he promised. I was supposed to have the happy ending. Instead, he dumped me for that princess. I don't care anymore, he can't scare me. Here is what happened. I was jealous of all the time he spent with his brother. That no good Luigi would keep him out to all hours of the night. I didn't know what they were doing. They said it was emergency plumbing calls, but I know better. They were chasing skirts. So I wanted him to show me some attention. I wanted him to love me like he used to. So I hired the stupid ape to kidnap me and make Mario come rescue me. I wanted to be saved, I wanted to matter. At first it worked, but then he became famous. Before long, he dumped me like yesterday's trash and hooked up with miss high and mighty. Now I am stuck here. Where is my happy ending? Where is my castle? Where?" She broke down in tears as we ordered her another drink. It was a sad sight to see someone fall so far. We could not help but feel sorry for her.

Video Game Tattler is written by Tom Zjaba, who also does tons of video game comics at http://www.arcadeafterdark.com. He also writes prose stories and features a new comic book he is working on called Tabloid at his comic book site - http://www.kzcomics.com

Gaming Advertisements

Games That Can Be Played On-Line

Game Over

Have a Frightful Halloween!

Vectrexenstein: "Arrrrghh!"

Me: "Help!"

Oh no, I have just been devoured by Vectrexenstein! Therefore, I will have to keep this "Game Over" brief as I don't have much life left inside of me. Anyway, I hope everyone has a scary, yet fun, Halloween. Heck, why not pass out this issue of Retrogaming Times Monthly instead of candy, as we all know RTM is the candy to us classic video gamers. This is Bryan signing off from another issue of....

Vectrexenstein: "Yummy!"

- Bryan Roppolo, Retrogaming Times Monthly Editor

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