

COVERING 3 DECADES OF CLASSIC GAMING

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### Press Fire To Begin

by [Bryan Roppolo](#)

With May comes a smaller issue of Retrogaming Times Monthly. I guess many people are taking some time off before the summer officially starts. Maybe with all the good weather everyone is away from their computers? Who knows, but we still have some retrogaming goodness this month, with some humorous columns mixed in to help spice up the magazine a little bit. One of the things I know people will see missing from this issue is Sal Esquivel's Many Faces Of... column. Last month I mentioned that Sal was in the hospital and was not able to get an April version of his column written, but was planning on getting two columns in for the May issue. Well, sadly it seems that Sal must still be feeling under the weather since I have not heard from him since early April, so I can only hope everything's okay and that the Many Faces Of... can eventually become a regular release like in the earlier years of RTM.

Other than what I mentioned above, there's not much to add except that I am looking for someone that is interested in becoming an Assistant Editor to help out with editing the columns. The reason for this is so that I can spend more time with other aspects of the magazine, like getting all those back issues uploaded. If anyone is interested in splitting editing duties with me, send me a message since it would help make Retrogaming Times Monthly a better magazine for sure. One of the perks is that you get to read columns before they hit the stands, so you will always be on top of what is coming before anyone else gets a chance! Anyway, I hope everyone enjoys this small but interesting issue!



### Retrogaming News

#### CCAG 2010

At Cleveland's Classic Console & Arcade Gaming Show you will find all Games from Past to Present with an emphasis on the Classics, when gaming was at its best. Explore a wide variety of Vendors and Collectors Games, Systems & Accessories in the large main hall. Play some Awesome Vintage Arcade Games in the FREE PLAY Mini Arcade. Challenge yourself in one of the Console Tournament Events for a chance at some Amazing Prizes. Also, our Legendary Chinese Auction offers many Rare, Valuable & Unique Prizes not to be missed. The show will be held Saturday May 8, 2010 from Noon to 8 PM at the American Legion Hall--Clifton Post 22001 Brookpark Road Fairview Park, OH. Visit <http://www.ccagshow.com/> for more info!

#### The 19th Annual "Last" Chicago CoCoFEST!

This FINAL show will be held May 15 & 16, 2010 at the Holiday Inn Hotel & Suites Elgin, IL on Saturday 10 am to 5 pm - Sunday 10 am to 3 pm or beyond. Cost of admission is \$82.00 plus 10% tax (\$90.20 total). Our 2010 Exhibitors are: Hawksoft, Tux Driver, Frank Pittel, Roy R Justus, The Music Man, Wally Grossman, Pitre Technology, John Mark Mobley, Griffin Christian School, Lost Wizard Enterprises, Bargeman Research Labs, Richard & Brenda Crislip, Glenside MARK II IDE Interface, The Glenside Color Computer Club, and Malcolm Cleveland's Not-For-Sale CoCo Memorabilia. Come see <http://www.glensideccc.com/> for more information about us and the show.



### A Cryptic Telegram

by [Keith Bergman](#)

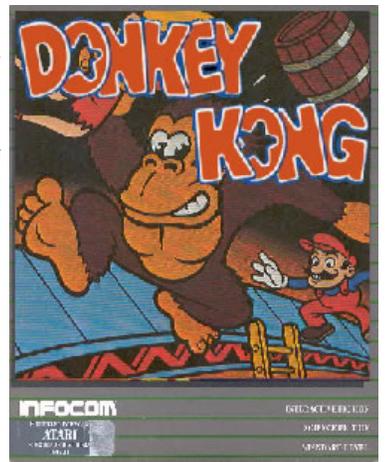
Recently, a cryptic telegram arrived at the stately Retrogaming Times manor, promising an exclusive interview that would "blow the lid off classic gaming forever." After an exhaustive selection process, it was determined that the newest, most expendable, and most frequently behind-deadline contributor (me) would meet our contact, "Deep Text," at an undisclosed location.

"Deep Text" told me that he worked at Infocom, the legendary text-adventure software house, during its most fertile creative period in the early-to-mid 1980's. "Wild times, man," he emphasized, talking into an empty "super-sized" drink cup to make his voice sound distorted and mysterious. "We're talking all-night pizza binges, piles of Pixi-Stix powder on every flat surface, girls showing up at all hours... well, they were middle-aged women, and we'd hired them to clean the office. But still."

While the world still reveres legendary Infocom titles like "Planetfall," "Deadline" and the "Zork" series of interactive fiction, "Deep Text" insists that the company let their greatest creations wither on the vine, unreleased. "What I came up with when I worked there would have revolutionized video gaming, extended the life of every classic platform by five years, and made Infocom a household name. But they lacked the vision to see what I saw!"

What he saw -- and what he showed me, in a sheaf of faded dot-matrix printouts -- was a concept known in-house as "Info-Cade." "Think about it," he said, his upper lip sprouting light beads of sweat. "Pac-Man on the Atari 2600 was crap. It was crap on the Vic-20. It was too slow on the TI 99/4A. Sure, you got a yellow ball and four ghosts, but where was the atmosphere? Where was the Pac-Manity of it all? What those older platforms needed -- what I created -- was a text-adventure arcade conversion."

"Deep Text"'s notes set the scene:



#### **CENTER OF MAZE**

**You awake with no memory of your past. Glancing down, you find yourself limbless, yellow, and rotund. Your eyes wide with horror, your condition renders you speechless. All you can do is open and close, open and close, your mouth, gibbering with "waka-waka" sounds in inarticulate horror.**

**As you collect your wits, you realize you are in a nondescript east-west passageway. Faint, ghostly sounds echo from the distance.**

**There is a dot here.**

>

His notes for the official "Info-Cade" version of Dig Dug give that popular game a new perspective as well:

#### **HOLE IN THE GROUND**

**You have tunneled to the center of this patch of earth. Possible exits are up, down, east and west. There is a faint smell of vegetation here, as if produce had been placed in this spot recently.**

**You are carrying: some sort of weird coily drill/gun hybrid thingamajig.**

>

"Missile Command was another masterpiece," he continued, spitting bits of french fry onto the faded printouts. "Honestly, and I'm not being biased about this or exaggerating at all, but I'd say my version was about nine million times better than the arcade game."

#### **CENTRAL LASER PLATFORM**

**Far below, you can see the faint skylines of three cities to the west, and three others to the east. The faint sound of air-raid sirens wafts to you on the chill wind. Above you, what look like hundreds of shooting stars dot the night sky.**

**There is a small amount of ammunition and a cannon here. Possible exits are down, east and west.**

>

"Tell me that's not more fun than some two-bit knockoff that doesn't even look like the original!" "Deep Text" cried, arousing stares from several other patrons of the undisclosed location. "Here, here's another good one. See if you can guess what game it's a conversion of. There's a couple game moves printed out on this one."

#### **BOTTOM GIRDER**

**You are standing on a steel beam, struggling to keep your balance. Something -- or someone -- seems to have knocked the beam askew. Looking up, you notice beams above you, also strangely crooked. Next to you is a burning oil drum, making you sweat through your red overalls. In the distance, you see what looks like a precarious rope ladder.**

**> USE HAMMER**

**You do not have a hammer. Perhaps you should go look for one?**

**You hear an ominous rolling sound, getting closer.**

**>E**

**You walk east, balancing on the girder.**

**The ominous rolling sound gets closer. You also smell a faint, rank stench, like the smell of the monkey house at the zoo, mixed with the subtle floral aroma of your missing girlfriend's shampoo.**

**>E**

**A large wooden barrel rolls into view.**

**> JUMP**

**You jump over the rolling barrel.**

#### **BASE OF LADDER**

**You stand at the base of a ladder, which appears to lead to a higher girder.**

**>USE HAMMER**

**Okay, we get it. You know there's a hammer coming up. Try actually picking the damn thing up, okay?**

"Deep Text" insisted that his game concepts were "big hits" in testing, and that if Infocom had let him test the games on larger focus groups than elderly narcoleptics and himself, the response would have been "through the roof." But licensing difficulties and a changing video game market led the company to officially pull the plug on the Info-Cade project almost before it even started.

"I didn't stop, though," "Deep Text" cackles, crying and scratching at imaginary bugs. "I kept on making arcade-based interactive fiction until at least 1992. Most of it never got off my notebook." He digs through a leather carrying case, past his laptop computer, and pulls out a worn spiral-bound notebook.

With no publisher interested in text-based interactive fiction versions of NBA Jam, Mortal Kombat or Tetris, "Deep Text" finally admitted defeat in the mid-1990's, packing up his parser and taking a series of odd jobs to make ends meet. "Infocom pretty much squashed me -- they censored me," he insists, jabbing the air with a milkshake-filled straw. "They couldn't handle the dynamite I was giving them. I guess some people are scared of innovation."

Calls to former Infocom staffers to verify the claims made by "Deep Text" were met with silence or resounding laughter. One former programmer, speaking on condition of anonymity, reacted with surprise. "Are you talking about Merton? Merton Bascomb? That idiot janitor we hired who kept talking about how he was gonna make Centipede into interactive fiction? I think he wrote a version of 'Whack-a-Mole' where all you could type was "hit mole," over and over. Is he still calling himself 'Deep Text,' or did his mom make him knock it off?"

"Deep Text" insists his time will come. "With all the interest in retro gaming these days, I think people may be ready soon to go back to a glorious past that never actually really happened or affected their lives at all. Once people type "enter hyperspace" in Asteroids, or "pretend I'm not in a Dig Dug rip-off" in Mr. Do, they'll never go back to some primitive, blocky graphic game on their screen. I have seen the future of video gaming, and I'm sorry, but graphics are just not a part of it."



If you've read my Apple II Incider column for any length of time, you'll remember that I've stated that my Atari 5200 was reserved for mainly the arcade games and my Apple IIe was for everything else.

While the Atari 5200 had many of the hit arcade games, there was one major title missing. That would be a translation of Galaga. It was always disappointing to me that Galaga didn't get translated to any of the early generation game systems.

As I entered college in the 1990's and moved to using a Windows 95 PC, I began playing other games such as NBA Live 95 (yes, it's been around that long), X-Wing, and Descent I and II. I enjoyed the newer generation of games and spent a ton of time playing each one. Yet, a part of me still pined for playing Galaga at home.

Keep in mind, this was the mid 1990's. If there were any emulators like MAME32, I wasn't aware of them. I don't think the term "retrogaming" even existed back then. If I wanted to play Galaga, I had to either go to the arcade or get the Atari 7800.

Thanks to the power of this new thing called the Internet, I discovered a company called CHAMProgramming. The company produced many remakes of hit arcade games including Champ Kong (Donkey Kong), Pac-Em (Pac Man) and Galaxia (Galaxian). At the time I discovered CHAMProgramming, what caught my eye was they had a remake of Galaga (called Galagon) in the works.

Unfortunately, what happened after this is a bit fuzzy. I knew CHAMProgramming eventually completed Galagon. They allowed people to download a trial version of their games that had some limitations to them. If you wanted to play the complete game, you would have to pay for it.

I forget if I ever downloaded the trial version but I definitely did not purchase the full version of the game. Even though I never bought it, I still followed the company's new developments. Therefore, it was a shock to me when one day, CHAMProgramming's website announced that they had gone out of business.

With the advent of emulators like MAME and the growth of the retro gaming market in the past decade, I had long forgotten about the games from CHAMProgramming.

However, thanks to Google, I was able to find a fan site for the CHAMProgramming titles. In addition, the games are AVAILABLE for download! The website is located here:

<http://www.champ-em.com/>

Unfortunately, I was not able to get a chance to play any before this month's deadline. However, I will endeavor to get to some reviews in the months to come.



Ah, spring...time again to turn one's thoughts to love. And why it doesn't mean simply lavishing sonnets and roses on the chosen target of affection.

Some of my recent columns got a bit...garbled during their journey to the internet, apparently because the TRS-80 Color Computer gods decreed I wasn't being appropriately reverential. I've sacrificed a Commodore 64 at the altar, however, so readers revisiting those rants will hopefully find the original fire-and-brimstone scrolls resurrected in short order.

Seems like once a year I need to make the pilgrimage to the Temple of CoCo Atonement, explaining why someone with such harsh words for Tandy's baby bits is allowed to write anything about them. So here goes, with a bit of fresh material for those who've heard it before.

First, the current collection of this Alleged CoCo Hater is more than a dozen working machines including the original grey chiclet-keyboard relic, CoCo 2, MC-10, CoCo 3 and Dragon 64 (in short, pretty much every consumer model made with a 6809 or related CPU). Add to that nearly every significant piece of software, a full set of The Rainbow and most other CoCo magazines, full sets of a couple of disk-based magazines, and a barrage of controllers, disk drives and other add-ons. That doesn't include past machines I've had since the year after it was introduced, nor the range of emulators and digitalized publications on various modern-day computers I lug around. I must confess, however, to owning practically none of the newish homebrew hardware on the market (somebody recently inquired what I knew about an SD memory card interface).

Anyone at the Last Annual CoCo Fest on the outskirts of Chicago a couple years back will tell you I was a madman who bought a significant plurality of the auction items at inflated prices, then shipped everything not sold back to Alaska in boxes (the postage alone cost something like \$500). Among the items, by the way, were a cardboard do-it-yourself Heathkit from the '70s, a couple old Ataris, a TI-99/4, a CD-I and other antiquities, in keeping with my 30-year-old infatuation with circuits that can't love you back. I've also got Commodores, Sinclairs and all kinds of one-shot failures – including some true monstrosities from Third World countries I've trekked through – but the CoCo remains the model I have the largest number of.

To reverse the cliché, "with enemies like these..."

Anyhow, moving on from "it's all about me," let's get into an example from last month's column in illustrating the difference between expressing love and chatting up a chip for a quick bit of stimulation.

The opening line was "The Color Computer 3 could beat the competition with one arm behind its back." Lost to the wrath of the CoCo gods was the subsequent "or so Tandy decreed, offering loyal CoCoists a machine deliberately kept from being all it could be." Obviously that turns the intended meaning completely on its head.

The larger point, detailed throughout, was while the corporate cowboys in Texas were keeping things on a short rope, some highly dedicated individuals did manage to stray from the herd and achieve amazing things with the computer's raw material (Google "CoCo3" and "Donkey Kong" if you missed that particular example). Problem is, too few people ever saw the results, instead finding store shelves largely filled with mediocre stuff that bent to the will of the company.

A perfect (if non-gaming) example is The Print Shop, the classic banner/poster/card designer that remained the top of best-seller lists for years on nearly every platform of significance (versions for modern computers are still available). Development of a CoCo3 version stated early in the machine's lifecycle, with Broderbund backing a well-known third-party programmer's efforts. Tandy killed the project halfway through, decreeing it would sell a cheap proprietary "desktop publishing" title instead. The resulting product was beyond a train wreck – buggy, devoid of the most basic features and so slow as to be unusable. Further, while the programmer of that package included drivers for many common printers of the time, Tandy ordered them removed, only allowing those for a couple of its in-house models to remain.

The message was clear: If you want the "real" Print Shop, buy one of our "real" (and more expensive) computers. And those sticking with the CoCo and trying to do anything practical were forced to buy add-ons costing more than the computer itself.

Yet those of us playing the role of abused spouse kept coming back, and not entirely because we relished being doormats mocked by users hooked up with "virtuous" machines. Tandy did some great things along with the bad and the user community's devotion may have been equaled, but rarely if ever exceeded by those "other" owners. It's the heroic efforts to bring out the "good" side of the CoCo's personality I try to highlight in these columns, but doing so requires being honest about the hardships overcome to get there.

Finally, something I emphasize in reviews I write about any subject: writing nothing but nice things about products is a travesty to those truly deserving praise, and a disservice to customers who deserve to know what is worth their time and money. I'm guessing most readers have encountered movie, restaurant or other critics who give rave reviews to everything, and the only people served by that are advertisers and publishers who don't want to risk income by causing any ire (and maybe "journalists" hoping for freebies or access, which as a career newsman is among the occupation's worst forms of corruption).

So that's this year's trek to the Temple of ROM (actual CoCo game, BTW). I'll be back next month to reviewing CoCo 3 games, a sorely neglected category from what I've seen on the internet these days, and rest assured: while some of them literally can't save their lives, others managed to find new dimensions on a machine made years before Windows users were Doomed into submission.



 **Dual Perspective - Pac-Man**  
by [James Sorge](#)

Hello, and this is James Sorge back with Dual Perspective, the column that reviews games from both the playing and the World Record Perspectives. This month, in honor of the FunSpot Classic Video Game tournament, the victim is "Pac-Man", Namco's revolutionary Pizza-slice made game.



**Graphics: A+**

Even after 30 years, the graphics of Pac-Man are so simple yet so good at the same time. Everybody recognizes what they look like, they fit the situation, and hold their own even against games 30 years later. They really do the job.

**Sound: B**

WAKA! WAKA! WAKA! The sound effects even hold their own against games today: Simple, yet effective. The only real regret is maybe not having a real tune or two to go with the stages, but then again, after 256 stages of the same thing you might be willing to throw that out the window too, so keep that in mind.

**Difficulty: B**

The game's difficulty more comes from its length and requiring of patience than directly attacking it. Its main problem is identifying the patterns of the ghosts and being patient enough to execute it. This will frustrate many casual players and even some people going for records, but it is breakable and you can get a reasonable score even within an hour.

**Replay Factor: A+**

This game will make you come back for more. If you are not tired of it from running it, you will play to see how you did. Even more so, turbo and regular versions of the game allow for different play speeds and different strategies. This game won't get old really fast.

 **The World Record Perspective:**

A classic patience and time eater game, and its been done to death. So many people have got the ultimate score, getting it is little more than a footnote in the world record book and they even keep times for who got it first. As much as you might hear about this among Twin Galaxies and other sites for World Records, I'd stay away from this one. It's three hours per minimum play attempt for just tying the world record, takes a lot from the patience standpoint, and it is little more than an achievement note at this point. There are better targets to play if you desperately need to hold a world record.



**The Penguin Says:**

"Overall, the classic Pac-Man gets a 10 out of 10 for being one of the best games out there. For the World Record Potential I give it only a 1 out of 5 as its been beat to death in the record department. If it's a record you want to obtain, pick another game."

 **Apple II Incider - Aliens: The Computer Game (Activision)**  
by [Donald Lee](#)

Happy May everyone! As I write this article, my birthday (in early April) and Tax Day (April 15th) has come and gone. I hope everyone was able to get their taxes done. For me, my tax year wasn't too bad. Thanks to my five month layoff during 2009, I didn't have to pay too much to Uncle Sam this year.

As for our game this month, I was debating between several before finally settling on a video game adaptation of one of my favorite science fiction movies. That game (and movie) would be Aliens, James Cameron's sequel to the original Alien.



When Aliens came out in 1986, I was around 12 years old. I forget exactly why I went to see the movie with my parents. All I remember was that I was freaked out. Anyone watching the movie would remember the face huggers and the Aliens popping out of people's chests. Of course, as I have gotten older I appreciate the movie a lot more, especially the drama and the action scenes.

As far as the Aliens video game, I definitely remember it being released by Activision. However, my exposure was very limited. I wasn't particularly interested in the game and never played it extensively.

However, in playing the game before writing this review, I realized I missed out quite a bit! Aliens consists of seven different mini games that mirror the plot of the movie. The seven mini-games include identifying weapons, landing the drop ship, exploring the base and fighting off Aliens with the marines, fighting off Aliens using Ripley with a flamethrower, crawling through the air duct with Bishop, searching for Newt and escaping the base, and finally the big battle with the Alien Queen.



Having minimal experience with the game, I had a learning curve playing the early parts. Identifying the weapons were not a problem, but piloting the drop ship took several efforts before I successfully landed it. Exploring the base was interesting as I had no idea what I was doing. That got three of my marines killed before I figured out what to do.

Fighting off the aliens with Ripley and the flamethrower was easy to figure out. However, this mini-game played like Centipede as certain aliens were faster than others and got past Ripley to grab one of the other people to be converted into a Alien host. Crawling through the air duct with Bishop was interesting and I got it done with two tries. However, the overhead view was not all that interesting and the fact that Aliens (or face huggers) were chasing Bishop around didn't quite mirror the movie.

Searching for Newt using Ripley was simple enough. I found Newt with minimal problems. However, I could not figure out how to use my flares and I could not escape the base before getting killed by the Aliens. I tried several times with no luck and thus I could not get to the final showdown with the Alien Queen.

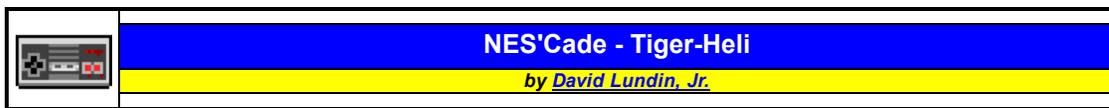
Overall, despite some struggles with some of the mini-games, I thoroughly enjoyed the game as a whole. Each portion is introduced with snippets from the movie itself which gives it a realistic feel, even if the games themselves may not play like how the movie went.

The graphics for Aliens are reasonable as the developers attempted to put in a lot of detail in the various mini-games. However, the Apple II just didn't have the graphical capabilities to pull it off. Animation in certain situations were also slow when multiple objects were on the screen. I don't know how the game performed on other platforms. However, I think Aliens would be a great game to play on some of today's computers or video game machines.



Sound was restricted to gun shots and a few other effects. There was some theme music in the beginning of the game but minimal during the game.

All in all, I found Aliens to be quite unique and enjoyed it thoroughly. It just begs you to keep trying so you can move on to the next mini-game. I recommend Aliens for anyone who liked the movie and wants to take their shot against the Alien Queen.



Tiger-Heli drops the player into the pilot's seat of an attack helicopter on a mission to penetrate a dangerous terrorist nation and prevent a world takeover. Armed with a barrage of missiles and a pair of bombs, any target is fair game. Houses, civilian cars, railroad crossing gates - everything is ripe for destruction and scores points. In fact ground targets are the only adversaries you'll face. Even the planes that you fight against are on the ground, either sitting out in the open or taxiing down runways. Unconventional to say the least but something that gives the game a little uniqueness. Powerups exist in the form of support helicopters, known as Little Heli, which can be called by shooting special power up cross symbols on the ground. Another unconventional aspect for a vertically scrolling shooter is that the game has no ending. Upon reaching the end of the final area, the game loops back to the second stage and continues in this fashion. Each stage ends with your helicopter touching down on a landing pad where bonus points are awarded for attached bombs and/or Little Heli. After totaling up any bonus it's back up into the air for the next stage.

The arcade version of Tiger-Heli was developed by Toaplan, who would develop many popular arcade shooting games in their short ten year business duration. Tiger-Heli is was of their earliest games but it set the groundwork for the company's legacy of entertainment. The NES version was developed by Micronics, infamous for their NES games such as Athena, 1942 and Super Pitfall. Taito published the arcade version while Pony Canyon published the Famicom version and Acclaim the NES version. While it may seem that the involvement of some of those companies would set the game up to be a rotting pile, amazingly enough the game turned out to be an excellent shooter - depending on how much you like the arcade title.

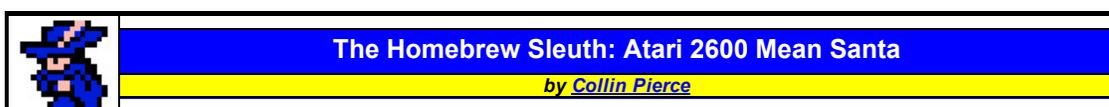


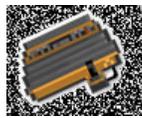
Before even getting into the specifics of Tiger-Heli on the NES I have to start off by saying this is one of my favorite NES conversions. As an arcade to NES conversion goes, you really couldn't ask for a better attempt. For the most part, 99% of the arcade game makes the transfer onto the home hardware. Controls are exactly as one would expect them to be with the directional pad replacing the joystick, one button for firing missiles and the other for dropping bombs. Graphics are outstandingly recreated and look excellent save for the lower graphical horsepower and a few minor changes. Granted the original arcade version's graphics weren't spectacular but side by side one can clearly see that a real attempt was made to get this game into the home looking like it did in the arcade. If there is one drawback to the graphics and control, it goes back to one of the key problems of most Micronics developed games - low frame rate. The game chugs along consistently for the most part but at first it feels like it is barely running properly. However it only takes a couple moments to adjust to the slower pace of the game and since it does remain consistent, it doesn't detract from the fun. Something that also has to be mentioned is how much on screen objects flicker, especially moving enemies such as the hundreds of tanks you'll destroy. The flickering doesn't cause any problems with gameplay but there is an awful lot of it, on pretty much everything that isn't a background object, including the burned out craters that are left in your wake of destruction. It's no secret that many Micronics NES games were poorly programmed so these problems don't come as a surprise but are far from crippling.

Game mechanics are identical with missiles traveling about half a vertical screen from where they are fired, even with the horizontal orientation change on the NES. Bombs take out a circular area around the helicopter and the explosion effect is pretty close to how it originally was. As in the arcade version, an enemy shot impacting the helicopter on the same side as a stored bomb will cause the bomb to detach and protect the helicopter. I found this to be a nice touch and helps to maintain arcade authenticity. The power up cross symbols work in exactly the same way: shooting a red cross dispatches a side firing Little Heli, shooting a grey cross (white in the arcade) dispatches a forward firing Little Heli, and shooting a green cross (blue in the arcade) dispatches an additional bomb. Little Heli's must be collected for them to settle into formation and as in the arcade, there is a limit of two at a time although they can be mixed and matched. Also as with the arcade version, only two bombs may be carried at the same time. Attached bombs show up on the side of the helicopter and drop off when fired, again authentic to the arcade. Power up items picked up when already maxed out will instead yield bonus points. Bonus diamond blocks work as they did in the arcade, shooting ten of them awards an extra life. Sound effects and music are dead on exact to the original, including the slightly different tune that plays when escorted by a Little Heli. Yes, the same repetitive song plays throughout the entire game, but it's great.

Tiger-Heli always brings to mind fond memories of the NES era, those days when so many were playing the games and the world was in love with Nintendo. Tiger-Heli was a game of constant rental, commonly owned game among friends and would become an unsung classic of the platform in my opinion. It wasn't until many years later that I was able to finally play the arcade original and I was able to drop right in and know exactly what to do. This is a testament to the accuracy of the NES version. Yes the NES version is a little easier than the arcade original but I think that's mainly due to the slightly slower pace of the home version. The effort at recreating the level design is what really shines. This is something that another Micronics NES conversion, Ghosts 'n Goblins (RTM issue #34), also did very well. While it's not for everyone, if you're in the mood for a simple NES shooter and high scores are your primary objective, then take a look at Tiger-Heli.

"InsaneDavid" also covers all types of video gaming at <http://www.classicplastic.net/dvgi>





**SYSTEM: ATARI 2600**  
**AUTHOR: TIM DUARTE/JOHN HARVY**  
**YEAR OF RELEASE: 2009**

Notice: This game has nothing to do with a certain movie of a similar name.

Yes, I'm doing a Christmas game review in May. Sue me. I actually have a good reason.

After my last review (Cave In for the Atari 2600), I received an email from Tim Duarte asking if I would like to review his Christmas-themed homebrew, Mean Santa. He apparently had read my Cave In review, and liked it enough to ask this of me. So, here we are.

I started by reading the manual and smiled at the funny pictures and writing. The game seemed promising enough.

The story is simple: Santa has lost it, and is going to steal all the toys this Xmas. You control him.

**Graphics: B**

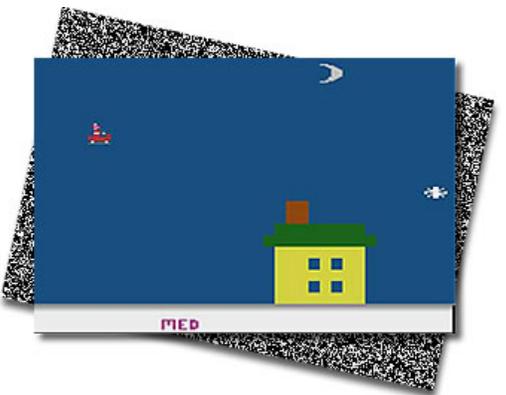
The graphics are pretty good for the most part. There are several types of toys to collect, and the obstacles are easy to recognize. My only problem is there is not much variety. All the houses look exactly the same except for a different color. It would have been nice to see at least one more model of house. However, it is the Atari 2600, so I'll let it slide. I normally would complain that Santa's sleigh has no reindeer, but that would complicate one of the game modes. Besides, it's explained in a fun way in the manual, so I'll let that one slide as well.

**Gameplay: C+**

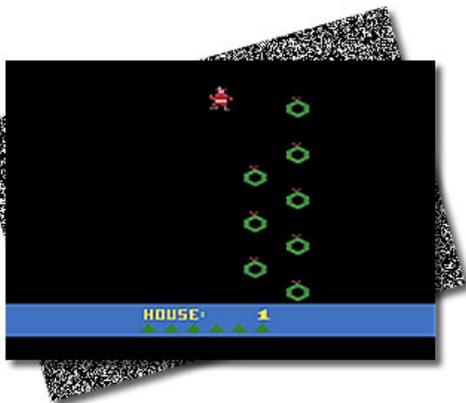
One nice thing is that there are three initial difficulty settings, with more being unlockable if you beat the game in a quick enough time.

The game structure goes like this: You start off flying the sleigh over the neighborhood, trying to land on a house. This would be easy, except that on any difficulty after Easy, the houses have chimneys that if the sleigh touches, the sleigh will crash and you'll lose a life. You start with six lives, and you can NOT earn them back. Besides the chimneys, there are other obstacles to consider. As the night progresses, the weather will start to deteriorate. Flurries and lightning will cause your sleigh to stop responding to your control for a second, potentially causing you to crash or miss a house and have to wait for the next one. However, you must rob every house to progress, making a missed house quite a frustrating prospect, and eventually, the weather will get so bad that it's almost impossible to land correctly!

After you land on a house, Santa will drop down the chimney and you must get him to pick up all the toys and run back to the fireplace. It starts off easy, with screens of only toys, but on higher difficulties, you'll eventually start seeing bananas on the floor that if touched, Santa will drop all the toys and you'll have to pick them up all over again. And later still, you'll encounter dogs that will chase you, and if they catch Santa, he loses a life.



After you grab all the toys and exit the house, you'll get back on the sleigh and take flight once more to rinse, wash, and repeat. After you rob all the houses, you must land on one more house, make it past a gauntlet of dogs, grab a Christmas ham, and make it back past the dogs again to the chimney to beat the game, where you'll get a screen showing how long it took you to win and, if you did it fast enough, what you've unlocked as a prize.



Now, you may say, "Wow! that sounds like a lot of fun!" It does, but there is one problem that just drags the game down considerably. It's really, really repetitive. There is no variation in the game pattern whatsoever, and it gets boring fairly quickly. I can understand playing it every once in a while, but it is not a game I would play for long periods of time, or often. Also, some levels are repeated if you play on the Hard difficulty. That's right, late in the game, you must play an earlier level with new obstacles. That's just cheap.

On some levels, the bananas are placed right next to the toys, and even on opposite sides, making it quite frustrating getting all the toys without touching the banana and having to start over. It's like if you were playing Operation and every time you touched the sides with the tweezers and the buzzer went off, you had to start the game over. It is very infuriating!

**Controls: B+**

The controls are fine. Santa moves fluently both in and out of his sleigh. The thing I find strange though, is that the button has no use whatsoever! That's right. That single big red button on the joystick is never used! That's just weird. I can't think of any other Atari game off the top of my head that doesn't use the fire button. Could they not find a use for it? Anyway, the controls work fine, but it's somewhat disappointing that the fire button is never used.

**Sound: B-**

The game begins with the Atari beeping "Joy to the World," which is nice. The sounds when you pick up toys make an interesting beep that for some reason sounds sneaky and appropriate. When your sleigh crashes, there is a small explosion that sounds pretty good. But besides that, not much. Still, it's enough to satisfy me.

**Replay Value/Fun Factor: C-**

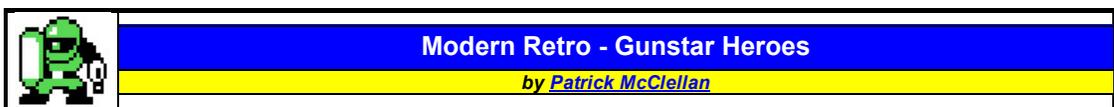
You might feel like giving this game a go every once in a while, but the repetitive and slightly boring nature prevents it from being all that it could be. It's not a game you'd play every day, or even once a week.

**Overall: C**

This is one of those games that I feel could've been a lot better with just a little more spice. The concept is original and entertaining, but the gameplay sours it a little. If the game had just a little more variety and excitement, I feel it could have been a real winner. As is, it's just ok.

Still, thank you, Mr. Duarte, for giving me the chance to play your game. It wasn't my favorite, but I greatly appreciate that you gave me an opportunity to review it. I look forward to your next game.

A thanks goes out to [The Atari 2600 Connection](#) for providing the screen shots for the game.





titles which gamers had to choose from in the early to mid-90s, which helped the console become Sega's most successful system ever, with one source claiming that the Genesis sold nearly 30 million systems worldwide across its lifespan. Another action-packed title released at this time was Gunstar Heroes, created by Tokyo-based developer *Treasure*. The side-scrolling shooter forced fast and furious *run and gun* style gameplay on the player, as they took control over one of two twin brothers, Gunstars Red or Blue, with the objective in the title being to protect the planet Gunstar 9.

The title was awarded Best Action Game in 1993 by Electronic Gaming Monthly, and could also be found in the Gunstar Heroes: Treasure Box Collection for the PlayStation 2. More recently, the game has become available as a downloadable title through the Nintendo Wii's Virtual Console, as well as the Xbox Live Arcade and the PlayStation Network. The game was however, oddly absent from 2009's *Sonic's Ultimate Genesis Collection*. While the game failed to sell as many units as the Streets of Rage games, for example, it gained a cult following who still to this day – as seen in a recent feature at GameTrailers.com, wish for a proper sequel.

The frantic title, comparable to Contra, allows players to choose one of four weapons initially, but players have the ability to pickup weapons throughout the game, leading to various possible weapon combinations, fourteen in total. Upon starting the game, the player is given several decisions to make. The first of which is to choose one of two abilities, either *Free Shot*, which allows the character to move when firing, or *Fixed Shot*, allowing the player to shoot in eight different directions. This initial element of choice seems insignificant, but over the course of the game, making the *wrong* choice can be potentially frustrating. The aforementioned four basic weapon types are *Force*, so the player can fire rapidly, *Lightning*, so the player can fire through enemies, *Chaser*, which as the name suggests allows shots to home in on the enemies, and finally *Fire*, the

most effective weapon at short range. This design choice of allowing the player to pick a weapon encourages multiple playthroughs of the game, and the game itself warns you to "choose carefully". This is a wise warning, as going all out with the powerful *Fire* weapon is all well and good for a time, but as the game continues, being picked off by long-range enemies is anything but fun. The game also allowed a non-linear traversal of the story mode, as you are allowed to choose from one of four stages, each with unique objectives, each with a crazy boss at the end, and each sounding more exciting and perilous than the last with regards to the names, such as "The Flying Battleship". Your elderly mentor, known as Professor Brown then encourages Gunstar Red and/or Blue to retrieve four "Mystical Gems" that have been stolen by the game's villain Smash Daisaku. While the story is interesting to a point, this game is all about the gameplay, which remains frantic and exciting to this day.

Other gameplay elements in the colourful title include the close quarters fisticuffs, whereby enemies can be grabbed or thrown, and your character can expertly execute athletic skids, slides and air-based attacks. The destruction of your enemies looks and feels incredibly satisfying throughout, partly because everything explodes in a fiery blaze of glory, from robots to inanimate wooden boxes. The gameplay is also satisfying, because for the most part, everything you pull off is intentional, and there is very little luck involved. However, whilst there is an element of skill needed for gameplay, flailing around wildly and shooting constantly will be enough to get you through large parts of the game. On this note, it has to be said that this game is fairly easy, especially when compared with one of Nintendo's combating action titles, Megaman.

Changes from the Genesis version to the next-gen releases are a little scarce, with the graphics seeing few updates. Whilst the games' graphics were impressive at its initial release, it is a little disappointing to see the game not receive an HD remake, similar to that seen with Bionic Commando Rearmed. Considering that game's success, and the very recent announcement of a sequel, it is a little surprising to see that Gunstar Heroes was re-released almost visually identical to the original version. The music also remains untouched, and is just as awesome as you remember it! There are two particularly nice additions however, with online co-op play being one of them, which from my experiences worked well, with little to no latency in your actions. The second is worldwide leaderboard functionality, whereby you can compare your scores with the world, or with those on your friends list. The ability to save your game at any time to return to it later is also a welcome addition, but the game is fairly short, and can certainly be completed in one sitting.

It is great to see Gunstar Heroes become available on next-gen consoles, especially at such an affordable price, considering the original Genesis version can fetch in excess of \$100 online, and it's even better to see that the gameplay still holds up incredibly well. Full of fun and intense action throughout, Gunstar Heroes is definitely a recommended purchase, and don't be surprised if you have an urge to go back for seconds, as it were.



 **A Pixelated 21st Century!**  
by Paul "Zimmzamm" Zimmerman

Hello Pixelated fans. Welcome to the new and improved Pixelated, known as Pixelated in another galaxy. I am back! Sorry for not reporting last month, but as Bryan said I was very busy with the Midwest Gaming Classic. Did anyone go to the event? It was awesome! On Saturday at the event I played Berzerk on the Atari 2600 for 10 hours straight! I was able to get the world record and roll over the score! The score will be official with Twin Galaxies very soon (if not already). You can see some of my game [here](#) (sadly we forgot to hit record to catch the beginning and then it stopped recording during the middle of my game – this is for the recorded stream video, not for the official recording for Twin Galaxies).

Before talking about the games from April, we need to go back a couple months (with our handy virtual time machine), and see how Nintendo ended March with a bang! They released [WarioWare: D.I.Y. Showcase](#) for WiiWare and it is awesome! If you do not know about WarioWare games, they are collections of very short, modern retro games called "microgames." In this WarioWare game there are 72 new microgames and you only need to press the A button to play (some of them you need to point and click). Of course I really love the retro NES microgames. This package has excellent music and bright, simple, fun graphics. Every Monday new microgames are released that you can download for free, which is a great bonus.

The week before WarioWare, Nintendo released [Cave Story](#), another game that I love. Fans of Castlevania, Metroid and Contra will love it! I love the retro graphics and the incredible music. It feels like a Commodore 64 title combined with a Nintendo one. There is no point system in the game, but that really does not take anything away from it. The story is interesting, the weapons are great and it is fun to explore and shoot the enemies. Boss fights are pretty cool as well. I highly recommend both games.

I also need to mention that if you do not already know, the Nintendo Wii has "Virtual Console" games that you can buy and download onto your system or SD card. The Virtual Console is the only reason why I lined up before sunrise, while it was raining, to buy a Nintendo Wii on launch day at my local retail store. Pretty much each week Nintendo releases a new game(s) for the Virtual Console. Just look at this incredible list of systems that are now available: Nintendo Entertainment System, Super Nintendo, Nintendo 64, Sega Master System, Sega Genesis, TurboGrafx-16, TurboGrafx-CD, Neo Geo, Neo Geo CD and Commodore 64. Plus, even arcade games are available! New this month I will also mention what Virtual Console games came out.

I also want to mention that the new [Classic Controller Pro](#) for the Wii came out last month and it is great! If you do not know, the Classic Controller is a controller that looks similar to a Super NES controller that you can use to play Virtual Console games with, as well as some Wii disc and WiiWare games. The Classic Controller Pro controller is bigger, designed better and it feels great in your hand. It is the same price as the original, so it is a no-brainer to buy the Pro over the original.

So, on with the games...

April was an excellent month to be a Pixelated fan! It was for sure the "Game & Watch" month. Here are some of the retroware highlights for the month of April:

**Alpha Bounce** (Video to the right)

**Game & Watch: Ball** ([Click here to see a video for the game](#))

**Game & Watch: Donkey Kong Jr** ([Click here to see a video for the game](#))

**Game & Watch: Flagman**

**Game & Watch: Helmet** ([Click here to see a video for the game](#))

**Game & Watch: Manhole**

**Game & Watch: Vermin**

**Mr. Driller: Drill Till You Drop** ([Click here to see a video for the game](#))



**Fishie Fishie** (Video to the right)

**Military Madness: Nectaris** ([Click here to see a video for the game](#))

I love the original Turbografx-16 classic. This version is nice, but I like the original more. It just feels better. Also, there is no in-game tutorial and even the Operations Guide does not describe the dozens of units in the game which each behave differently. So, new players to the series probably should not play this first. But, this one does have 4-player online play, which is very cool. Fans of strategy games will probably enjoy this. To tell you the truth, I am still playing WarioWare and Cave Story. Buy those first and then the original Military Madness.



*Note: most of the videos for the games below are of the originals (meaning they not being played on the Wii). This is because the Virtual Console is emulating the original system and therefore they are identical.*

**Ironclad (Neo Geo CD)** ([Click here to see a video for the game](#))

**Mega Man 4 (Nintendo Entertainment System)** ([Click here to see a video for the game](#))

**Zaxxon (Arcade)** (Video the right)



 **What Is The Meaning Of Three?**  
by [Tom Zjaba](#)

From the earliest video games, you would always start with three lives. Space Invaders, one of the early games gave you three lives. Three chances to defeat the aliens. From that point on, almost every game started you with three lives. Galaxian, Asteroids, Pac-Man, Jungle King, the list goes on and on. It is so ingrained in your psyche that we are just used to starting with three lives. But why did they decide on this number? Was two lives too few? Did four lives limit the profitability of a machine? Pinball machines used to give you five balls, but they moved to the three chances as well.

Many numbers have meaning. The number three is no exception. In Christianity, there is the Holy Trinity and the three wise men. Poseidon's trident had three points. Cerberus the dog that guarded Hades did so with three vicious heads. Three does not just have meaning in religion. We eat three meals a day (despite Taco Bell trying to push their Fourthmeal) and the day is essentially broken into three periods - Morning, Noon and Night. In sports, a field goal is 3 points, there is the three point shot in basketball, three goals in a single hockey game is called a hat trick and one of the hardest things to do in baseball is win the triple crown (having highest batting average, most homers and most RB's in one season). Horse racing has the triple crown.

The world of entertainment is filled with significant threes. In the movie world, some of the best movies were trilogies. The Lord of the Ring Trilogy, the original Star Wars and before this summer, the Indiana Jones movies were all highly successful trilogies. The Three Stooges are among the most popular comedians of all-time. Power Trios were the norm in popular music with groups like Cream, Rush and ZZTop consisting of three members. And then there are the Three Tenors. And the third time is a charm.

While the number three is quite significant in popular culture, does any of this have anything to do with why video games give you three lives? Probably not. But it is interesting to wonder how they came to that number and even more why its use is so widespread. Maybe it is just the perfect balance of giving a player their money's worth and maximizing the earning potential of a machine. Or maybe it is something devious and subliminal.

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 his plethora of his homemade video game related comics.

 **The Gaming Post**  
*Places For Gaming Fans To Check Out*



- [Retro Games Collector](#)
- [Game Gavel](#)
- [Retro Gaming RoundUp](#)

**Game Over**

I hope everyone has a good upcoming summer, considering next month is when summer officially starts. In the meantime lets keep our fingers crossed that Sal is okay and able to write his Many Faces Of... column next month. Until then, enjoy the warm temperatures and get your pool ready!

- [Bryan Roppolo](#), Retrogaming Times Monthly Editor

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