RETROGAMING TIMES monthly

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'70s '80s '90s

COVERING 3 DECADES OF CLASSIC GAMING

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Press Fire To Begin

by Bryan Roppolo

It's that time of year to celebrate the red, white and blue for those of us in the USA. To commemorate this event, I decided to dress the header of this issue in a red, white and blue color scheme. It looks pretty sharp if I must say so myself. I know that I am looking forward to the Fourth of July since it should prove to not only be fun because of fireworks, but also because the day should be nice and steamy. I mean, what would the Fourth of July be like without the heat? Anyway, this issue is packed with some explosive content of its own, at least for someone that is into classic gaming. One such explosive topic is the Vs. Super Mario Bros. controversy which was related to me by James Sorge. He did a quick little write up on what went down for those of you not in the know and hopefully he can do a more detailed Funspot write-up next month.

Sadly, there are not really any Fourth of July themed articles this month, but the content is still the same good old stuff that you expect from Retrogaming Times Monthly. One thing to note is that Sinistar for the Atari 8-Bit was released recently, which was a game that was almost completed by Atari but never released. It's neat to see this game finally make it out there. Just goes to show you that classic gaming will never die as long as "new" classics keep on being released! On that note, I hope that everyone has a good Fourth of July weekend, it's sure to be a blast!

Retrogaming News

Retro Computer Games Festival - Charity Weekender
Being held Friday July 9th - Sunday July 11 at Ash Victoria Hall in Surrey, U.K. There will be a plethora of classic gaming consoles to play on as well as a number of coin-op machines, which will all be set to free play over the weekend. There will also be a licensed bar to keep everyone hydrated throughout the weekend. If you are in the U.K. and like playing classic games, be sure to stop on by. For more info you can go to http://www.retrocomputergamesfestival.com.

AVC Video Game Summit 2010
Remember how much fun you used to have playing Atari, Nintendo and all kinds of games on your computer? Well, you will have the rare opportunity to play these great games again at the Video Game Summit, Chicago's premier video game trade show. In fact, dealers in retro games will be on hand offering games, controllers, systems and memorabilia and will be prepared to buy or trade for the games you have held onto since you were a kid. Who knows, you might just have an Atari cartridge worth $1000 or more collecting dust in your attic.This years event is being held at the Heron Point Convention Center in Lombard,IL on July 17 from 11:00-6:00pm. To read more on the even, visit their official site at http://avc.atari-users.net/VGS.html.

21st Annual KansasFest Convention
This convention is dedicated to the Apple II computer. Users, programmers, hobbyists, and retrocomputing enthusiasts are invited to Rockhurst University in Kansas City, Missouri, from Tuesday, July 20th, 2010, through Sunday the 25th for six days and five nights of sessions, demos, announcements, contests, and camaraderie. Veterans of the event are invited to bring a first-time attendee; if each indicates the other's name on the registration form, both will receive a $25 referral rebate at the event. For more information, you can visit their official website here: http://www.kansasfest.org/.

2010 Classic Gaming Expo
The 2010 Classic Gaming Expo will rock Tropicana Las Vegas on the weekend of July 31 and August 1, 2010. Now in its 12th year as the ultimate destination for retro-gaming aficionados, Classic Gaming Expo introduces the pioneers of video game design to the players who grew up with their creations. In previous years, the special guests at CGE have included such dignitaries as Ralph Baer (the “father of home video games”), Nolan Bushnell (co-founder of Atari Inc.) and million-selling game designers like Al Alcorn (Pong), David Crane (Pitfall!) and Rob Fulop(Demon Attack). Luminaries like these will present keynote speeches at CGE 2K10, where they will reveal the behind-the-scenes stories of their greatest hits, answer questions and sign autographs for fans. A major portion of the expo is devoted to retailers and collectors who buy, sell and trade games, peripherals and gaming memorabilia. One of the show’s most eye-opening exhibits is the CGE Museum, where over 1,000 of the most desirable video game artifacts are put on public display. These are the “holy grails” of video game collectors—one-of-a-kind prototypes, limited-edition collectibles, rare hardware and ephemera. In addition, Seth & Michelle from the Chip/micro music bands 8 Bit Weapon & ComputeHer will be performing here! To find out more, visit http://www.cgexpo.com/.

Abandoned But Not Forgotten: The '80s CRPG

by Owen Brand

The CRPG… A classic and timeless genre which has its roots in paper and pencil games like Dungeons and Dragons. It is a genre that has a vigorous and loyal following from just about every computer and gaming platform that has ever been produced. From the earliest days of the Atari 2600 and the TI-99/4a and all the way up to the modern systems like the XBOX 360 and the Playstation 3, the CRPG has been a vibrant and living organism with a strong following for many years. The earliest CRPG's were "Roguelikes," or ASCII-only games. In the late 70's, the multi-player paper and pencil RPG was slowly being replaced by the single-player CRPG on the increasingly-available micro computer. In this article, I would like to discuss some early RPGs from a few different platforms. Hopefully this will prompt readers to take another look at some forgotten or abandoned CRPGs that stand the test of time.

The TI-99/4A

The TI-99/4A had its time and place in history. A computer ahead of its time, it set many standards and inspired many thousands of programmers. Sadly, it was one of many victims of the home computer wars of the early 80's and went out of production only 4 years after it was introduced into the home computer market. Almost 30 years later, the computer still has a vibrant and flourishing community of dedicated programmers and developers. The consummate staple for the TI-99/4A CRPGs is "Tunnels of Doom" which has been discussed in this magazine and in many others. However, it does not qualify for this discussion, as it is not "forgotten". In the years following the computer market collapse, a few games were quietly written and released in the CRPG genre for the 99/4A which never received the wide-spread acclaim they truly deserved.

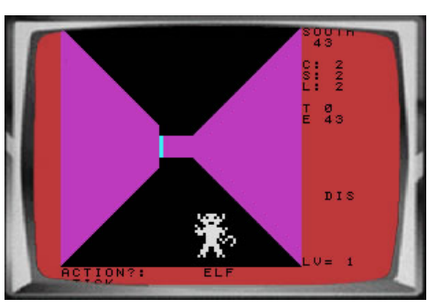
Legends

Written by Donn Granros and Ed Johnson, "Legends" and its predecessor "Old Dark Caves" became the true benchmark by which all subsequent 99/4A CRPGs would be measured. Its relative anonymity probably comes from the timing of its release, 1987. By this time, the TI-99 market had dwindled, making way for the more powerful DOS machines of the time. It is brilliantly simple in its user interface and has an excellent replay value. The following description of gameplay comes from The TI gameshelf, a brilliant compilation website, maintained by Walid Maalouli.

"It is essentially a four characters fantasy adventure game set in the island of Edonland on the planet Legends, a land plagued by roaming monsters and Dark Knights released through the "Western Portal" by the evil mage Ashtar Creel. Your mission is to close the portal and return alive to boast the tale of your exploits. You start as a weak party whose powers, strengths and wealth grow through combat and exploration in the spirit of Dungeons & Dragons."

Wizard's Lair

A brilliant piece of programming and a testament to the genre! Interestingly enough, this game is written in a BASIC dialect of the TI-99, "Extended BASIC." The clever use of SPRITEs in this game coupled with clean graphics and a very helpful mapping function makes this game fun, fast, and replay-able. Your goal is to kill the evil Wizard who resides on level 4 of this game, and to do so, you must traverse the first 3 levels. Each level has a time limit, and you must defeat the Wizard before time runs out on level 4. This game is in first person, similar to the classic, "Tunnels of Doom" staple, but this game makes much better use of stark colorations of the game boards and (as previously mentioned) employs much more SPRITE motion to enhance gameplay. While this game may not fall directly into the classic mold of a CRPG, it cannot be overlooked.



M.S. DOS

From the ashes of the 80's home computer meltdown came a Phoenix: a new computer system and language, on which the genre of the CRPG would flourish in a way never before seen. MS-DOS would give game programmers new tools and unprecedented programming power. The late 80's would be a very productive and exciting time for the CRPG genre. The "Ultima" series would get new life, "Heroes of Might and Magic" would take center stage for a period of time. In deeper searches, however, you may come across the following games--- and I certainly suggest you give them a try.

The Magic Candle

You play the part of Lukas who leads a band of adventurers in a quest to save the kingdom of Deruvia from the Forces of Darkness. There is a magic candle which (while it burns) keeps the forces of darkness away. Problem? The candle is melting and the Children of Light are in dire need of being rescued from this evil threat. You are charged with selecting a party to go on the quest to restore the candle and save the Lands of Deruvia. The game features combat, magic, exploration, character growth, eleven types of weapons, five types of armor, nine professions and five different races. Top-down perspective on this game… quite the challenge and excellent gameplay!!!

The Dark Heart of Uukrul

You lead a party of heroes on a mission to destroy Uukrul, the evil lord of an underground land. Many have tried and failed over the years, and you are the best and last hope. An interesting twist is, you have an old diary from a fallen hero who died in his attempt to defeat the evil below. This will give you valuable information about your quest and what you stand to face as you journey. You cannot select the class of your party members, so you have one Fighter, one Paladin, one Priest, and one Wizard… all of whom have unique abilities which will be necessary as you delve deeper into the underworld. There are many puzzles which require the skillsets of each party member. It is a brilliant example of a DOS CRPG, and it is devilishly difficult.

There are dozens of unique puzzles and trials that you must complete/best before moving onward. Remember: Every item and puzzle has some use or value, so remember to thoroughly walk and examine every room and every hallway, as you don't want to miss an important Quest item. A brilliant game and high replay value, it is a shame this RPG has been buried in the sands of time.

Nintendo Entertainment System

The unchallenged king of all the 8 bit home gaming systems and still the highest selling gaming console of all time, the Nintendo stood alone in the 80's as a pillar of uniqueness and innovation. Games were cartridge-based and seated into the console via a 72 pin connector. Games did not come with SRAM, as with later consoles such as the Super Nintendo and the Sega Genesis, so more often than not, continuing a game required a lengthy password. This system put gaming power in the hands of millions of eager consumers and became the benchmark for home gaming from that point forward. Many brilliant games were developed for the system, many of which were widely distributed and were commercial blockbusters. The games I wish to discuss flew a bit more under the radar.

Faxanadu

To this day, this is probably my favorite game of all time. While it went largely unnoticed, "Faxanadu" was a masterfully crafted side-scrolling CRPG, taking place inside the "World Tree." You are a nameless wanderer who returns to his hometown of Eolis to find it nearly abandoned and overrun with monsters. You visit the Elven King who asks you for help in restoring order in the World Tree. As the story unfolds, you learn that a meteorite has fallen and unleashed "The Evil One" who turned all the dwarves into monsters. You must defeat the dwarves and save the World Tree on the way to fight "The Evil One." Along the way, you collect and use Elixir, Winged Boots, Armor, potions, and food rations. There are many "mini-quests" and puzzles along the way that you must figure out and solve on your way through the World Tree which augment the story and gameplay. Overall, the game is brilliant in its physics, storyline, and user interface—however the game has one black eye: "Mantras." When you need to stop playing the game, you must find a guru who will give you a mantra. It is a long series of capital letters, lower case letters, numbers, punctuation, and spaces. I remember years ago writing all my mantras down in a large spiral notebook and inputting them later. The only problem: you sometimes write it down wrong. You could lose hours and hours worth of play if you don't get mantras often. This doesn't harm the game, though. It's more of an endearing quirk. Magnificent replay value and stunning graphics, this game is HIGHLY recommended.

Chaos World

Chaos World is a widely unknown RPG for the Nintendo Entertainment System which deserves much more recognition than it has gotten. A game with a day/night cycle was quite unique at the time, and this game employed the feature very well. It has been called "ahead of its time" for many reasons. You are able to add members to your party and ask them to do "jobs," which usually bring gold or experience points once completed. The only issue, however, is that while a party member is doing a job, he ceases to be a useful member of your party until the job is complete. Graphically, this game is very clean and draws the player in with believable landscapes and a nice combination of top-down and ¾ perspectives. I would recommend this game to anyone who enjoys 8-bit RPGs and has the time to put into a 20 hour game.

These are but a few of the countless forgotten games I would like to talk about. There are games like "A Bard's Tale," "Old Dark Caves," and "Nethack" which deserve the recognition as well. Perhaps I will start a regular "Lost RPGs" column here at Retrogaming Times Monthly to bring new life to old code. In the meantime, the development of new CRPGs for old systems is gaining steam. Two new CRPGs are in the works for the TI-99/4a and at least one in the Commodore 64 community, leading this author to have faith in the genre and hope for the future of classic CRPGs. I hope this article has sparked some interest in the classic CRPG genre and will entice you to do some research on your own. If you wish to play these games, there are great emulators available for the TI-99/4a, MS-DOS, and the NES which can be found on a quick Google search. If you would like to read more about classic RPGs in future Retrogaming Times Monthly, let me know!

Picture for Chaos world borrowed from: http://aqtp.romhack.net/project.php?id=chaosworld
Pictures for TI-99 games borrowed from http://tigameshelf.net

Lunch With Tom Votava

by James Sorge

For those of you who do not know who Tom Votava is, here's a short snippet from the Twin Galaxies website:

"Tom is a Senior Referee at Twin Galaxies, and has been a part of the Twin Galaxies community since October 2001. Tom resides in Scottsdale, AZ, USA and adjudicates scores on the Sega Genesis and Super Nintendo platforms. His expertise in these areas allows him to crown world champion gamers for Twin Galaxies on these 16-bit consoles. Tom is also well known for his "Name That Tune" style contests featuring music from various video games.

'Twin Galaxies has done so much for competitive gaming and for me', says Tom. 'I am honored to help out our gamers in any way that I can. Do you have what it takes to be our next champion? Then send us some videos and show us your best stuff!'

Tom holds numerous world records across a number of different platforms, all the way from the classic Atari days up to today's modern Playstation 2 console. In addition, Tom just broke the world record on one of the longest standing scores at Twin Galaxies – the arcade version of Mario Bros. Tom's 3,658,030 point score eclipsed the previous score of 3,481,550, held for nearly a quarter of a century by long-time Twin Galaxies gamer Perry Rogers. "Breaking the Mario Bros. record has been the single greatest challenge of my gaming career", says Tom. "I always enjoy difficult games, but this one was on another level entirely. I'd like to thank Perry for cheering me on. He's a legendary gamer and an even better person. Now, if only we can take back our 2-player record…"

Sorry for the low quality picture, it was dark

Now onto the interview!

Tom, how long have you been playing video games, both for entertainment and competition?

A long time. Counting my childhood, I have been playing for 29 years! I got my first gaming system (an Atari 2600) in 1981 and have been playing ever since.

I have been a serious gamer for about 9 years, submitting my first scores to Twin Galaxies in 2001.

What got you into the competitive circuits of video games?

My start came when I found the Twin Galaxies web site and started to submit scores. At the time, my purpose was just to fill out an otherwise empty NES scoreboard. As I got more interested in the site, I ended up becoming a referee in 2004, which in turn got me invited to Funspot for the first time. Things kind of snowballed from there.

So what was it like winning Funspot last year?

It was an odd feeling, given the circumstances. I went home with a 2nd place check only to find out later about a scoreboard error that gave me the title! It was still satisfying to win though, as I had taken 2nd place a couple of other times before finally breaking through.

What do you expect as the defending champion?

Nothing more than usual. My main goal is to have fun, as always. I'm friends with all of the top-ranked gamers in the tournament, so I look forward to having a few laughs with them just as much as I will enjoy playing the games. We are all very competitive, but whatever happens, no one takes the results personally.

Where do you have your sights set to next?

Not exactly sure. I'm coming off of a rather long grind from playing in Scott Patterson's "King of Konami" challenge. After doing all of those marathon NES scores, I needed a break. Between Life Force, Contra, Jackal, and Rush'n Attack, I logged over 20 hours of gameplay! Maybe I'll take up something serious after the tournament, but right now I'm just enjoying the perfect weather in Arizona.

What are your favorite games?

Tough question! I love so many different games that I don't know if I have a good answer. If I have to pick something, I'll go with the Castlevania series. I love every Castlevania game I've ever played, from the original NES game, to Symphony of the Night, to Lament of Innocence. I even liked Simon's Quest!

What kind of games do you think you're the best at?

Not sure, but I know what I'm the WORST at: Button mashing games! Most video games are nothing more than puzzles to be solved for me, regardless of whether it's a shooter, RPG, or even racing. I like to think that I can solve any puzzle I set my mind to, but that won't help me run the 100-Meter Dash in Track & Field!

Do you think live play or taped world records are better at proving someone's worth?

Both are equally valid. Successfully setting a live world record may give you more publicity, but in the end, all that matters is the score. I feel that I can perform well both at home or in person, though I prefer to stay at home when I play, if only because that's what I'm used to.

What was your best run of all time?

Another tough call, because I have so many favorites. In the end, it's tough to compete with breaking an ancient 20+ year-old record, so I'll have to go with Mario Bros. (arcade). That was easily the most difficult accomplishment of them all.

I know you have a lot of good quality NES and SNES scores. How do you think you'd fare against some of the old Nintendo players in a tournament situation if it were applicable?

Not exactly sure, but it sounds like fun!

A Super Controversy

by James Sorge

As a bonus, here's a short memo on my time from Funspot limited to the floor which deals with the Vs. Super Mario Bros. score controversy.

To hear the background on the controversy, check out Triforce's video on YouTube here:

Anyway, Andrew Gardikis's score has been verified, but Triforce's score has not. Twin Galaxies will announce it after the referee's ruling is discussed and if no rules were broken. I personally witnessed Gardiki's run and not Triforce's response, so I can't really say too much on this subject, plus Triforce's run came at 9:10 PM on Sunday when I was back in the hotel.

Any comments or anything please write back. I just waned to post this in this issue so people could hear and read about the controversy. A full article on Funspot should follow next month when I have more free time.

The Game Review H.Q.

IF IT'S GAME REVIEWS YOU WANT, IT'S GAME REVIEWS YOU'LL GET!

Apple II Incider - Stellar 7

by Donald Lee

Unlike last month, when I had a little extra time, I will only be able to squeeze in one article for the July issue. Work has been busy and I have been playing basketball Monday and Tuesday nights for the past three weeks and will do so for the next five. Time and energy are definitely lacking a little bit this summer.

Bryan asked if we could do a July 4th or president theme this month. There is actually a game I could look at but it's complex and takes a little more time than I have to play it. Perhaps next time.

However, I will talk about a game that can create its own fireworks and can be related to the month of July (the 7th month). The game is Stellar 7 which was programmed by Damon Slye. From the ads I saw in various Apple II magazines, Stellar 7 was originally published by a small company before being picked up and published by Polarware later on.

Gameplay wise, Stellar 7 is comparable to Battlezone. I played Battlezone in the arcade sparsely and don't recall playing the Apple II version at all so I don't have much to make a comparison.

On its own merits, Stellar 7 is an exceptional game. The graphics are created in a 3D wireframe style. They are only black and white but the animation is fast and very smooth. Also, the various objects in the game (especially the enemies) have good detail. Like most Apple II games, the sound isn't great but serves its purpose just fine.

Gameplay is also very good and is very easy to get into. You use the joystick to maneuver and the two fire buttons to fire your weapon and use your shields. I found the game very re-playable and it's one I would come back to again and again to try and do better.

According to the Wiki entry, Stellar 7 has seven levels though I was only able to get to the second level in the time I played.

Overall, Stellar 7 is a slightly hidden gem within the Apple II library and worth a play. Stellar 7 was later released for PC machines in the early 1990's. Damon Slye would also go on to create Arctic Fox (among other PC games), which was also released on the Apple II.

Dual Perspective - Contra

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, the victim is "Contra", the classic shooter from the NES and the arcade.

Graphics: 8/10

Nice presentation all around, and they hold up in today's world. The NES doesn't botch the arcade's

graphics too much. The characters are well known among other games and don't look horrible in any iteration.

Sound: 6/10
Contra isn't known for having great sound like many other games. It has tunes that serve the purpose and ones that classic gamers will know, but it doesn't have tunes that are played anywhere but Tom Votava's Name That Tune (if you don't know what I am talking about here, read my interview with Tom which is also in this issue), unlike the Legend of Zelda and Super Mario Bros. for example. Contra was more known for gameplay.

Difficulty: 8/10
Some find it easy, some find it hard. I personally prefer the arcade over the NES, but it's basically the same concept.

Replay Factor: 9.5/10
It may not be the most appropriate for kids, but I have seen kids play it over and over. But other than that, you will be playing it a lot, whether it's for normal runs, marathons, or for speed runs. This game has it all.

The World Record Perspective:
It definitely has its share of ways to play. There's the arcade version which has a finite end, there's the NES which loops into infinity and can be marathoned for points or run for speed cases. As for the actual numbers:

- **Arcade Score:** 1,838,000 by Charlie D. Wehner
- **NES Points:** 6,553,500 by Andrew Furrer and Tom Votava, in 5 lives or less
- **TG Speed World Record without glitches:** 10:51 by Matt Turk
- **SDA Speed World Record with glitches:** 10:17 by Frezy "Frezy Man" Andersson

The Penguin Says:
"One of the better games to come out in history and you'll enjoy blasting through this one. World Record Potential: 1.5 out of 5 stars. Points are maxed, only an accomplishment at this time; speed is close to maxed. There are better games to try to get your name across."

Mutated Output: Rituals Of Radio Shack's 'Lost Tribes' Live On

by Mark Sabbatini

Two recent news items that say a lot about citizen vs. corporate mentalities:

– Surviving Color Computer loyalists gathered near Chicago for their annual convention, where highlights included new video player software showing "Star Wars" and other movies, a new internet server device and a Bluetooth-operated robotic spider.

- Radio Shack continues looking for a buyer after jettisoning much of the electronic parts business that has been its identity for decades, which Wired magazine featured in a lengthy article called "The Lost Tribes of Radio Shack." The consultant-fueled move into aggressively selling cell phones with sometimes deceptive practices is the latest in what's been a lousy PR year for the company. They were subjected to nationwide mockery for trying to rebrand as "The Shack," a supposed nickname I've never heard or seen in 30 years of closely following the company. Then at Christmas a bunch of customers complained an unauthorized $1 "donation" was being added to their bills for something called the Livestrong Foundation (the corporate response was they'd give refunds to complainers since "Radio Shack doesn't intend for any customer to feel compelled to support the fight against cancer").

This month's column pays tribute to that first group.

There's a probably a fan base for every computer and console ever made (the 22nd AdamCon is happening in Montreal as I write this). But I've always considered the CoCo community's numbers and new projects proportionately high compared to most machines when one factors in the number of machines sold. Much of that I attribute to those "lost tribes" who spent as much time rummaging for diodes as they did for software, a marked difference from those buying Atari's and Commodores at Kmart.

A CoCo 3 Plays video from Star Wars at the 2010 CoCo FEST

Among those offering reports from the 19th Annual "Last" Chicago CoCoFEST was Allen Huffman, a CoCo programmer and co-founder of The Color Computer Preservation Society. He called the video player, written for the CoCo 3 by John Linville, a remarkable achievement for an eight-bit machine.

"It reminded me of the low resolution web video from 1996-era internet," Huffman wrote in a post at The CoCo Archives forum (http://five.pairlist.net/pipermail/coco). "He had clips and several full movies, with sound. Not what you'd want to watch in your living room, but amazing that it can even be done."

A device by Cloud-9 called DriveWire 4 "boggles the mind," Huffman stated. It does a number of things that don't sound impressive by current standards, such as supporting hard drives up to 4GB in size, but way back then a 10MB drive was an outlandish luxury of storage no CoCo owner could reasonably expect to fill. In any event, reading that the device allows a CoCo to be a Web server or hub for a chain of Internet stations is more impressive to me than the other things that can be connected, emulated or whatever.

Using computers to control robots is old school, but the tidbit that interested me about Roy Justus' project is it uses a CoCo Bluetooth interface to send signals to the 18 servos to move the six-legged "spider," according to Huffman's report. Considering Apple didn't manage to make its iPhone connect with anything I want with Bluetooth (i.e. an external keyboard) until the day this column was due, I'd love to see what a CoCo might be able to interface with.

One final item from the show that may be of more general interest to the retro crowd is the CoCo Archive DVD, available from www.coco3.com for $18. It's got 8GB of books, magazines, videos, music, software, emulators, 6809 programming tools for modern computers and a lot more. A lot of it exists on the Internet, but surfing for it might take so much time you'll spend far more paying monthly network access fees. I bought the old version a couple of years ago with a mere 4GB of content and considered it a great bargain, even for those who never boot up a CoCo, and have sent off for the new one despite that large amount of duplicate content.

As for Tandy disappointing the tribes, this month's column (mostly) isn't meant to be a "bad corporation" rant. Going back all the way to when they first started selling computers it turns out they've had a contentious relationship with the hardcore hacker crowd with nearly all of their models, not just the CoCo. If the tribes now have to go to Fry's or eBay for circuits it's just the end of a long, slow decline. Like watching a loved one pass on after a long period of suffering, it's an event that doesn't come without some relief.

Just one game review this month, because it's a long rant about a distinctive title I've wanted to give proper attention to for a few months.

Gate Crasher (A-)
This Doom-like 3D shooter released in 2000 by Nickolas Marentes shares my Most Impressive CoCo Game Programming Achievement honors with John Kowalski's exact replica of Donkey Kong (reviewed a few issues back). Actually, Kowalski gets some credit for this title as well since he wrote the graphics engine Marentes uses.

The mission has a futuristic corporate theme, with player storming a five-level office building and gunning down white-collar workers and evil computers designed to help take over the world by controlling human minds. The levels are of decent size by Doom standards, not so much for anything done in the past 10 years.

The action is amazingly smooth and fast, and the graphics look far better than you'd ever expect given that Marentes uses what he calls an "unofficial 128x96x16 color graphics mode." Computers, the crooked ties on workers, medi-kits and the rest are easily recognized, and the 3D rendering is convincing (if very simple). Sound isn't award-winning, but basics like gunshots, explosions, and subtle computer tones when using access cards to unlock doors are well-implemented (Marentes also says the final boss has "a classic evil laugh," which I haven't experienced yet.

All in all, it's a remarkable technical accomplishment to wring a full-fleged FPS out of a machine with less than 10 percent of the memory, CPU power and disk space as the 68040 Mac I used to play Wolfenstein 3D. But sadly it doesn't earn top marks as game because it's crude even in comparison to that Nazi killfest most consider the pioneer of the genre – which itself was deemed crude not long after other titles popped up soon thereafter.

Walls and doors are simply solid colors, highly pixelated, and I had the weird sensation of trying navigating awkwardly in fog when trying to unlock some doors (even in Wolfenstein you knew you were standing where you needed to in order to open something). Also, you can't open a door and see (and shoot) into the next room – it's essentially not there until you enter it (I support Marentes could work it into the narrative as a laser shielding effect or something). Finally, there's no save feature or ability to start on anything other than the ground floor.

Still, I have to recommend any retrogaming fan at least take a look at the screenshots and YouTube videos of Gate Crasher, and a free one-level demo is widely available. But there's a few caveats:

1) Playing the full version almost certainly means paying the $12 asking price, since CoCo loyalists are remarkably resistant to posting it online.

2) The game runs in modern-day emulators, but performance is inconsistent, with the flicker on my version of MacMESS so bad it was borderline unplayable.

3) Marentes' site (www.nickm.launch.net.au) was down as I was submitting this. No idea if it's a short-term or permanent thing, but given all the other free programs and insight he offers it'll be a real loss if he's gone. Luckily, the work he's already done is preserved in the Wayback Machine at www.archive.org.

The Homebrew Sleuth: Yie Ar Kung-Fu

by Collin Pierce

Before Dead or Alive, Tekken, Virtua Fighter, before even Street Fighter, there were two games that initiated the idea of one-on-one tournament-style fighters: Irem's Karate Champ and Konami's Yie Ar Kung-Fu.

Whatever the heck "Yie Ar" is supposed to mean, the Arcade version of YAKF is definitely the direct ancestor to the tournament fighters we love today. Karate Champ works basically like a Karate Tournament works: 3 points wins, and to be honest, it's kind of hard to get into it today. YAKF is much more identifiable: two opponents, each with a life bar, ducking it out until one runs out of health, falls down, and can't get up.

Keep in mind, this was before the idea of choosing a character or even secret, special moves were key features of fighting games. Those didn't come along until Street Fighter revolutionized the genre. Still, YAKF has enough going for it that will be familiar to fighter fans of today that they will be much more likely to pick it up than Karate Champ.

The game has you play a martial artist attempting to take out a gang of evil martial artists. You fight each opponent in sequence, each one with a special skill. One has a Bo Staff, another throws Shuriken's (those little Ninja throwing stars), etc.

The game was successful enough to be ported to the MSX, a Japanese home computer, with a few changes of course. Instead of the several backdrops of the Arcade game, all the fights take place in a Pagoda (a special type of building in the far east), as your character fights a villain on each floor, attempting to get to the big boss on the top floor; just like the climax of that Bruce Lee film, Game of Death. There are less opponents to fight, and other such changes made on the basis of memory limitations.

Twenty years after YAKF's release in 1985, a port of the MSX version was released for the ColecoVision by OpCode Games, but does it do the original justice?

Graphics: A+

Seeing as the MSX operates on similar hardware as the ColecoVision, the graphics translate perfectly to the Coleco, with large, well-detailed characters (for the time), vivid colors (again, for the time), and decent animation. Everything looks as it should for those who have played the original, although a few graphics are different from the MSX version, apparently taken from the Famicom (Japanese NES) port. The screen layout is a little different from the MSX port as well, also apparently emulating the Famicom port as well. Aside from all that nitpicking nonsense, though, the game has amazing graphics, considering the hardware being used. I like the little touch of you character, Lee, smiling and showing off when he wins a match, but that was in the MSX original, so it's to be expected.

Gameplay: A+

Lee (obviously named after Bruce, and named Oolong in the Arcade original), has a pretty limited move set. He doesn't have any special moves, and all of his opponents have a weapon or special move, some of which are projectiles, which can be quite difficult to dodge with the finicky controls. But despite all this, the game is actually really fun, in spite of, or perhaps even because the odds are against you.

The game has a steep learning curve, with even the first opponent being quite capable of kicking your butt. But the characters you fight are so much fun that you will be quite willing to keep at it, get good at the slightly-cumbersome controls, and win the early fights so you can see what comes next.

There are five opponents, which is slightly disappointing compared to the dozen or so in the Arcade version, but this isn't OpCode's fault, but rather Konami's when they designed the MSX port. Still, all the opponents are interesting and exciting to fight. First is Wang, the aforementioned Bo Staff specialist. Second is Tao, a Fire-Eater who proceeds to spit his flames like bullets. Third up is Chen, who wields a metal chain like a whip. Next is Lang, the lone female who throws Shuriken's. And finally Wu, the big boss who can fly like Superman.

As fun as the fights are, it can be annoying when your attacks refuse to connect. The collision detection is demanding to say the least. If the tip of your fist or foot doesn't connect with the desired target just right, the attack will have no effect and you'll leave yourself open to counterattack. Thankfully, it's not so precise that you'll never win. You just need to know what attack to use at what distance.

Mixed in with these fights are bonus stages where you test your accuracy with the controls by attacking objects thrown at Lee from both sides of the screen. These are pretty difficult, especially when considering the complex and stiff control, but they are a welcome addition to break up the possible monotony of the fights.

Like most games of the time, the game has no real ending, but loops after beating Wu. This means you start over from Wang, with all the fights being somewhat harder. Also like most games of the time, you start with three lives, and can only gain them by earning points; one at 30,000 and one more at 50,000. After that, you are on your own.

The game may not be as deep as modern fighters, but tell me: Are you really interested in reading about modern games in a Online 'Zine called Retrogaming Times Monthly? YAKF may not be complicated, but it succeeds based on its fun factor and ability to just pick up and play it without having to memorize a long list of special moves and combos. This has been proven by me, using the brand new feature in this port.

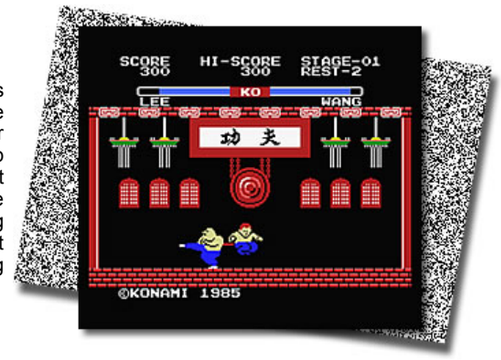
Yes, the best part is the godly fact that this port of YAKF has an exclusive Two Player Vs. mode! For the very first time, fans of the game can play against each other in a Vs. mode in the same style as YAKF's sequel, meaning Player 1 plays as Lee, and Player 2 plays as a boss character of their choosing. But while Yie Ar Kung-Fu 2 has a Vs. mode like this, Player 2 can only choose from three bosses, whereas in this release, Player 2 can choose from all five bosses.

As for me proving that this game can be learned in a matter of minutes, well...

I challenged my little sister to a match, and she proceeded to kick my ass. Yeah, my little sister kicked my experienced gamer butt at a game she had never played before.

I blame the fact that she played the boss characters.

Controls: C+



This is the one problem I have with this game; the controls are awkward to say the least.

Besides walking back and forth, ducking, and being able to jump (but only straight up or towards his opponent), Lee can throw a punch to the stomach by pressing a fire button, do a kick to the head by moving the joystick diagonally up-left or up-right, a shin kick with diagonally down-left or down-right, and an ankle kick by ducking (down on the stick) and pressing a fire button. Jump straight up by tapping up on the stick, and to jump forward towards your opponent, you must execute a very tricky up on the stick while pressing a fire button simultaneously. Mess up the timing, and you'll either punch or jump straight up before doing the wished move, risking getting hit by your opponent, however, if you pull it off right, you can not only dodge a projectile, but jump kick your opponent in the face by letting go of the fire button and pressing it again during the middle of your jump.

Everybody got that?

The controls are quite hard to get used to, especially if you grew up playing more modern fighters. They are also remarkably stiff, but that's partially Coleco's fault for making such a hard to use controller. Yes, the controls are the same as the MSX version, but that's no excuse when you consider that the Colecovision not only has a joystick and two fire buttons, but a numeric keypad as well. It would have been nice to have an option to switch to a more modern control style.

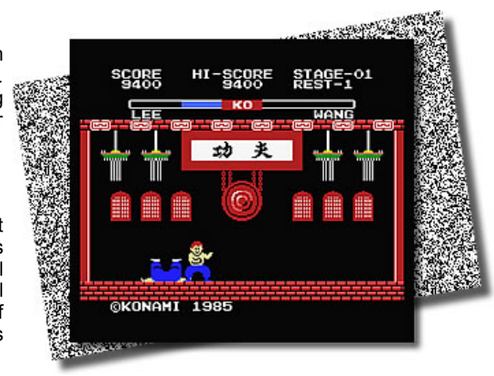
Sound: A+

A perfect port of the original MSX soundtrack. The tunes all sound cheerful and somewhat exciting, especially the cute battle theme. The sound effects all sound great as well. Each successful attack makes a nice *POW* noise, while misses only cause a whistling noise as your attack strikes air.

Replay Value/Fun Factor: A-

This game is fun, no question about it. It has a lot of character that in my opinion, a lot of modern games have lost in the gaming industry's commercialization. The 1 Player mode is pretty fun, but the 2 Player Vs. mode is incredible. Also, considering it's the only one-on-one fighting game for the Coleco, it will probably be played by fans of the system and perhaps even curious fighting game fans a lot, seeing how it fills a niche in a system library.

MSX to Colecovision Port: A+++



This port is not only a perfect port of the MSX and Famicom versions, it improves on them greatly! The 2 Player mode is a revelation, and by modern fighter standards, a required feature. In fact, it makes the game so much more interesting that I dare say the "classic" versions lacking it are practically obsolete! It's also the only version to be available in the West, so that's another point in its favor.

Overall: A-

Modern fighter fans might have a little trouble getting used to the peculiar control scheme, but once that hurdle is leaped, the game becomes quite entertaining. Besides, if modern fighter fans are willing to spend years perfecting their use of characters from their favorites, I'm sure they will be able to deal with taking a few minutes to learn a few controls! The game is, I admit, old-school by today's standards, but it is elegant in its simplicity. And the new 2 Player mode adds a lot of new life to the game, seeing as it allows you to master playing as the boss characters. Seeing as it's the only tournament fighter on the Coleco, and a good one at that, I recommend picking it up.

OpCode Games is a definite master of Coleco homebrew, and I can't wait to see what new projects are waiting in the wings.

Like that Memory Expansion Module which will allow more intricate homebrews to be released...

Yie Ar Kung Fu, as well as many other Coleco homebrew games, are available at www.opcodegames.com.

Modern Retro - Bionic Commando (360/PS3)

by Patrick McClellan

Bionic Commando Rearmed, which I previously reviewed in Retro Gaming Times #63, was a massive hit for Sweden-based developer GRIN, and much was expected of their future projects. They would go on to release two poorly-made, shoddy movie tie-ins, in the form of *Wanted: Weapons of Fate* and *Terminator Salvation*. Another title was released by the studio however, contrasting the previous titles as it featured clever mechanics, good visuals, and a solid experience overall, and one that I feel is underrated by many.

This game was *Bionic Commando*, not a downloadable game, but a title that would see a full disk retail release for the Playstation 3, Xbox 360 and PC. One thing all the GRIN titles did have in common however, was their poor sales figures. *Bionic Commando* sold 27,000 units in the US in its first month at retail, truly terrible numbers from publisher Capcom's perspective. Despite being a far less polished game, *Terminator Salvation* sold 43,000 units - still very disappointing figures admittedly. More misery was to come, as GRIN filed for bankruptcy in 2009. Despite the poor sales, many fans (including myself!) continue to hope for a sequel to Nathan Spencer's 2009 outing, but have to accept that it is unlikely Capcom would gamble on it, given the limited success of *Bionic Commando*.

The game serves as a direct sequel to the aforementioned *Bionic Commando Rearmed*, and features a redesigned version of ginger hero Nathan Spencer. Vocals for the character are provided by Faith No More singer Mike Patton, who generally does a good job of screaming and dishing out the cheesy insults when appropriate. Spencer, now sporting dreadlocks, so as to be 'down with the kids', has been betrayed by the government, and the "Great Bionic Purge" is taking place, whereby all soldiers with Bionic technology are imprisoned having been stripped of all their Bionic kit. Without spoiling anything, Spencer then becomes free, and is free to seek his own special brand of vengeance. I felt the story on a whole is enjoyable and fairly well written, but a couple of the later plot twists don't work quite so well.

Like the previous games in the series, *Bionic Commando* has a heavy emphasis on action and adventure, but it also strays from the familiar 2D side-scrolling presentation of earlier games, instead

opting for a full 3D world. Locations in the game vary, with the player visiting ruined cities and vibrant forests. These both give you the impression that it's going to be a fairly open game, and that you can achieve your goals through non-linear means. Whilst this is true to an extent at certain parts, the often frustrating radiation mechanic often restricts you to a certain path, eliminating any hope of forming a creative route. Whilst I understand why the developers chose this, I can't help but think about the potential awesomeness that could come in the form of a more open world game containing a swinging mechanic.

Speaking of this, I think it's important to discuss the impact of the Bionic arm in the game. Some have described the swinging as "erratic", but I would completely disagree. You can latch on to the majority of objects, and you simply have to jump, and roll the joystick back and forth to begin swinging, quickly building up speed. The difficulty comes in the timing – Let go a little too early, and you'll fly flat, not getting enough height, and if you release too late, you'll float helplessly in the air, not gaining the distance needed. Once I nailed the timing, I found it to be one of the most satisfying mechanics in a game I've experienced in recent years. The thrill of stringing together 7-8 giant swings at full speed is really something else.

The other main mechanic in the game is shooting. I had been a little worried about the gunplay before its release, as it looked a little lacklustre. I was pleasantly surprised however, as it proved to be very satisfying, with a range of guns each packing a punch. Controls while shooting are surprisingly solid, and enemies never feel like bullet sponges, more often that not succumbing to their fate after just a few shots. Melee attacks with your Bionic arm are also deadly against the majority of enemies, and are a good way of disposing of nervous stragglers without wasting bullets. If you do run out of bullets, never fret! Your Bionic Arm also has the ability to pick up numerous objects, from cars to boulders, which can in turn be chucked via lock-on at enemies, often dealing massive damage. Gameplay is definitely a strong point for the title, and is very refined. The level design and structure is often massive in scale, and is cleverly put together, but the radiation mechanic does leave a little to be desired.

The graphics within the game are for the most part, very impressive. This is displayed during the numerous frantic boss fights, but also as you travel from location to location, swinging at full speed. Draw distance is also very impressive throughout, and you never have to worry about not knowing where your goal is. One of the shortcomings comes in the form of enemy types. You will encounter the same looking soldiers multiple times, seemingly void of personality, and certain other enemies will be seen multiple times during the sub-10hr story mode. The soundtrack borrows certain tracks from *Bionic Commando Rearmed*, but does at times opt for a more sombre mood, as a lone pianist plays the main theme in a way we're not used to. The soundtrack fits the mood of the game, and is really well put together.

The game does feature online multiplayer, but I feel it is a little underwhelming. At the point of writing this review, it is very rare to find anyone still playing the game, and when you do, it tends to be the generic deathmatch mode. Introducing the swinging mechanic into multiplayer does add another element, but it really is quite standard fare as far as online titles go. More could have been done with the multiplayer for sure, but it could give you some fun once you're done with the Story Mode.

Bionic Commando is a severely underrated title, and it pains me to think that it will probably never get a sequel, despite the ending of the game implying that the guys at GRIN had more they wanted to do for the franchise. The swinging mechanic really steals the show, and is immensely satisfying once you get your mind around it. The story mode will take up a fair chunk of your time, and if you're anything like me, you'll enjoy it for the most part. The fact that you can pick it up literally dirt cheap has seen an inevitable surge in sales, but it's sadly too little too late for GRIN, who shut its doors just a few months after the game's release. I'd definitely recommend this title for fans of the original title, and 2008's *Rearmed*, as it should provide a great bang for the buck for any action/adventure aficionado.

A Pixelated 21st Century!

by Paul "Zimmzamm" Zimmerman

Hello Pixelated fans. "Pixelated Paul" is here to let you know about some of the retroware highlights for the month of June. But first, I want to mention that X-Scape came out on May 31st for DsiWare and it looks great!

I am sure fans of Battlezone and Star Fox will love it.

Sadly, it was actually a slow month for retroware goodies, especially on the WiiWare side; and only 2 Virtual Console games: Shadow of the Ninja for the NES and Mario Tennis, which has the debut of Waluigi, for the N64. 16 Shot Shooting Watch was released for DsiWare, an application that sounds excellent. It is all about how fast you can press a button on a controller in 10 seconds which should make for some great competition.

16 Shot! Shooting Watch (Click here to see a video for the game)

Flametail (Click here to see a video for the game)

Kappa's Trail (Click here to see a video for the game)

Super Swap (Click here to see a video for the game)

Music on: Retro Keyboard (Video to the right)
Let's end things on a high note. Remember all of the great 80's songs that sound like rock music combined with video game music and made by robots? Just kidding about the robots. Well, that "space invaders" sound was due to the futuristic musical instrument called the keyboard. Now you can make that same video game robot/dance/rock music with "Music on: Retro Keyboard" application for DSiWare, but right now it's only available in Europe and Australia. Those in Europe and Australia can now write a song like this: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ldyx3KHOFXw.

Art Style: Rotozoa (Video to the right)
Rotozoa is another fun "Art Style" game. In this one you control an ameba, or something like that, swimming underwater. You need to collect the same color organisms as its

tentacles to help make the tentacles grow. Once they are at their maximum you go on to the next level. There are 3 stages with 5 levels each. But, the more you play the more modes you can unlock – from Endless Mode to Snake Mode. I enjoy this one, but I enjoy Light Trax even more.

Bejeweled 2 (Click here to see a video for the game)

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.

Shadow of the Ninja (NES) (Video to the right)

Mario Tennis (N64) (Click here to see a video for the game)

I will see you next month for hopefully some more retroware goodies!

Arcade Memories - Q*Bert

by Tom Zjaba

Don't judge a book by its cover. I'm sure you heard that saying a time or two as you were growing up. Well, Q*Bert is a good example of that. When I first saw Q*Bert at a local arcade, I thought the game looked stupid. You have this big nosed creature bouncing around on a pyramid while a snake chases him around. What is a Q*Bert and why is he swearing on the marquee? This was definitely a game that did not explain itself easily. Space Invaders was simple, you knew what the game was about just from the name. While Pac-Man had a strange name, one look at the game in motion and you knew exactly what the object was. But Q*Bert was different. Yeah, it was easy to understand that you needed to change the color of the blocks of the pyramid, but the rest was strange. While I had my reservations about playing this bizarre game, I could not resist the lure of a new video game.

My quarter fell into the slot in no time. I was greeted by a small cartoon of Q*Bert as he showed me how to change the blocks. If that was all he needed to show me. I bounced around changing the blocks with a false sense of bravado. This game was easy, I thought. Then I reached the end and found the controls were not exactly what I expected. My poor Q*Bert flew off the side like Wile E. Coyote in pursuit of the Road Runner. I was greeted by the thud sound from the beanbag inside the machine. At first I was upset at how easily I died, but I put aside my anger and prepared for my second life.

This time I was ready for the controls. I made sure to be careful around the sides so not to repeat my fall to oblivion. But as I changed the board, balls fell from the top. One in particular, a purple one, sat at the bottom. Was I supposed to eat it? I moved my way towards it when it hatched. There I was caught in the power of forward motion as a bouncing snake popped out of the purple egg. The shock messed with my reflexes as I greeted Coiley head on. Needless to say, he won that battle. Cursing myself for not reading the instructions or watching the video that loops, I grabbed hold of my last Q*Bert and decided to use my new found knowledge and finish the board.

With the majority of the board cleared and the Coiley nowhere in sight, I easily cleared the board. But I was greeted by a new video that showed the challenge went up a notch. This was to be expected as all video games did that. Bring you in gently and then pull the rug out from under you. But now I was down to one Q*Bert left and little knowledge of how to play the game. I went back to the task of trying to change the blocks, only to find my old friend, Coiley back. As he hatched, I had no idea what to do. He chased after me like a crazed maniac in a slasher film. I went left and he followed, I went right and so did Coiley. What was I to do? I saw the strange floating platforms on the side and had no idea what they did. But since I could not shake Coiley, I decided to try and jump on one. To my amazement, it worked! I floated to the top and poor Coiley fell to his death.

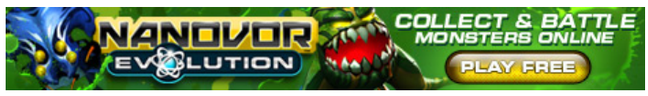
But my good luck was short lived as I stepped down from the top block and was quickly hit by a red ball. The game ended with a pitiful score. But I did learn a lesson in basic gameplay and was a wiser man for it. In the coming games, I slowly built strategies to maximize my score. It did not take long to learn the fine art of how to lure the poor Coiley off the edge. And I learned the hard way just how annoying Ugg and Wrong Way can be. Stop too long to look at them and you will die. And I learned to curse like Q*Bert at Slick and Sam as they undid my work. And I quickly learned that if it is green you can eat it, otherwise avoid at all costs.

In time, Q*Bert became one of my favorite games. The simplicity of it, the uniqueness of the characters and the challenge added up to a great game! Too bad that none of the sequels could ever improve on the original. But then it is hard to beat a great game, especially one that was truly a one of a kind when it was released.

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

BAM!!! Whoa, looks like I better be careful with those video game fireworks. They might seem harmless since they are behind a screen, but let me tell you that video game fireworks are nothing to mess around with. I mean, in many video games pretty fireworks are displayed when you lose a life, so that right there should show you just how deadly video game fireworks are. Now that I think of it, it seems that pretty much anytime an enemy or hero dies in a classic game they go out with an explosion of some sort. That's the reason I decided to end this issue with a bang, since you really can't have a classic video game without an exploding hero now can you? So why should Retrogaming Times Monthly be any different? See you guys next time...hopefully I'll still be in one piece then. BOOM!!!

- Bryan Roppolo, Retrogaming Times Monthly Editor

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