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As retrogamers we have a lot to be thankful for this year. A new retrogaming magazine called RETRO is in the process of being launched, new games keep coming out for our classic systems, and game shows for classic games keep popping up.

The new magazine called RETRO is currently raising funds to get off the ground on Kickstarter and they are very close to their goal as of this writing. If you are interested in learning more on how you can help them reach their goal, visit <http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/socalmike/retro-the-multi-format-throw-back-video-game-magaz?ref=live>. They have some very good people involved with the staff, including Mike Kennedy who has been actively involved in the classic gaming community for many many years, and has promoted our magazine many times throughout that time period. We wish him the best of luck in his new venture, as I'm sure it will be an amazing magazine once it launches! Check in next month for a follow-up on this new magazine, as its first issue should be coming out in January and will be a bi-monthly publication.



Fanboyism, And The 16-Bit Console Wars Part 8: The Wrap Up!

Greetings! Over the past 2/3rds of a year, we've sought to take on the 16-bit Console Wars, and the fanboyism that has plagued them Parts 1-7 can be found here: Part 1: The "Preamble Ramble", Part 2: SNES vs. Genesis: Graphics, Part 3: SNES vs. Genesis: Sound, Part 4: SNES vs. Genesis: Hardware, Performance, and Design, Part 5: SNES vs. Genesis: Software, Part 6: Turbograftx16, and Part 7: Neo Geo AES.

We opened with a short treatise on what is and is not fanboyism, and then have sought to really examine the hardware and software libraries of these systems in a manner as objective, and self-divorced as possible. In this way, we continued our indictment of fanboyism throughout, only implicitly, rather than explicitly. I was not hesitant to also include my subjective preferences along the way, only I was very careful to keep subjective and objective clearly distinguished from each other... something that fanboyism is notorious for failing to do.

What was the outcome of all of this? Well, in popular perception, there is a clear hierarchy in the 16-bit consoles, which goes Neo Geo, SNES, Genesis, TG16. Factoring out the Neo Geo for a second, I felt that objectively, this hierarchy was untenable, and based on superficial observations, lack of understanding of the hardware, and well, the circular tendency for popular perception to feed itself.



What I sought to do, then, is establish more or less a parity between them by dragging the unduly inflated SNES down to about Genesis level, and lifting the underrated TG16 up to about Genesis level. This was really my purpose...primarily because I felt the objective evidences demanded it, and secondarily, because while all three have the rabid kinds of fanboy, the SNES by far, has the most casual fanboys, and even those who I would not consider fanboys at all, such as the hosts of the gaming podcasts I mentioned in part 1 who inspired this series, simply tend to default to it as the superior (and again, I am not directing this at the

well reasoned, well informed SNESist out there, just the pop-fad kind which is the majority of the larger gamer culture). This, thought I, was the crime of the 16-bit console wars (the elevation of the SNES, as well as the degrading of the TG16), and I thus set out to make all things right. Okay, perhaps that's a bit Quixotic, but if nothing else, I hoped to at least challenge the perceptions, and preconceived notions of all of gamerdom out there, be them SNESists, Genesisists, TurboGrafxists, or NeoGeoists, and make them examine whether or not their convictions really hold water. Whether I succeeded in making my case or not is ultimately up to the reader to decide.

One concession that I'll make here, and perhaps the most compelling argument in favor of giving the gold to the SNES (though I say this as a committed Genesis guy, so do with it what you will) is that the SNES does the best job of "hiding" its weaknesses from the casual observer. The astute observer will notice them, and they will be glaring, but the casual lay gamer...really may never even be aware of them. Where the Genesis lacks is more apparent, and the TG16 makes the worst casual impression of them all with so many games that criminally under-utilize hardware which in many ways is actually the most powerful of the three (despite the completely undeserved rep it gets by way of it's 8-bit CPU). The astute observer will see that power manifest in various ways all over the place on the TG16, but the system's misuse, largely due to the self-strangling limitations of the Hu-Card format, the anorexic supermodel that probably never should've been, the casual observer may again not notice them.

I think this phenomenon is also a big player in why the perceived hierarchy exists, and is again, in my opinion, the single most compelling case to be made for favoring the SNES. But there is so much that doesn't get taken into account that way. It's superficial, and as I've set out to demonstrate over these past several months, it's ultimately nothing short of illusory.

We can't even say that the SNES did the best job of the three at maximizing its hardware, and squeezing every last drop out of it. We never saw, nor will ever see the true extent of what that video and sound hardware could've really done, because of how weak, and/or screwed up the rest of the hardware is. Actually, it's the Genesis that should receive credit for being the one to most fully realize its hardware's potential. The things done on that system were marvelous, and it actually exceeded what the numbers on the spec sheet showed.

Speaking of spec sheets, here are the Spec sheets for the SNES, Genesis, and TG16 in that order (there are a few mistakes on the TG16 spec sheet, but it's mostly solid, and it was the only one I could find online in short notice with a good format – see part 6 of this series for clarification). Remember, though, that the SNES spec sheet is wildly misleading. All three of these spec sheets show idealized figures for the system, what the system is theoretically capable of. However, what they do not show is what the system actually accomplished. TG16 intermittently lived up to its numbers, Genesis consistently lived up to its numbers, and even occasionally shot past them. SNES, on the other hand, NEVER lived up to its numbers, and in many important ways fell short of them by as much as half. Look at parts 2-4, and part 6 in this series for more details on that.



SNES

Core

CPU: Nintendo custom '5A22', believed to be produced by Ricoh; based around a 16-bit CMD/GTE 65c816 (a clone of the Western Design Center 65816). [Edit note: 65c816 was made by Western Design Center by William D. Mensch. CMD/GTE was a licensee] The CPU runs the 65c816-alike core with a variable-speed bus, with bus access times determined by addresses accessed, with a maximum theoretical effective clock rate around 3.58 MHz. The SNES/SFC provided the CPU with 128 KB of Work RAM.

The CPU also contains other support hardware, including:
for interfacing with controller ports;
for generating NMI interrupts on Vertical blanking interval;
for generating IRQ interrupts on screen positions;
Direct memory access unit, supporting two primary modes, general DMA (for block transfers, at a rate of 2.68MB/second) and Horizontal blanking interval DMA (for transferring small data sets at the end of each scanline, outside of the active display period);
multiplication and division registers.

Cartridge Size Specifications: 2 - 32 Megabits(Mb) which ran at two speeds ('SlowROM' and 'FastROM'). Custom address decoders allow larger sizes, eg. 48 Mb for Star Ocean and Tales of Phantasia

Sound

Sound Controller Chip: 8-bit Sony SPC700 CPU for controlling the Digital signal processor running at an effective clock rate around 1.024 MHz.

Main Sound Chip: 8-channel Sony S-DSP with hardware ADPCM decompression, pitch modulation, echo effect with feedback (for reverberation) with 8-tap FIR filter, and ADSR and 'GAIN' (discretely controlled) volume envelopes.

Memory Cycle Time: 279 Minutes

Sound RAM: 512 kilobit(Kb) shared between SPC700 and S-DSP.

Pulse Code Modulator: 16-Bit ADPCM (using 4-bit compressed ADPCM samples, expanded to 15-bit resolution, processed with an additional 4-point Gaussian sound interpolation).

Note - while not directly related to SNES hardware, the standard extension for SNES audio subsystem state files saved by emulators is SPC_sound_format(.spc), a format used by SPC players.

Video

Picture Processor Unit: 15-Bit

Video RAM: 64 KB of VRAM for screen maps (for 'background' layers) and tile sets (for backgrounds and objects); 512 + 32 bytes of 'OAM' (Object Attribute Memory) for objects; 512 bytes of 'CGRAM' for palette data.

Palette: 256 entries; 15-Bit color (BGR555) for a total of 32,768 colors.

Maximum colors per layer per scanline: 256.

Maximum colors on-screen: 32,768 (using color arithmetic for transparency effects).

Resolution: between 256x224 and 512x448. Most games used 256x224 pixels since higher resolutions caused slowdown, flicker, and/or had increased limitations on layers and colors (due to memory bandwidth constraints); the higher resolutions were used for less processor-intensive games, in-game menus, text, and high resolution images.

Maximum onscreen objects (sprites): 128 (32 per line, up to 34 8x8 tiles per line).

Maximum number of sprite pixels on one scanline: 256. The renderer was designed such that it would drop the frontmost sprites instead of the rearmost sprites if a scanline exceeded the limit, allowing for creative clipping effects.

Most common display modes: Pixel-to-pixel text mode 1 (16 colors per tile; 3 scrolling layers) and affine mapped text mode 7 (256 colors per tile; one rotating/scaling layer).

Hardware specifications	
Processor	<div>Motorola 68000 (or equivalent)</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Runs at 7.61 MHz in PAL consoles, 7.67 MHz in NTSC consoles.Some systems contained clones of the Motorola 68000 manufactured by Hitachi and Signetics.Signetics 68K only found in early revisions as this CPU is known to be inefficient.
Secondary processor	<div>Zilog Z80 (or equivalent)</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Runs at 3.55 MHz in PAL consoles, 3.58 MHz in NTSC consolesUsed as main CPU in Master System compatibility mode.

Memory specifications	
Boot ROM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">2 KBKnown as the "Trademark Security System" (TMSS)When console is started, it checks the game for certain code given to licensed developersUnlicensed games without the code are thus locked outIf a game is properly licensed, the ROM will display "Produced by or under license from Sega Enterprises Ltd."Boot ROM is not present on earlier versions of the Mega Drive and GenesisSome earlier games not designed for the TMSS may not work in later consoles
Main RAM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">64 KBytesPart of M68000 address space
Video RAM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">64 KBytesCannot be accessed directly by CPU, must be read and written via VDP (Video Display Processor - see below)
Secondary RAM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">8 KBytesPart of Z80 address spaceUsed as main RAM in Master System compatibility mode
Audio RAM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">8 KBytes
Cartridge memory area (ROM space)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Up to 4 MBytes (32 Megabits)Part of M68000 address spaceGame cartridges larger than 4 MBytes must use bank switching

Graphics Processing specifications	
Planes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">4 (2 scrolling playfields, 1 sprite plane, 1 'window' plane), per-tile priority
Sprites	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Up to 80 on-screen 320x240 or 320x480 pixel mode or 64 256x240 pixel mode.
Palette	<ul style="list-style-type: none">512 colors (1536 using shadow/highlight mode)
On-screen colors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">64 × 9-bit words of color RAM, 4 lines of 15 colors plus transparent, allowing 61 on-screen colors (up to 183 via raster effects and shadow/highlight)
Screen resolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none">256x224 (32Hx28V), 320x224 (40Hx28V), 256x240 (32Hx30V, PAL only), 320x240 (40Hx30V, PAL only)Interlace mode 1 provides no increase in resolution, but still generates a true interlaced signalInterlace mode 2 can provide double the vertical resolution (i.e. 320×448 for NTSC, 320x480 for PAL). Used in Sonic 2 for two-player split screen
Scroll size	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Width and height independently set to 32, 64, or 128 cells as VRAM allows

Sound Processing specifications	
Main sound chip	<div>Yamaha YM2612<ul style="list-style-type: none">Six FM channels, four operators each; channel 6 can be used for CM data or as a regular channelProgrammable Low frequency oscillation low-frequency oscillator and stereo panningRuns at 7.6 MHz</div>
Secondary sound chip	<div>Texas Instruments SN76489 compatible device built into VDP.<ul style="list-style-type: none">Four-channel PSG (Programmable Sound Generator)Three square wave channels, one white noise channelProgrammable tone/noise and attenuationUsed for Master System compatibility mode as well as to supplement FMDifferent random noise generation compared to a real SN76489/SN76489A chip</div>



TG16

Technical specifications

CPU: 8-bit HuC6280A, a modified 65SC02 (a separate branch from the 65C02, of the original MOS 6502) running at 1.79 or 7.16 MHz (switchable by software). Features integrated bankswitching hardware (driving a 21-bit external address bus from a 6502-compatible 16-bit address bus), an integrated general-purpose I/O port, a timer, block transfer instructions, and dedicated move instructions for communicating with the HuC6270A VDC.
GPU: A dual graphics processor setup. One 16-bit HuC6260 Video Color Encoder (VCE), and one 16-bit HuC6270A Video Display Controller (VDC). The HuC6270A featured Port-based I/O similar to the TMS99xx VDP family.

Display

Resolution

X (Horizontal) Resolution: variable, maximum of 565 (programmable to 282, 377 or 565 pixels, or as 5.37 MHz, 7.16 MHz, and 10.74 MHz pixel dot clock)[10] Taking into consideration overscan limitations of CRT televisions at the time, the horizontal resolutions were realistically limited to something a bit less than what the system was actually capable of. Consequently, most game developers limited their games to either 256, 352, or 512 pixels in display width for each of the three modes.[11]
Y (Vertical) Resolution: variable, maximum of 242 (programmable in increments of 1 scanline). It is possible to achieve an interlaced "mode" with a maximum vertical resolution of 484 scanlines by alternating between the two different vertical resolution modes used by the system. However, it is unknown, at this time, if this interlaced resolution is compliant with (and consequently displayed correctly on) NTSC televisions.
The majority of TurboGrafx-16 games use 256×239,[10] though some games, such as Sherlock Holmes Consulting Detective did use 512×224.

Color

Colors available: 512 (9-bit)
Colors onscreen: Maximum of 481 (241 background, 240 sprite)
Palettes: Maximum of 32 (16 for background tiles, 16 for sprites)
Colors per palette: 16 per background palette (color entry #0 of each background palette must be the same), and 15 per sprite palette (plus transparent, which is displayed as an actual color in the overscan area of the screen)

Sprites

Simultaneously displayable: 64 on-screen, 16 (256 sprite pixels) per scanline
Sizes: 16×16, 16×32, 16×64, 32×16, 32×32, 32×64
Palette: Each sprite can use up to 15 unique colors (one color must be reserved as transparent) via one of the 16 available sprite palettes.
Layers: The HuC6270A VDC was capable of displaying one sprite layer. Sprites could be placed either in front of or behind background tiles by manipulating a bit which caused indirect pixel color entry #0 of the background tile(s) to act as transparent.

Tiles

Size: 8×8
Palette: Each background tile can use up to 15 unique colors via one of the 16 available background palettes and 1 shared color (BG color #0) for a total of 16 colors per tile. The first color entry of each background subpalette is ignored. Instead, color #0's RGB value is shown in its place (the common/shared color). When a specific sprite is set to show behind the BG layer via the priority bit, all tiles that use relative color #0 (of 16) will not show BG color #0. But instead will show the sprite pixel (if not opaque).
Layers: The HuC6270A VDC was capable of displaying one background layer.

Memory

Work RAM: 8 kB
Video RAM: 64 kB

Audio capacity

6 Mini-Wavetable stereo audio channels, programmable through the HuC6280A CPU.
Each channel had a frequency of 3.58 MHz PCM sample clock (while not in D/A mode) with a bit depth of 5 bits. Each channel also was allotted 20 bytes (32×5 bits) of RAM for sample data.
The waveforms were programmable so the composers were not limited to the standard selection of waveforms (square, sine, sawtooth, triangle, etc.).
The first two audio channels (1 and 2) were capable of LFO when channel #2 was used to modulate channel #1. This was used to achieve FM-like sound qualities.

The final two audio channels (5 and 6) were capable of Noise generation.
Optional software enabled Direct D/A which allows for sampled sound to be streamed into any of the six PCM audio channels. When a channel is in D/A mode the frequency is as fast as the CPU can stream bytes to the port, though in practicality it's limited to 6.99 kHz when using the TIMER interrupt with the smallest loop setting (1023 cpu cycles). Additionally, a programmer could use the scanline interrupt to generate a 15.7 kHz interrupt system to play samples.
Each channel has its own DAC and two layer attenuation device (two volume mechanism controls) allowing a combination of two channels in Direct D/A mode to be paired and play back 8-bit, 9-bit, or 10-bit linear PCM samples.
Each channel has a 4-bit left and 4-bit right fine pan volume register for stereo volume control. The audio unit also contains a master 4-bit/4-bit pair fine pan volume control, used to set volume/stereo level for all channels as a whole.

Now, that leaves us with the Neo Geo AES. Popular perception holds that this is the best system of the four, and from an objective hardware perspective, how can I argue? The graphics hardware is far and away better than any of them, coming closer in many ways to the 2D aspects of the 32-bit Saturn and Playstation than any of its fellow 16-bitters. It is this phenomenon, plus the fact that the AES has a 16-bit CPU, plus an additional 8-bit chip as a co-processor that has led people to mistakenly call the AES "24-bit"...but it doesn't work that way, the AES is 16-bit. And may I remind the reader that the Genesis has that same processor setup (albeit clocked slower), even using the same Motorola 68000/Zilog Z80 scheme, so IF the AES is 24-bit, so is the Genesis. The sound hardware was an amazing SNES/Genesis duet, and that's not too far from being literal. The memory management schema was very similar to the TG16's, which allowed for reading from ROM and streaming data, so that large amounts of information could be addressed with very small, inexpensive memory banks. It really is the best of the four objectively.

However, where the popular perception is wrong, is that a lot of people think the Neo Geo is the best of the four in every conceivable way, which is not true. In fact, in various and sundry small ways, ALL THREE of the other systems best it. See part 7 for the low down on this.

Here's the Neo Geo's spec sheet:



Neo Geo

Processor

Main processor: Motorola 68000, often produced by another manufacturer, running at 12 MHz
Co-processor: Zilog Z80 running at 4 MHz. This is also used as an audio controller.

Memory

Main memory (used directly by 68000): 64 KB
Main video memory : 84 KB
Video memory: 64 KB (32 KB x2)
Palette memory : 16 KB (8 KB x 2)
Fast video RAM : 4 KB (2 KB x 2)
Sound memory (used directly by Z80): 2 KB

Display

Display resolution: 320×224 (many games only used the centermost 304 pixels)
Color palette: 65,536 (16-bit) (Not RGB565, but RGB666, where the lowest bit of each channel is shared with one bit[13])
Maximum colors on screen: 4,096 (12-bit)
Maximum sprites on screen: 380
Minimum sprite size: 1×2
Maximum sprite size: 16×512
Maximum sprites per scanline: 96
Simultaneous scroll planes: 3
Aspect ratio: 4:3
A/V output: RF, composite video/RCA audio, RGB (with separate 21 pin RGB cable FCG-9).

Sound

Sound chip: Yamaha YM2610
4 FM channels, 4 operators per channel
3 SSG channels
1 Noise channel
7 ADPCM channels
Work RAM (sound): 2KB
Sound ROM 128KB on-board (only less than 32KB used)
up to 512KB sound ROM on cartridges

I did look around for comprehensive US software libraries for each system, as well as historical sales figures, and could only find sketchy, and incomplete results. If you find that information, I would be honored to have you present it in the comments section.

Now, before we bring our focus on the 16-bit console wars to a close, there are a few other systems that we didn't get to discuss (and I know very little about them in terms of hardware). The chief of which is the Commodore Amiga line of Computers. I also wanted to do something on Game Boy Advance, but ran out of time. I know that the GBA is tenuous since a) it came out so much later, b) is a handheld, and c) is technically 32-bit. But its performance is in the SNES range, lower resolution, higher color, and a VERY different, generally considered inferior, but still primarily sample-based sound system. And so, in the same way that TG16 is technically 8-bit, but effectively 16-bit, so is the GBA technically 32-bit, but effectively 16-bit.

I don't really have any tech-spec GBA figures for you, but I do have some things about the Amiga. At about the time the TG16 article released, I reached out to Kamahl, who was very helpful with the TG16, and asked him for the low-down on the Amiga. Since it is so very other from the paradigms I understand and can relay to you, this information created as many questions for me as answers. I suspect it'll do the same for you, yet, it will go some way to peel back the curtain on the 16-bit system that first debuted around the same time as the 8-bit NES. Here is what he shared with me verbatim, and unformatted (except for an expletive delete [indicated by brackets], and italics):



"The Amiga was originally intended to be a game console, but due to the crash it's design was shifted to be a home computer.

It's design was finished around 1984 and the first Amiga (the 1000) was released in 1985, 2 years before the Genesis. It had a 7 Mhz 680000 CPU (much like the Genesis and Neo Geo). It was floppy disk based.

The really popular Amiga was the cheaper 500 released in 1987 (same hardware) with an extra 256mb of ram. The chipset used by these Amigas was called OCS (for Original Chipset) and it's the one I'll be covering.

The later 1200 has a 32 bit CPU with a minor and disappointing chipset upgrade (called AGA), basically it has more colors, bigger hardware sprites, more bandwidth but higher contention and little else. Compared to VGA and 386 CPUs on IBM PCs it was a very weak improvement and together with bad management lead to the fall of Commodore.

The Amiga never got popular in the US, but it was very popular in Europe. Nearly every game is PAL, with very little NTSC games available.

Although it was released by Commodore, it was designed by an external team lead by Jay Miner who used to work at Atari. He was the designer of the Atari 2600 and 800 (the computer whose hardware would later be used in the 5200).

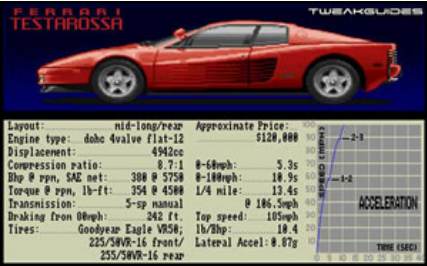
All Jay Miner hardware can be described as being designed to "do more with less". While the Atari 2600 is technically weaker than the Intellivision, later games completely humiliate the Intellivision graphically. This is due to 1. The much nicer master palette, and 2. The hardware is designed in such a way that it can be abused much further than intended.

- The Amiga has a 68000 CPU running at 7 Mhz (a bit less than the genesis).
- It uses framebuffer graphics (no tiles, just a big image) for the background. This background is in bitplane format (planes of bits stacked on top of each other, instead of using a single byte or nibble for each pixel).
- The typical resolution is 320x240, though a lot of games have a border with 16 pixels cut off on each side.
- It can go all the way to 640x480 interlaced at 16 colors.
- It can scroll this background in hardware, might not seem like much but it was something that computers typically lacked (more on this later).



- The Amiga can have any number of bitplanes from 1 to 6 for the background, each doubling the number of colors onscreen (2,4,8,16,32,64). It has 32 color registers, with the extra 32 colors being "shadowed" versions of the first 32 (much like shadow mode on the genesis, but much more useful).
- It doesn't use palettes, any pixel onscreen can use any of the 64 colors, this is a lot more freeing than the paletted 64 colors of the genesis.
- The master palette is 12bit, with 4096 colors.
- It has a chip called COPPER, which is a co-processor synced to the raster beam of the television (one write per 8 pixels). It can control all other chips on the Amiga to make things like linescrolls and such. The so called copper gradients of the Amiga are made by this chip changing the background color at every line of the image. It's more powerful than SNES HDMA while being simpler than even the genesis scrolling tables.
- The Amiga only has eight 3 color hardware sprites, with 16 pixels of width and unlimited height. Two of these sprites can be paired to make a single 16 color sprite of the same size. It's only slightly better than the NES when it comes to hardware sprites.
- The sprites use the second set of 16 color registers, with every 2 sprites using 4 colors (one transparent) in groups. This is fixed in hardware and it's an annoying limitation.
- The COPPER can change the colors of the sprites midframe, cut them to make more vertically and repeat them horizontally. This greatly increases their number.
- Besides that the Amiga also has a blitter chip, that can move blocks of memory around with masks. It can be used to draw sprites onto the background. This essentially means the Amiga has unlimited sprites (or as many as it can draw in an acceptable framerate).
- For audio, it has a 4 channel 8 bit PCM chip, capable of up to 28Khz but no game went further than 22Khz. The channels are hard panned for stereo. 2 right, 2 left. It's possible to do software mixing but it's CPU intensive. It has no effects like echo or anything you'd find on the SNES. The filter is controllable in both hardware and software unlike the fixed filtering on the SNES.
- The lack of audio channels meant that lazy programmers sometimes made games with only sound effects, or only music, not both.
- The Amiga doesn't have VRAM or Audio RAM, the memory on the system is shared between the chips and the CPU. As the RAM is about twice as fast as the CPU, there isn't much contention between chips. However, using more than 16 colors cuts into CPU time during active display, a 50% cut if all 64 colors are used. This is also why a lot of games stuck to 16 colors to guarantee 50 fps.

- So called Fast Ram could be used to fix this (only usable by the CPU), but it wasn't used during the OCS era. The Amiga had an expansion for another extra 512kb of Ram (not usable by the chips), but it used the same bus, so it still had contention.



- It can do parallax scrolling by splitting the background into two 3bit sets. That means 7 colors for each only (this includes sprites drawn by the blitter). This is why games like Turrigan 3 are so low color in areas with parallax.
- It's also possible to do parallax by repeating sprites, a few games did this. Jim power did it to make a third independent layer.
- It's also possible to simply draw 1 of the bitplanes with the blitter for a 2 color background. A lot of games did this, James Pond 2 being the best example. Agony does it for a third layer.

Much like the Atari 800, MSX and Commodore 64 released before it, the Amiga was a game machine in computer form. Most other computers of the time were not.

One other such "non-game machine" computer was the Atari ST, released at the same time. The ST used an 8Mhz 680000, was a lot cheaper, could have 16/512 colors onscreen using a similar layout to the Amiga, and used a [crappy] rebranded AY chip for audio much like the one on the MSX.

Due to the price, it quickly became very popular, and lots of games were developed for it. Since it has no game related hardware, all sprites and backgrounds had to be drawn by the CPU.

Since the Amiga took awhile to catch up in price, most games were straight ports, using just the CPU for everything, replacing only the audio. This is why most games look horrible.

For examples of Amiga games that make good use of the hardware (including showing some of it's limitations), see:

Wolfchild, Kid Chaos, Turrigan 3, Virocop, Alien Breed 2, Disposable Hero, Agony, Jim Power, Risky Woods, Apidya, Elfmania, Lotus 2, ATR, Fighting Spirit, Worms, Road Rash, Shadow of the Beast 1-3, James Pond 2."

And I would like to thank Kamahl once again for being so very helpful with the TG16 article, of some help to me in the Neo Geo article, and now for giving us this information on the Amiga. Reading it now for the third time it makes more sense to me than it did the first two times. Yet, time ran out for me, and thus, I am presenting it as-is, with full credit to him, rather than taking it and working it into an actual article.

Anyway, our look at Fanboyism, and the 16-bit console wars now draws to a close. Thank you so very much to those who have followed it in its entirety, especially to those who have been kind enough to comment on it, and those kind enough to promote it on Facebook. You guys are the best! Thanks to Bryan Roppolo, general editor of RTM for giving me the opportunity, and to Rob Luther for hooking me up with him. Hopefully by press time next month, I will have had an idea for what to do next, and have it written up. No promises, but series on the 8-bit and 32/64-bit console wars are possible. Stay tuned, and thanks again!



Wayne Green / Incider Magazine

I got some family things that occupy a lot of my time these days (not fun). While I've been playing some iPhone games, I haven't had much interest in playing the old Apple II games. However, writing an article is a nice distraction.



A little while ago, I saw a posting on A2-Central that mentioned the passing of Wayne Green. Wayne Green was the founder of many magazines including InCider, an Apple II oriented magazine for which the Apple II Incider column is named after.

Article on the passing of Wayne Green: <http://www.trs-80.org/wayne-green/>

While my RTM column is named after Incider magazine, Interestingly enough, Incider was NOT the first magazine I read. I found a stash of A+ magazine my dad had and got hooked on that first. I believe my dad (or I through my parents) got newer issues of A+ magazine by the newsstand rather than by subscription.

Somewhere along the way, I found my dad's stash of Incider magazines too! I started reading the magazine too though I think I preferred A+ overall. As time went on, Incider and A+ got merged into Incider / A+. I continued reading until the final issue in July of 1993.

Most young kids who were into computers in the 1980's usually got into programming and other technical aspects of the machines. Unlike those young kids, I was always a "user". I figured out how to use programs like "Print Shop", "Appleworks", etc and then used them for specific personal purposes or projects. That is probably why I favored A+, Incider and Incider / A+

magazines. There was very little programming in these magazines. Instead they reviewed hardware and software and talked about different things you could do with the many software programs and hardware that was available for the Apple II.

This "user" attitude still carries with me today, except I apply it to my job as a Sales Engineer. I learn my company's SaaS products, figure out some things it can do and then I help our Sales team try to sell them. Not an easy job, but it's quite fun. I never imagined I would say that about Sales.

Some interesting factoids about A+, Incider and Incider A+. At one point, I had the premier issues for both magazines (think A+ was missing the cover). As I went through college, I started cleaning up some piles and sound off some of my older issues of the magazines to collectors. I believe I may have accidentally dumped the premier issues as well.

One hope I do have is that the publishers of A+, Incider and Incider A+ release an archive of the magazines in the future. I would love to read some past issues for old times sake.

See you all next month.

Additional Reading:

Apple II History: Incider

<http://apple2history.org/history/ah21/#03>



Part 1: NES Edition

Why hello there Junkieites, RTM Fanatics, and the general public at large, Nick D, aka Atari Man here in what will be a 4 part series entitled Lasting Legacy: 5 Games That Could Use a Remake In The Next 5 Years. Allow me to explain the premise of this and why I decided to do this as a series here at RTM. If you just finished up eating a plate of bacon while listening to a Rob Luther inspired podcast (and really, who hasn't done this?) feel free to grab another plate of pig candy because this is important stuff people. Ok, so maybe not.

The fact is, I used to constantly write articles that were lists of things on my Hubpages account, and they always seemed to get a nice response from people. One of them, in fact, was about this topic of remakes. But I decided to take it one step further and talk about games that really could use one within the next few years because, even if this is merely one gamer's opinion, this series or franchise is going to lose relevance or importance in gaming history if they don't. There are so many games coming out that could end up taking the place of these iconic games, and more importantly, as I wrote previously, the gaming industry, in some aspects, is getting stale, and these remakes could really help boost sales and bring in more former hardcore gamers back to the fold.

Second, I really did enjoy playing through and reviewing DuckTales Remastered and it really got me thinking what certain games would be like if given the proper attention that game and that franchise was given by developers. So, how are we going to go about this series? It's fairly simple really. I've narrowed the series down to 5 games from 4 classic consoles. I apologize if your console of choice is not on this list, and perhaps over time, if this is given enough attention by readers, I'll consider expanding to others, but for now we are limited to 5 games from the NES, SNES, Genesis, and N64. These are the systems that were around me constantly growing up, so for me, these are the systems which libraries I am most familiar with. I apologize ahead of time if certain systems have games from certain genres only, but truth be told, some systems had libraries with heavy doses of certain genres, so it was easy to pick from them, still, I tried my best. We begin today with the NES, that classic and iconic system that introduced us to some truly legendary games and characters. The following are the 5 games I feel would do well to have a remake, and, truth be told, I am still scratching my head as to why some of these haven't been given the proper remake treatment.



Come on developers, even this random potato knows better than you.

Déjà Vu

It's no secret that my love of this game is vast, and it is still one of my favorite games to play on my NES console. It seems to me that over the years, the idea of point and click games, and thus the love of them by gamers, has seemingly vanished, and while I don't feel this is the avenue a developer should take should they choose to bring this game back to life, I do feel elements from that formula should be implemented. Déjà Vu was created by Kemco, which made other point and click titles for the NES, along with Rescue The Embassy Mission, and I feel a lot of Kemco's work for the NES gets overlooked, which is a sad shame really. Déjà Vu hasn't been seen since the days of the Gameboy Color, and you'd think with the recent years emergence of the game L.A. Noire that somebody would have jumped at the chance to counter it with a semi known game like this one, but no one ever did. I feel a nice mix of the Noire style along with the established point and click would really make this title a hit with gamers, and if it isn't done within the next 5 years, I feel the number of people who don't know about the NES game (and trust me, there are a lot of them) will continue to grow.



The original NES gangsta, Ace Harding, share his deep thoughts on Microsoft. Well said, Ace.

River City Ransom

The story of River City Ransom, the game, is an interesting one, in that it initially wasn't that well received, or at least did not get the fanfare it now has, that cult following, until much later. Who didn't have fun turning thugs into coins and hearing that now infamous yell about puking? I know I certainly did. However, over time, any sequels to this game were regulated to handheld systems, and some were only import releases. I've heard rumblings about remakes of this game, but nothing fully concrete and conclusive from what I could find. Truth be told, this would probably be a difficult game to remake, because I don't feel a true modern version of this game would be the answer, and in fact, hurt the cult following this franchise has. However, something along the lines of what was done for the Scott Pilgrim game, which, if you couldn't tell, was a bit of an homage to River City Ransom, might be the answer here.



Linus, without his security blanket, sharing the thoughts every River City Ransom fan has over why there hasn't been a remake.

Bucky O'Hare

What's that? You didn't comment on my posting of the Bucky O'Hare intro one Monday on the Retro Junkies Facebook page? You must do this at once! Ok, so did you? Really, you're not pulling my chain? Alright. Well, while this may just be one man's vain attempt to bring this former struggling cartoon series into the limelight, I also cannot ignore the fact that the arcade game wasn't just good, it was VERY good, and sadly, the home console game we were subjected to just wasn't, not at all. At this point I'd take a re-release of the arcade game, or something similar, but it's kind of sad that a cartoon show with such a catchy theme (admit it, you love it!) and a decent plot (for a 90s cartoon) was given such a terrible home console game after having such a fresh and awesome arcade port. Bucky and his crew saved the galaxy from evil toads, won't someone save him from video game and cartoon obscurity?



More of this...



And less of this abomination..for the love of green rabbit heroes everywhere.

Battletoads

So I'm sure this may seem a bit silly to some folks, why a guy like me, a writer, a highly educated scholar, would be talking about a franchise that many view as nothing more than a blatant rip off of our Heroes In A Half Shell, but let's keep a few things in mind. One, this game wasn't just hard, it busted your balls. Two, the Dark Queen was smoking hot. And third, and most importantly, this franchise is really overdue for something new, and to be honest, aside from the fact Rare was behind this awesome game, I don't see what the hold up is. If Double Dragon can be turned into Double Dragon Neon (with pretty good results) then why hasn't anyone done something similar with our pimply friends? There are few games on the original NES library more deserving of a

remake, and I hope it happens soon, because my fear is this franchise will sink into some dark unknown, some video game purgatory, in which it may never return from.



And really, who wants to argue with the crazy one?

Chip N' Dale: Rescue Rangers

Out of all the games on this short list, perhaps none are as easy to explain why they are in need of a remake more than this one. Yes, there was a sequel, and yes, it did pretty well, but after that, our furry adventurers were never seen or heard from again! As many of you stated to me after my review of DuckTales Remastered (Read it..READ IT!!) a lot of us are hoping for similar results with other Disney games from that era, and for me, I'd definitely put this one up there for some serious consideration. Come on people, make it a prerequisite of any Disney game remake. If seemingly everyone knows the theme song to the original cartoon, it gets a remake, no questions asked.

StarTropics

Just on innovation and reception alone, no game on this list is truly as deserving of a remake than this one. Hampered by what many felt was a subpar sequel, while being initialized praised as a game that was the “natural evolution of the Legend Of Zelda” it really has me quite confused while there’s never been a true remake of a game that actually made you use a packed in letter in order to solve the game. If a remake is not made of this title soon, it will definitely go into video game history as a truly wasted opportunity by Nintendo and everyone associated with this franchise.

Well, there you have it. Next month I take a look at 5 SNES titles that could use a remake within the next 5 years. Until then, take care, and remember..

GAME ON!



Tune In

Music has always played a key role in my life, and from a very young age I always knew it would play a vital role in my life. In 3rd grade I began learning how to play the trumpet, and later I would go on to get more involved in the singing and songwriting aspect of music. As a gamer, one of the first things that really connects me with a game is the music. I may not always remember a key plot or a key point of a particular game, but I can always close my eyes and listen to a song from a game and immediately know what game it is the music is from. So I decided, as part of this whole new theme of being thankful for things in gaming I would start a column discussing a few tunes from retro games that have stood with me over the years, as both an overview of whatever information I can gather about the song, as well as my own personal stories connected to them. I call this column Bits and Bleeps, and today we begin with 3 tunes that are very near and dear to my heart, 3 that I still listen to on an almost daily basis.

Why Yes, I Do Feel The Ambience

It's no secret that the folks at Rare really did know how to make some truly awesome soundtracks, especially during the era of the SNES, and no series is a better example of this than the Donkey Kong Country series, and for me, no track more so than Aquatic Ambience. I could be having the worst day ever, and just sitting back and listening to that track takes me to a place of relaxation, which for a guy who works third shift while running a video game business is a pretty hard thing to do, and yet my mind can easily slide into Aquatic Ambience, the sounds really taking me back to a simpler time in my life.



When things were filled with WONDER.

Aquatic Ambience, like a lot of tunes for Rare, were composed mainly by David Wise, who along with other composers, really helped create some stellar soundtracks on some of the company’s top titles. David left Rare in 2009 stating that “there’s just not the opportunity to create the soundtracks that Rare was previously known for” which is a really sad thing. David also stated that one of the biggest reasons for the music being what it was, is his love, along with the other composers, to really push the limits of what could be done within the limited 64kb of memory in the SNES. He really did enjoy pushing those limits to the furthest extent, and Aquatic Ambience clearly shows what could be done right with the waveform data available to Wise and others.

Pulling the trigger

Another game that takes up a lot of my retro hours, as I call them, is Chrono Trigger, and I could write a whole article just on the great music from this game, but for the purpose of this article, I want to focus just on the theme you hear when you let the game go through the opening on the SNES. The music for the game was mainly composed by Yasunori Mitsuda with assistance from veteran Final Fantasy composer Nobuo Uematsu. The score for the game took over a month and a half to develop. That’s

dedication folks. What's most interesting to note about that opening track in the game, a truly epic and driving force in the game, is that Mitsuda still feels it's "rough around the edges" while still crediting it as a major influence in his love of composing music. For me personally, this track is motivational. I could be sitting there, needing to crank out tons of work, and I put this track on and feel like I can move mountains, that I'm getting ready to do battle, and I think, like a lot of good SNES RPGs, Chrono Trigger didn't just succeed on great gameplay and a killer story, but also on the music, and this title track really sets the tone for the game, which is what every good video game soundtrack should do.



THIS MUSIC PUTS ME IN THE ZONE! I WANNA PUT PEOPLE IN AN ANKLELOCK, AHHHHH!!

It's Just An Instinct

If you were one of the fortunate folks in the 90s to have purchased Killer Instinct for the SNES, you were treated to a copy of Killer Cuts, a collection of the game tracks for the game. Created by some real geniuses at Rare, this marked a milestone era for the company as far as games and video game music is concerned. The Killer Instinct main theme has been covered so many times over, and it has really taken on a life of its own with the return of the franchise on the Xbox One. The game was filled with some great music, but none truly as iconic as that opening theme. It really was a different kind of music for a game at the time. We were so used to the music in games like Mortal Kombat and Street Fighter for fighting games, Killer Instinct's opening theme really took a lot of people by surprise, and it was a pleasant surprise for our ears.



Like a good pair of ear muffs. Oh boy!

Next month, I'll be choosing 3 other tracks from video games and sharing my thoughts on them. Until then, take a listen to the above tracks and see if you agree with me.

Take care, and remember..

GAME ON!



What This Gamer Is Thankful For

by Nick DeMarco



I'm not a big fan of Thanksgiving. Oh sure, gorging on food and watching football before taking a nap all sounds like great fun, but it's the whole getting together with family and friends thing I'm not big on. Don't get me wrong, I love my friends and family very much, but it's this ridiculous thing they insist on doing every year that actually makes me sweat, and why do you ask? Well the joke I make is that I'm not an improv comedian, I can't just think of something right on the spot, so when someone asks me "Hey Nick, what are you thankful for this year?" my mind doesn't become flooded with the endless notions of love, devotion, family, or anything. I don't even think "Hey, I'm just glad to be alive" because to me, that's a generic answer. Now if I had a moment to really think about it, really devote time to my answer, it would probably be something like "Bill Cosby, because really, he's Bill Cosby" or "That all alien movies are fake, and that I get to keep my brain." Yeah, definitely something like that.



And this. YOU'LL NEVER TAKE IT AWAY FROM ME, YOU VILE ALIENS, NEVER!

But what about my life as a gamer, especially this totally awesome year for me, meeting such amazing people, and really diving into this whole thing of writing about retro gaming and gaming in general? I must have some things that I am thankful about with that, right? Of course I do! There are actually a lot of things I'm thankful for in this realm of my life, but the following are the three of most importance.

Who Is This Rob You Speak Of?

Taking nothing away from the equally awesome Landon, or the countless other great people I've met through the communities of RTM and The Retro Junkies, Rob Luther was the guy who first took notice of my writing, recommended RTM to me, and has remained friends with me, despite my constant bashing of his Genesis Gems podcast (Curse you, Genesis evildoers!) and my obsession over his shiny teeth of unknown power and persuasion. I don't have as many conversations with Rob as I used to, we're both busy fellows, but for me not to be thankful of Rob taking a chance on me, inviting me into the fold, as it were, would be wrong of me, and I may be crazy, but wrong, not on most days. So thank you, Robert Peabody Luther (Bet none of you knew that was Rob's middle name!) may your shiny teeth and useless knowledge of Genesis titles cover the aura of your life cycle with as many great things as possible, like Retro Junkies licensed fruit chews and bobbleheads.



Because really, who WOULDN'T want a Rob Luther bobblehead? Operators are standing by.

Bryan..Yes, Bryan

Any guy who can politely ignore my arrogance of wanting a sprite on the RTM page is worthy of thanks. I often feel bad for Bryan because for all the efforts he puts in to RTM, there often isn't enough in response to his work and the work of others. Bryan allows me to pretty much write what I choose, and with my bizarre sense of humor and knowledge of things few people care about, that's quite the feat. I still get a kick out of how I write an email that's way too much hot air and Bryan just responds with "Thanks!" or "Great as usual" which is Bryan for "Please don't send me spam about an African Prince and his millions that he's sending to my personal bank account" or "You're great Nick, but I really don't want you anywhere near my house." I heart you, Bryan.



Even if you are secretly the evil wizard lord Ganon in 80s cartoon form. It's ok, we can make it work.

That Glorious Technicolor Community

I'm thankful to all of you, whether you choose to read my nonsensical shenanigans or not, although I'd really hope you would. I mean, it's a tough job being this wacky and silly all the time, so when you all tune into The Retro Junkies Facebook page or RTM and say "Ain't nobody got time for that!" or however you choose to say it, it makes me sad. It makes Rob sad. It makes Bryan sad. It makes that other Nick sad. It makes Thaddeus The Unofficial Nomadic Tribesmen mascot of RTM and The Retro Junkies sad. It kills unicorns. The pretty ones. So please, get addicted to our work like nicotine. Do it. Do it now!



A community with more suction than the Suck-O-Matic. For real.

I'd also like to add that I'm thankful for my Wii and it's countless emulators and games that are nicely packaged into an SD card on it. It makes me a happy panda. And we all know pandas are awesome..



Because every self-serving RTM article requires a cute/sad little panda...

Right?



A Retro Thanksgiving

As I sit here writing this article today, I can't keep from smiling. I can hear bits and pieces of A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving echoing from the living room. I can see fall's red and gold hues burning through the windows. And, to top everything off, I'm drinking coffee with a splash of pumpkin spice creamer. It's sappy; I know, but this is one of the very few moments in life where all is well with the world. Sure, I have to work tomorrow. This week will most likely bring a new set of challenges that will test my faith, patience, and character. However, at this very moment, I can truly say life is good. And even when things aren't going so smoothly—I suppose life is still good! While I take in this beautiful afternoon for all it has to offer, I just want to take a step back and humbly thank the retro gaming community—the people that have taken time out of their busy lives to give me advice, constructive criticism, or say few kind words that have gone a very long way. These people are my friends. They are people I trust. And I never thought that a little Facebook page, of all things, would play such a big part in who I am today.



Ryu VS Sagat in 2003

Just about this time a year ago, I was sitting in a Bojangles' Famous Chicken 'N Biscuits restaurant in Canton, North Carolina waiting for my best friend Landon Long to show up. Landon had recently bought a beautiful home in Canton, and I was meeting him there bright and early to help him move. As I sat there sipping my coffee, (Do you see a trend here?) I started thinking about my decade long friendship with the big man. You see, on the surface, Landon and I are polar opposites. Landon is a country boy from Robbinsville, NC. I'm a city slicker originally from Philadelphia, PA and later Gloucester City, NJ. Landon is 6'7". I'm 5'9". Landon was outgoing. I was shy. Landon played basketball and football in high school. I never played a sport in my life aside from pickup hockey on the weekends.

When I moved from New Jersey to North Carolina in 2002, the guidance counselor asked Landon to give me a ride to Tri-County Community College since he and I had the same schedule that year. At first, I wasn't too keen on the idea. *This guy's going to get tired of me real quick*, I thought to myself. I even remember walking up to him during lunch and introducing myself that first week. I recall being intimidated by not only his hulking presence as his back faced me, but the entire lunch table of athletes staring at me as I walked up.



Check out our friend John's Nerd Noise Radio Pages on Facebook

I tapped on Landon's shoulder.

"Hey, man. My name's Rob. I just want to thank you for agreeing to give me a ride to Tri-County this year," I said.

Landon grinned and said, "Sure."

He shook my hand, and I walked off.

That was it. That's when I knew Landon Long was a good guy. So what did this huge, outgoing athlete and this short, introverted nerd have in common? One thing.

Classic games.

That's all we would ever talk about amidst our trips to and from Tri-County that year. I'd go to Landon's house and play his Super Nintendo. He'd come to my place and play my Sega Genesis. I'd watch him defeat Gannon in Ocarina of Time. He'd watch me defeat the Dark Dragon in Shining Force. We'd watch Family Matters and The Lady's Man at his place. We'd watch Clerks and Mallrats at mine. Landon quickly became my best friend back in 2002.

And he's been my best friend ever since.

The winter days we spent playing hockey in the high school parking lot. The summer days we spent flipping jet skis on the lake. The day I was his best man. The day he was mine.

That morning at the Bojangles' in Canton, NC, I thought about all those good times with The Great Landino.

Then, as I mulled over the idea of getting another biscuit, I had an idea. Why not create a Facebook page dedicated to classic games? Heck, why not record a podcast? Landon and I could just do what we always did in the past—just sit back, play classic games, have a few laughs, and just be ourselves. ...What could we call it? Well, I loved The Retro League podcast...

Nineties^{90s} ENTERTAINMENT SHOW

Check out our friend Nick's NES Podcast

Why not... The Retro Junkies?

...Honestly, I wish I had a neat story about how I came up with the name, but I just thought it sounded cool.

Then Landon walked in. As he scooted into the booth, we exchanged the usual pleasantries, and then I went in for the kill.

"Hey, Landon, how would you feel about us starting up a Facebook page and recording a podcast dedicated to classic games? We could call it The Retro Junkies."

I'll never forget it his response. It's seared into my brain! Without missing a beat, just like the day I thanked him for giving me a ride, he took a bite out of his chicken biscuit, shrugged his shoulders and said, "Sure."

It was that easy.

We created our Facebook page in mid-November with two goals in mind—to be kind to others and to have fun. We'd post topics and videos where we simply played classic games without a script. ...Hey, it was nothing special, but we didn't care!



Our Ninja Turtles podcast
with our friend Josh!

And this is where all the many thank yous come in. Throughout the early days of the Facebook page, we met our good friends John Wedgeworth (St. John, Des Gamer), Tim Worley, Bob Dudley, Bayou Bill, Erick Purscell, Adam Hainey, Jeff Komar, Jay Murphy, Super Mario Guerra, Rockman James, Justin Harris, and so many other good guys and gals that would stick with us to this very day. Thank you, guys!

In late November, I heard The Retro League podcast mention an online retro gaming magazine called Retro Gaming Times Monthly. After reading a few back issues, I knew I wanted to be a small part of this long running online magazine. I sent the editor Bryan Roppolo an email with a sample of my writing, and he was kind enough to give me a chance to prove myself. I got to write about two of my favorite NES games for the December issue—Batman and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles III: The Manhattan Project. I was on cloud nine. I loved to write, and I loved classic games. Landon then hopped on board with RTM in February and we've been teamed up to review classic games ever since. I'll always be grateful to Bryan for giving us a shot. Bryan would later design our logo, website, and provide some of the best musical videos I've ever seen! Thank you, man!



Check out Rob McCallum's
NES Club documentary

In late February, we finally began recording The Retro Junkies podcast. Our goal was to simply talk about the games we grew up playing. Landon and I had so much fun—despite the poor audio quality, interruptions, and my repeated cackling early on... and ever since! We would eventually meet our friends Nick Stephens of NES Podcast, Josh Witt who would later cohost Turtle Flakes, Derek Slaton (The Video Game Archeologist), Carl Kerby Jr. from It's Not Just a Game, Nick Demarco (Atari Man, Turn to Channel 3), \$1500 from Classic Console Gamer News, Rob McCallum from The NES Club, Preston from Gameroom Junkies, Dylan Cook from What the Shell!, James and Xander from X S Gaming Podcast, Mike and Carrington from No Quarter Podcast, Ferg from The Atari 2600 Game by Game Podcast, and literally dozens of other fellow gamers and podcasters through this little podcast. Thank you all for the kind words and support, guys. I consider us all kindred spirits!

I've often wondered what Landon and I would be doing if we never started The Retro Junkies this time last year. Sure, we'd still be nerding out over classic games, but I think we'd miss out on something truly special—the people. The community. We'd miss out on the classic video gaming trades between one trusted gamer and another. We'd miss out on the encouraging words from a fellow podcaster. We'd miss out on the opportunity to write and read retro gaming articles written from folks around the world. And, most importantly, we'd miss out on all the friendships we've made in just one year. Landon and I believe in the retro gaming community, and we're proud to be a very small part of it!

We'll settle for the last 8-bit house on the left!





Thankful for Pandora's Palace

First, let's get something straight: the Thanksgiving story as we know it is utter turkey droppings.

The proclamation of a "thanksgiving" day in 1637 was to welcome the safe return of colonial volunteers in Massachusetts who massacred 700 Pequot Indians in what is now Mystic, Conn. It also turns out some Spaniards in what is now Florida celebrated a Thanksgiving 56 years before the Pilgrims, feasting near St. Augustine with the Native inhabitants on stewed pork and garbanzo beans.



Fast forward a few centuries and Thanksgiving is now about serfs being torn from their families by robber barons insisting on bait for their Colosseums of Commercialism so the annual bloodsport of Black Friday can begin a day earlier than tradition dictates.

With that in mind, what's a fitting old-school coin-op arcade game for this month's MAME review?

Since nobody saw fit to bring a coin-op version of Custer's Revenge to Chuck E. Cheese's, it means looking elsewhere overriding themes of death, food and greed. Fortunately (within this context, at least) there's a rather impressive and nearly obscure machine whose title alone hints at the devastation inflicted upon the original Americans by folks determined to make the land civilized.

(And before I reveal the title, let's get something clear: I like Thanksgiving in the tradition of 1) playing football, 2) watching football (and I'm fine if it's the Redskins playing somebody) 3) feasting on non-Tofurkey and 4) actually giving thanks for the year's blessings. But, as with politics and religion, my beliefs aren't threatened by being willing to acknowledge some flaws.)

Pandora's Palace is a 1984 platformer by Konami with a Roman-era theme that rises above most of the Donkey Kong-inspired knockoffs of the era by offering a nice variety of well-designed levels and a hero with a couple of Super Mario-like touches. The difficulty level is harder than most, but those extra touches gives your character enough of a boost to make him reasonably durable.

The opening of the game shows a treasure chest opening, with a mad amount of treasure and skulls spewing out in all directions. These apparently end up scattered in a bunch of temple-like rooms and it's up to your money-loving hero (wearing the cliched white robe and green-leaf headdress) to find the loot by navigating from the top left of each screen to an exit or treasure at the lower right.

Of course, Death is also present and in far greater numbers than riches. It appears in the initial waves as skulls, then progresses to some creatures in green and gold that I don't have a clue about in terms of identity. Also, for some reason the Romans really like their fire pits and there's a bunch of them you'll need to jump over along the way. In latter waves extra-high flames, which appear to be part of what emerged from that Pandora's chest, will erupt at frequent intervals on some pits.



In your favor, the Romans also really like their food, so there's a buffet of grapes hanging about (although they end up notoriously absent on some latter screens). Eating any of these turns your character into some kind of mighty warrior, complete with a red Roman-era superhero outfit, and he can smite his enemies by landing on them from above. It doesn't have to be a jump – you can climb down a pillar (the equivalent of ladders) or stand on a moving platform that descends on them. Also, a sideways collision as superhero guy isn't fatal, as the death guys will merely bounce him back a ways. Of course, a lot of times that ends up with your guy in a fire pit, which is still fatal.

Backing up slightly, let's talk about those moving platforms. I always considered first-century indoor plumbing to be the height of Roman architectural genius, but the rooms of Pandora's palace are filled with contraptions that defy the laws of engineering, physics and gravity. Some move up and down with the aid of giant corkscrews (presumably lacking electricity). Others extend fixed platforms horizontally, sort of like a pull-out table for those extra uninvited Thanksgiving relatives. Still others are completely free floating, which upon reflection probably isn't that remarkable compared to giant skulls able to pursue you with a degree of intelligence.

In any event, some unusual physics apply to these platforms as far as your character is concerned. He can fall more than an expected amount of distance if jumping down onto a moving platform. But he won't survive a fall of the same length if jumping from a moving platform onto a fixed surface. I'm generously choosing to interpret this as intentional instead of a bug.

In a pattern similar to many games back then, you go through a couple of normal stages (the first ends by opening a temple door, the second by reaching a treasure) followed by a challenge stage where you can rack up points with no risk of dying. The challenge stage places a bunch of enemies on the screen and your goal in permanent superhero mode is to jump on all them before time runs out. The "timer" is depicted by a bird that appears at the top of the screen after a bit and, after flying most of the way across, explodes in a way that somehow sends you back to mortal reality (hey, it's as realistic as those gravity-free platforms).

Graphics and sound aren't the most advanced, whimsical or anything else, but they get the job done and there is a fun chiptune that plays when you're in superhero mode. The big challenge with gameplay is the sheer number of enemies and hazards, and the challenge of timing your jumps to clear their rather large size. The speed of foes is also a considerable challenge after even a few waves.

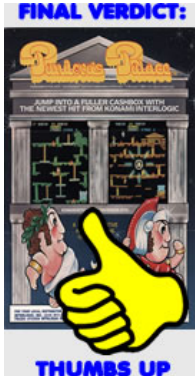


A few visuals can be a little confusing in the heat of the moment. The broken, half-height pillars, for instance, look like barriers at first glance, although you can pass through them freely (I hesitated approaching one for the first time, which led to a fatal error timing a jump). Also, in the slightly negative category, is while it will take a while to become proficient, the gameplay does get a bit monotonous since the goal on each screen is largely the same. As best as I can tell, there's eight levels that repeat with more enemies and different placement of some items. Back in 1994 that'd be a bonanza; in 2013 it's a demo.

The DIP switches offer a good range of options, including starting with three to seven men (I have no shame in admitting I love and shamelessly take advance of such generosity), four levels of difficulty, and four different point-level settings for extra men. It's also mildly amusing to note the coin options range from seven games for one quarter to one game for four quarters (I find myself wondering if any arcades opted for the latter and, if so, if anyone actually played it).

Pandora's Palace has a rarity rating of three out 100 on The Killer List of Video Games scale and I didn't see anything suggesting any home versions were released or attempted. The obscurity is unfortunate since the limited modern-day internet chatter about the game is just about universally positive, even among those who complain about the difficulty. But it's also understandable Pandora got lost in a numbers game: Konami's coin-op releases alone at that time included Track & Field, Roc'n Rope, Antarctic Adventure and Juno First.

I wouldn't bet the turkey on getting the younger crowd to set aside GTA V in favor of this once the Thanksgiving football games are over, but exercise your authority to relegate them to the kids' table and the more mature crowd should be more appreciative. Unfortunately you probably won't be able to survive a game long enough to get out of your spouse's demand to get into the kitchen and help with the dishes so (s)he can get a good spot in the Black Thursday waiting line at Macy's.



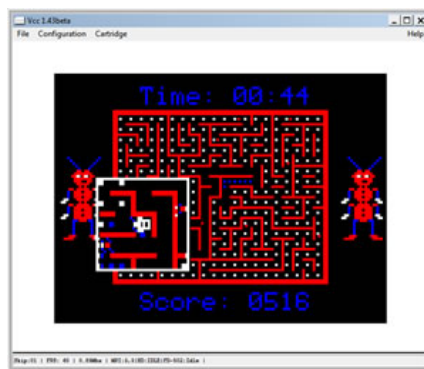
CoCo Style Pacman Mania

Happy Thanksgiving Retrogaming Times readers!! This month we have another Color Computer 3 game review – and it's none other than Pacman. Actually, it's a Pacman Tribute game by Nick Marentes. Nick is no stranger to my articles, having contributed information and commentary on the CoCo3 article from earlier this year. Half way thru the Donkey Kong review last month, I realized I wanted to do another well-known arcade game for the CoCo 3, and Pacman was the obvious choice, so, on with the show!

Released by Namco in Japan in May of 1980, Pacman and received a mediocre response there and was considered just another video game. However, in October of 1980, Midway licensed Pacman for release in the United States – and its success took the competition completely by surprise. The game was such a hit that it outsold all other video games, and generated more revenue Namco/Midway than Star Wars did for 20th Century Fox.

Along with the natural progression of arcade to home translations, Pacman was no different. Home versions of Pacman first appeared on the Atari 2600, Atari 8 bitters and the 5200, Commodore, Intellivision, Apple II and many others. Atarisoft had been working on a version for the Colecovision, but, legal issues with Coleco's Atari 2600 adapter put that on ice – though Colecovision Pacman has surfaced since the 80's from several sources.

The Usual Suspects:

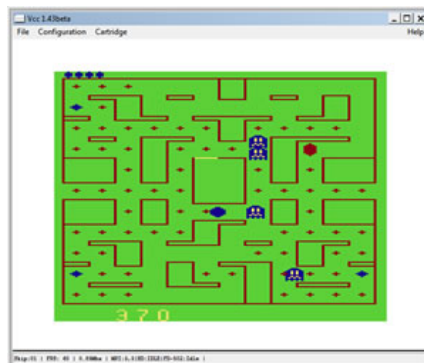


MegaBug

As with most other arcade ports to the CoCo, Tandy's venerable little machine didn't get an officially licensed version of Pacman. One of the first games released that seemed to be even close to Pacman was Mega Bug, written by Steve Bjork and released by Datasoft.

In Mega Bug, you navigate thru a maze eating dots, while trying to avoid the little blue creatures chasing you. When you do get caught, you hear a digitized voice saying "We got ya!" The game utilizes a magnified area of the screen that follows you around, but, it also somewhat masks the blue things chasing you. Game play wise, it is similar to Pacman, though, it's also very different. There are no power pill power ups, nor are there any extra lives - so when the blue things get you, it's time for a new game.

A more identifiable port was Ghost Gobbler, which is very much like the arcade in that you are a hungry semi-circle, eating dots and being chased by ghosts, and somewhat resembles the Atari 2600 version.

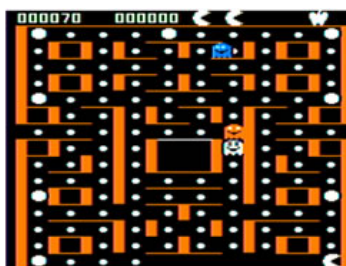


Ghost Gobbler

Due to the limited color palette of the CoCo, I doubt an arcade perfect translation is even possible. However, a game that utilized artifact colors could've gotten closer. The premise of Ghost Gobbler is the same as Pacman – it just looks different. After playing thru several screens, I feel safe in saying that I doubt if Ghost Gobbler has any intermission screens like the original Pacman does. The dots that Pacman consumed are replaced by plus-signs in Ghost Gobbler, and the ghosts look similar to those in Pacman, but, Ghost Gobbler himself looks more like a hexagon with a mouth than Pacman.

Speaking of an artifact color based game, the next game up is Snak-Pak from Tom Mix software. Like Ghost Gobbler above, it does it's best to be a worthwhile clone of Pacman.

This game would not run under the VCC emulator, so I had to revert back to MESS 1.36. Yes, Snak-Pak utilizes artifact colors. While the graphics are pretty detailed with the smiling ghosts, the game play is slow and cumbersome, and the animation isn't the smoothest around. Also, there are more power-pills on the map. I have no earthly idea if the game has any intermissions like the original Pacman since I couldn't make myself play it long enough to find out. It should also be noted that Snak-Pak only has three ghosts on the screen.



Snak-Pak

There's more to the Snak-Pak story, though. According to L. Curtis Boyle's CoCo Game site, there are several versions of Snak-Pak – and you can read more on it at his site. However, there appears to be no less than four versions of this game. Authoring credits are not fully known, and it seems to be the same with the distribution channels. The graphics have changed during the game's evolution, but, the four versions are clearly the same game – you can see the different versions at Curtis's site.

Next Please:

In consideration of the above efforts, all of the above games would be good for an honorable mention if I were handing out awards. But on the flipside of that comment, the above games were meant for play on the CoCo 1 & 2, and while they were all lacking in some aspect, they were good games for the CoCo 1 & 2 lines. Besides, I'm not handing out awards, and there were a couple other Pacman clones that just weren't very good or entertaining enough to discuss in this article. Unlike what 'The King' did for Donkey Kong, there doesn't appear to be a standout Pacman clone for the CoCo 1 & 2.

For the CoCo3, it's a slightly different story. One effort that stands out above those previously mentioned games is Pac-Dude, by Brian O'Neill, for the CoCo3.



Pacdude differs from Pacman in that there are multiple mazes during the game - so I guess you could say that Pacdude is similar to not only Pacman but also Ms. Pacman. Additionally, during my time spent playing Pacdude, I can say that the keyboard controls are quite frustrating - almost maddening. Graphics and sound wise, Pacdude comes in at number 2 for the CoCo 3. While the sounds are not true to the arcade, they seem to fit pretty well to the game. Like the rest of the games mentioned earlier, Pacdude is missing the in-game intermissions, but it is still a very good attempt at a Pacman clone.

Will the REAL Pac-Man Please Come Forward:

That brings us to Nick Marente's Pacman Tribute game. Nick has authored some very cool games for the TRS-80 Model I/III computers, as well as the original TRS-80 Color Computer: Donut Dilemma, Rupert Rythym and Neutroid 2 to name a few.

For the CoCo3, Nick also created Space Intruders and Cosmic Ambush - two of the very best games of their genre.

In 1997, after five years away from CoCo programming, Nick decided to create a new game for the CoCo 3. Not wanting to do the CoCo 3, Pacman or Namco any injustices at all, Nick set out to make a Pacman version for the CoCo 3 that looked, sounded and played as close as possible to the beloved arcade classic. Nick hand drew the graphics on his Amiga 1200 and used digitized recordings of an actual Pacman game for the sound effects. The results are quite impressive.

"I developed Pacman before I had any MAME arcade emulator for my PC which would have made it easier to translate the graphics and sound. Instead, I had a friend who actually owned a real sitdown Pacman arcade machine and we would play it over and over, examining the ghosts AI movements and the flow of the game. Based on these observations, I formulated an AI algorithm that tried to mimick the original ghost AI.

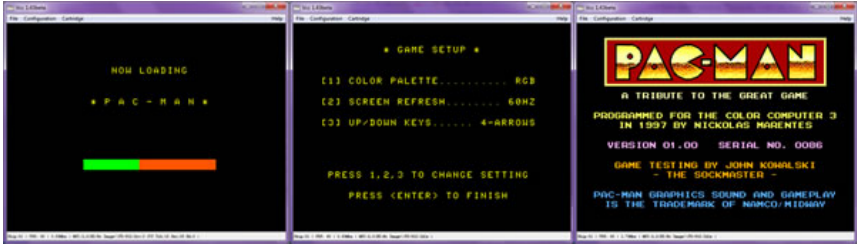
The way this worked was to setup 5 target points on the screen. One in each of the four corners of the maze plus another in the centre. Each ghost was assigned one of these targets and the ghosts would attempt to navigate towards their respective targets.

After a time, the targets were rotated amongst the ghosts and this prevented the ghosts from getting stuck in one area of the maze and have them travel the entire area of the maze in search of the Pacman.

When the X or Y position of the ghosts coincided with the Pacman characters X and Y, the target was changed to the position of the Pacman and the ghost would attempt a course change to zero in on that new target.

If the target was not reached in a set time, the ghosts reverted to the original targeting system. A simple idea that worked uncannily similar to the arcade.

Many years later, I located a document on the internet that explained the actual arcade game AI and I was amazed to find that it to used a similar targeting system, although extended in ways to provide each ghost with a few extra variations."

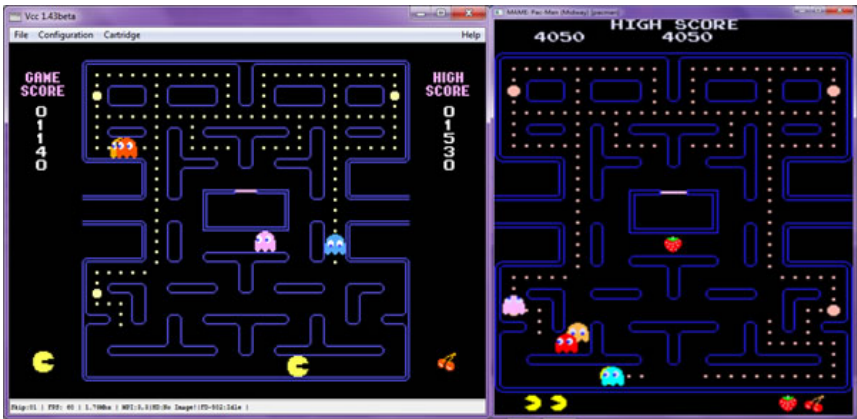


On the left is the loading screen - many CoCo games didn't have a loading screen so all you got was a blank screen while the disk drive spun away. The middle screen is the game setup screen where you can tailor the game to the CoCo3 system you are running Pacman on. On the right is the title screen.

"In order to translate the original arcade sound effects, I actually sat with a cassette recorder and microphone near the cabinet's speaker and recorded all the actual sounds.

I used the CoCo3 running Studio Works to sample the sound effects directly into the CoCo and edited these files into my game."

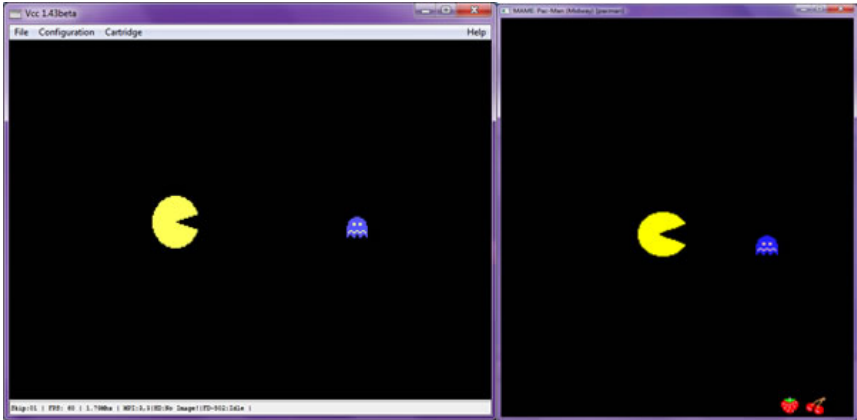
Gameplay:



Above left is Nick's Pacman Tribute level one screen. When compared to the original Pacman running on MAME in the right image (yes, that's level two), the game looks very close to the arcade hit. There are differences in color (due to the CoCo3's color palette limitations) and resolution, but, Nick did a tremendous job with his port to the CoCo3.

"The game graphics was created by hand using Brilliance 2.0 on a Commodore Amiga 1200 based on my observations of the real machine. I also found various screenshots on the internet that I was able to refer to in order to recreate the graphics to suit the CoCo3's 320x225 resolution.

The original arcade machine used a resolution of 224 x 288. It was essentially a normal screen as on the CoCo but tipped sideways to utilize the wider direction as the vertical. Since tipping the CoCo screen on it's side was impractical, I had to compensate by moving the score display area to the sides of the screen, optimising the screen height for the maze."



Nick has stated that the CoCo3 Pacman Tribute game contains all of the original game's intermission shots as well. Even though I enjoyed playing it, I was never really good at Pacman, being able to only get thru about 20 levels back in the day. While I didn't have that kind of time to put into the game play for this article, I can confirm that at least the first intermission is present. Again, the CoCo3 Pacman is on the left, MAME on the right. The in game sound effects and music are there. Some of the effects appear to play a little slower on the CoCo 3 version, and are at a reduced sampling rate, but, I've noticed the same on other platforms as well – and that's without discussing the Atari 2600 version.

"Pacman has been my best private selling game that didn't have the benefit of being sold by a distributor such as Tandy/Radio Shack. All sales were directly from me and most sales were made at the Pennfest 1999 Color Computer festival hosted by Ron Bull."

Game Over Man!!

When compared to some of the other Pacman versions that have appeared on other systems over the years, much like Sockmaster's Donkey Kong, the CoCo3 version by Nick Marentes stands up proudly. It may not be an arcade perfect translation, but, it's VERY close. Nick easily met his goal of creating a game that was as close to the arcade as possible, and indeed did the CoCo3, Pacman and Namco all the justice they deserved.



TMNT IV: Turtles In Time



In the late 1980's and 1990s I was like many kids my age, I was wearing my love of all things Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles on my sleeves. I owned tons of action figures (but never got the Party Wagon, someone buy me one) watched all the movies (even the brutal 3rd installment most hardcore fans would like to forget exists) and of course, watched the cartoon show, even after it lost all it's luster. In addition, as a gamer, you could bet I was either parked in front of my television playing the latest console game, or at the arcades every weekend pumping quarters into their awesome beat em' up classics. So, as part of my November writing theme of writing about things I am thankful for, I'd like to review a game that is very near to my heart, and a game I feel ties a lot of us folks together who love both retro gaming and TMNT, and that would be TMNT IV: Turtles In Time for the SNES. This game sits proudly on my shelf as an awesome anniversary gift from my fiancée, so I decided to pop it into my SNES, sit down in my green TMNT t-shirt, and see if those fond memories come flooding back into my mind, as well as whether this is a game that is enjoyable to play after all these years. Let's kick shell!

Sound 9



Approving of sewer surfin' since 1990

Prior to this game, TMNT games weren't really noted for their music. This isn't to say there weren't some great tunes in the NES games, but with that system's limited hardware, we really didn't get much that really stuck with us as gamers, minus a few things, like the above ground music in the original TMNT game. However, this game changed everything for Turtles fans as far as tunes go. There's truly something here for everyone, from the Alley Cat Blues theme to the Sewer Surfin theme, it's all there and really well done. The music just seems to get better as you go through the game, especially in those levels that take place during different time periods. The sound effects are great too, even though I still wish SOMEONE would make a true TMNT game with James Avery and his iconic Shredder voice, instead of just a generic laugh that no one will remember. While the voices of our heroes all sound the same, little things in this game, like from the moment you hit the button to start the game, to the sounds of thrashing Foot Clan members, all comes together to make something truly unique. This was one of the stronger points of the game during the heyday of the SNES, and it stays true even today.

Graphics 8



Look at his clenched fist.
These graphics make him VERY angry.

While I feel this is the weakest part of the game, it isn't to say that the graphics are terrible. There are a nice variety of enemies, and while the Turtles all look the same, designers did a great job on their weapons. The levels are well made, along with each boss, creating a complete adventure, just for the eyes alone. While I will always prefer the more comic book style of the original arcade game (things just looked tighter, if that makes sense) this was still pretty well made for what limitations the SNES gave designers. Back then it was near impossible to make a perfect arcade port of just about anything, but developers did a very good job with this game graphically.

Gameplay 9



Well that, and the fact I got to wear these sweet threads while playing it.

For me, the best licensed games are those that offer something even for those gamers who are either not familiar with the subject matter, or aren't as diehard as the true fans of the product, and this game accomplishes that. Any fan of this genre of games still regards it as one of the best, both on the SNES, and overall in the realm of gaming. I think one of the main reasons this game is so fun to play is up to this point, TMNT games really didn't offer us that much as far as gameplay. You didn't have a bigger variety of attacks, the ability to use objects in the levels as much, and bosses that offered you a bigger challenge. I still enjoy throwing enemies "through the screen" even if it looks clunky with all those pixels, and the same could be said for smashing enemies back and forth, taking out as many enemies at once as I can. Even stubbing my toe on spikes still brings back some great memories. Playing through this game is still a blast almost 20 years later. Critics will say that the arcade version is better, and maybe in some ways it is, but I still prefer the SNES version, and this game was the main reason I began collecting SNES games in the first place.

Overall 8



Play this game, don't make James Avery say something nasty and MESS YOU UP!

Yes, it's a relative no brainer that if you grew up loving all things TMNT, and you still do, that you owe it to yourself to play this game. That being said, even if you're not, but still love games within this genre, Final Fight, Double Dragon, that sort of thing, Turtles In Time can still leave you entertained as well. Years later, developers are still trying to duplicate the fun of this, and other TMNT games had for gamers of all ages, and maybe in time they will, but perhaps none with as fond memories as this one. Turtle Power!

Well, there you have it. Next month I hope to end the year with a truly special game, and hey, if you know of one you're just dying to see me review, don't hesitate to send me a message on Facebook through the Retro Junkies Facebook page, or through email at ndemarco29@yahoo.com. I'll do my absolute best to accommodate you.

Until then, take care, and remember..

GAME ON!



Saturday At The Arcades

by Nick DeMarco



WWF Wrestlefest



Oh yeah, it is on

So as some of you know, not long before I was discovered by those two crazy dudes at Retro Junkies, Rob and Landon, and became Atari Man on the Retro Junkies forums and on their Facebook, I was toiling away countless hours on Hubpages.com, a blogging site that, if done right, can make you some dough. Of course, my advertising and social media skills are quite limited, so promoting my work was hard, and yet, I had an absolute blast for two years writing for the site. I may even return there in the near future, who knows, but one of the things I loved to do there was review arcade games, and I used to write them every weekend, dubbing them "Saturday At The Arcades" because really, when you stop to think about it, aside from the summer months, few kids could get their parents to take them to a local arcade during the week. Saturday, along with awesome cartoons and highly sugared up breakfast cereals, was also for going to the arcades. So, with that in mind, I decided to resurrect the old column and take a look at reviewing some of my absolute favorite arcade games. There are, however, some things for readers to remember.

1)I do not own actual arcade cabinets. I play arcade games on a MAME emulator, either for my Wii console, or on my laptop. I apologize for that, but sadly I doubt my loving fiancée would appreciate waking up and finding several 100 arcade cabinets in our tiny apartment. It would be awesome, but chances are I'd be sleeping on the couch for a long time. If there was still room for a couch.

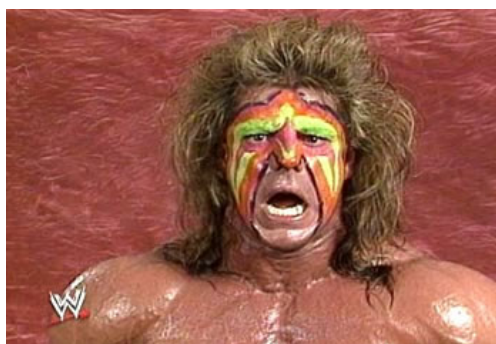
2)My knowledge of arcade games is still a bit limited. I only truly know of the ones I played religiously and thus, that is where I'll be starting for this column.

3)If there's a game you'd like me to review, either comment under this post here on RTM, drop me a line on Facebook, or email me at ndemarco29@yahoo.com and I'll definitely get to it as soon as I can.

Now then, with those formalities out of the way, let's get to our very first game for review today, a game that definitely swallowed up several months, if not years of allowances for me, WWF Wrestlefest!

Sound 8

While certainly not the strongest point of this game, there's still enough there to keep you interested. What I never really understood about wrestling games, even during this time period, is how there were never full or even shortened versions of actual theme songs in the game. Even in this one, while there are subtle versions of wrestling themes, there's nothing concrete there that you can grasp onto. This is a real shame, because I feel the addition of them to this game would have really helped push things over the top. Yes the moves sound great, slamming your opponent into the mat, and the hilarious versions of Hawk and Animal are fun to laugh at now, but there's not much here sound wise to really help this game stand out. What's there is nice, but as a wrestling fan, you're left wanting more.



This guy was left wanting more..toilet paper.

Graphics 9

The graphics in this game, for the time period, are quite impressive. Where in previous wrestling titles, especially on the home console, we're subjected to small, slightly accurate versions of our favorite grapplers, Wrestlefest sports some big, well designed characters, all with their traditional moves and taunts, and with them, the ring is a true sight to behold as well. Outside the ring looks great, and those animations of the wrestlers, both as your own goes to the ring, and your adversaries heading to the ring are very well done. I actually feel the graphics in this game are better than some of the early wrestling titles on the original Playstation.



Seriously, they're better than some PS 1 wrestling games. Would YOU disagree with The Sarge?

Gameplay 8

While there's not much there, what is there is entertaining enough to keep a gamer and wrestling fan busy for a little while. You have the excitement of a Royal Rumble, which allows for a nice amount of wrestlers in the ring at the same time, as well as Saturday Night's Main Event tag team tournament. The process of amping up your character, doing moves in a pattern before hitting their finisher, is really fun, and I actually like how hitting a finisher or a signature move doesn't automatically earn you a victory every time. Each character has a nice set of moves that is fairly easy to learn, so it makes experimenting to find your favorites that much more fun. The challenges get harder in the tag team mode. If this game was missing anything it was a more expansive roster or the ability to unlock other characters.



Like this guy..who used to make me want to wee wee in my little boy pants.

Overall 8

Wrestlefest, in a way, is a sequel to WWF Superstars, which appeared in the late 1980s, and was definitely a step up from that. The game had such a strong following that a remake of it was made for smart phones and tablets within the last few years, although a lot of folks tell me it's just not the same as the original. If you grew up on this game, and pro wrestling of the time period, it's certainly worth tracking down, but don't expect it to be hours and hours of fun, there's just not enough depth to it for that. Still, it's a nice trip down memory lane for anyone who grew up on the WWF and arcade games of the 1990s.



Just for this alone. WHAT A RUSH!!!!

Well, reviewing Wrestlefest sure was a lot of fun. Tune in next month when we take a look at another arcade classic!

Until then take care, and remember..

GAME ON!



Know Your Role

by Nick DeMarco



Earthbound

So before I get into what this column will be about, the topic at hand, all of that, allow me to first answer a question all two of you may be wondering right now “Gosh Nick, there certainly seems to be a lot of you in this issue of RTM. Why is that?” First and foremost, I am not looking to oversaturate this publication with my work. I love writing, and I love video games, but most of all there are two reasons for this sudden rise in my work ethic. One, I am extremely grateful to all the wonderful people I’ve met in the last few months in regards to this magazine and beyond, and this is my way of saying thank you, and second, at one point during this time of writing I had absolutely NO IDEA what I was going to write about. One of the best things about being a creative person is that you do come up with a lot of ideas. The worst part is, especially if you’re me, you doubt anyone will care about your ideas or if they are just downright terrible and not worth your time. Thankfully, I decided to cast my fears aside and work on all my

articles. This one, Know Your Role, came from both my love of roleplaying games, and my love of The Attitude Era in pro wrestling, namely The Rock. What you will see in these articles are simply my reviews of some classic RPGs in my style of reviewing, as you see in my other review columns. These will strictly be for RPGs though, no games that have RPG elements, games that you know, from top to bottom, are RPGs, and we begin this month with an RPG that has mesmerized me for years, that true SNES classic, Earthbound. I decided with the debut of the Wii U a few months back, and the fact this game was one of the initial ones added to the Wii U's Virtual Console it was worth taking another look at. So with that in mind, strike your best hero pose, and say fuzzy pickles!



Because "Say cheese" just isn't good enough.

Sound 9

There are a lot of reasons this game is so beloved, with legions of fans all across the globe, but it all starts with the music. From the opening theme, to the music that plays as you name your characters and everything else, to the individual themes of certain areas in the game, it all further adds to the overall enjoyment gamers get from playing this game. You know you're playing a game with a great soundtrack when it's so hard to narrow it down to just one great song. Each song really helps tie the story together, and it would really be less of an experience without them. While the sound effects are pretty good too, it really is the soundtrack that stands out as one of the first gems about this game that you notice. This game has a very unique style to it, and the music is up there as some of the best and most unique of any SNES title. I also really liked the music because it elicits the feel of each environment so well. The Threed theme still gives me goosebumps, the Fourside Theme has that big city feel to it, and the theme of the stores is just iconic. But I think, for a lot of us, that last boss fight, that music, it's just something that really can't explained, you need to experience it for yourself.



Some folks just rock harder than others.

Graphics 8

The reason graphics are rated as the lowest portion of the review is quite simply because they are plain, simple, and while they are certainly a focal point of the game, they aren't what's noticed first when you play this title. That isn't to say they're not good. Each area comes alive with colors that seem to come right out of a storybook, and each character is unique enough to stand out on their own. The enemies are well designed, more so in the battle interface than anything else, but still, you are given a world you will remember long after your experience with the game. I just feel there are other SNES games, especially RPGs that do it better.



I'll pass. I hear that coffee makes you really trippy and retrospective. Besides, I prefer tea.

Gameplay 10

This game is being sold for over \$100 online these days, sometimes into the \$300 or more if it's sealed, and while this is certainly a large sum for a game that is nearly 20 years old, I think the reason for this is it was truly a different and pleasantly unique game for its time. Earthbound took swords, shields, and potions and replaced them with baseball bats, caps, and hamburgers. They took away castles and dungeons and replaced them with caves and department stores. Gone was the ultra serious and stiffness of most RPGs, and what we got, in the end, is a compelling story, mixed with some wit, humor, and a steady dose of originality. I think we, as gamers, can appreciate games that go against the grain, against the norm of the genre, make fun of itself a bit, and yet still create characters and stories we are emotionally invested in. Earthbound, for it's childish nature on the outside, has a really poignant story, with memorable characters and all the things we come to expect in RPGs, only without the air of fantasy and that ultra serious feel games like Final Fantasy and Dragon Warrior were known to have. It is deceptive in that you start to play it, and don't realize you've spent hours going through the game, getting introduced to characters, and going on some amazing (and sometimes funny) adventures.



And sometimes not so funny..unless of course pooping in the desert makes you chuckle. In which case..what do you have against deserts?

Overall 9

If you love RPGs, especially on the SNES, you owe it to yourself to find time in your life to play this game. I won't go full fledge fanboy here and say it's life changing, because it's just a game. But it is one of the better developed and presented games of that era. Earthbound had a sequel that was only produced in Japan, and yet tireless translation by American fans allow you to download a patch and play the rom of this sequel in English for free. There are now talks of a fan made follow up coming at the beginning of next year. That's how much people were grabbed by this game. That's how dedicated it's fan base is. Earthbound, for me, was something I stumbled upon in the basement of my cousin's house not long after it's debut, and for years it was in my possession, until one day it was stolen from me. I am still trying to save up enough money to get my own physical copy. For now I play it either on my laptop or on the Wii and I can say, without question, it is a true timeless treasure of gaming history. A prime example of what good storyboard writing, decent graphics, and a killer soundtrack can get you in the gaming community, and that, my retro friends, is a cult following to last for years to come.



And trust me, this game knows a thing or two about cults. Blue, blue.
(No blue oysters though)

I thoroughly enjoyed reviewing this game, and I hope you enjoyed reading my review. Next month we take a look at another RPG classic.

Until then, **KNOW YOUR ROLE..**




The Pixelated Mage

by Jeff Wittenhagen

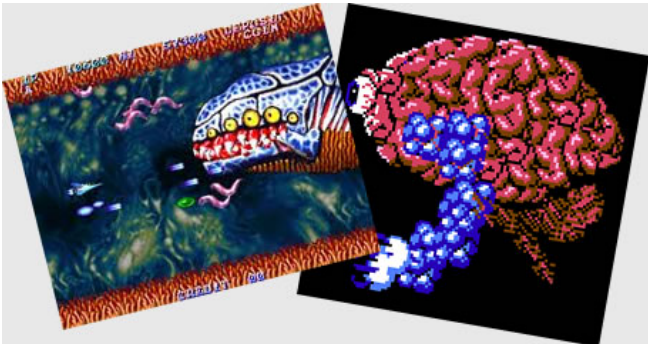


Salamander 2

Platform: Arcade
Developer: Konami
Release Date: January 1996
Genre: Scrolling Shooter
Game Modes: Single Player, Cooperative
Tag Line: "Flawlessly fuzes 3D graphical elements into a 2D shooter world."



Salamander 2 is the Arcade only (except in the Salamander Deluxe Pack Plus compilation), Japanesse sequel to Salamander/Life Force. You again pilot Vic Viper ala Gradius lore and the 2nd player pilots Super Cobra (another classic Konami tribute) to battle opposing forces in a side scrolling/topdown shooter adventure.



What eats Golem, and his original NES version (left to right)

Salamander 2 flawlessly fuzes 3D graphical elements into a 2D shooter world.

A few bosses return from the original Salamander but with a few added twists. The classic first level boss Golem, appears in the first level, but then is eaten by the true boss. The powerup system is the same as the Salamander arcade version of getting powerups based on the icon. The set amount of lives in order to complete the game is removed which makes this game pretty easy to beat the first time through.

After you beat Salamander 2 through once, you play through a second time but on a higher difficulty. I don't know if it was just on my play through, but I only had 1 life this time and when I got to the boss and actually got killed, I got a game over screen and entered in my high score. Overall though, with an amazing score, beautiful visuals and interesting level design, Salamander 2 is another outstanding space shooter and a must play for fans of the genre.



Oh yeah!



If you are looking at what to get your retrogaming significant other for Christmas this year, check out AtariAge's store as they always have great things coming out around Christmas time (in addition to their already loaded stock), <http://atariage.com/store/>. Games such as Reindeer Rescue and Toyshop Trouble come to mind. Then there's also Revival Studios (<http://www.revival-studios.com/>) with great homebrews as well, and they have something coming out for the Sega SG-1000/SC-3000 in December by the looks of it! You could also subscribe to RETRO magazine during their Kickstarter campaign and receive its premiere issue in December rather than January, making for another great Christmas gift idea.

Regardless of what you decide to get for your fellow retrogamer, you can't go wrong with any of the above suggestions. Hope you all have a great Thanksgiving/first day of Christmas shopping!

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