Retrogaming Times Monthly

Issue #6 - November 2004

Press Fire to Start

by Adam King

It's that time again. Time for another dose of that classic gaming newsletter we call the Retrogaming Times. The chilly winds of Autumn are no doubt in full force, and Thanksgiving is just around the corner, so we hope to present to you a nice warm edition that features many fall themes. We have basketball games, we have invaders falling from space, we have some games that are real turkeys, and so much more. So put down the cranberry sauce and lets start this thing.

RTM Writers Needed

As you know a newsletter is only as good as its writers. While we try to do our best to provide you readers with some great stuff each month, we could always use some help. Not to mention some of our contributors seem to have vanished off the face of the Earth. That's why I'm putting out a call for some new writers to join the RTM staff. This is your chance to make a contribution to the retrogaming universe. No experience is necessary, you just need to put together some good stuff.

There are many areas we can use writers for:
•Homebrew games
•Unreleased Prototypes
•Systems that don't see much coverage
•Thoughts and editorials on video games and systems
•Articles from other areas of the world
•Reports & Photos from classicgaming shows
•Anything else I haven't though of

If interested, e-mail me at Hal_3000@rocketmail.com, or my partner Alan Hewston at Hewston95@NOSPAMstratos.net, and we'll see what we can work out. Please understand that this is a voluntary position. You will not get paid for your work, but you will give others a chance to see you

words online.

Costume Collage
by Alan Hewston

Most of our readers are not into the costume thing and several told me NOT to look for one from them. Our first submission is from former staff writer Fred Wagaman.


Fred & Jennie Wagaman, with Ed Evans as "Mario, "Princess" & "Luigi"

Next, my daughter Samantha Hewston also dressed up as the "Princess" at the 2004 Philly Classic where she met a very friendly adult "Princess Zelda" in a fantastic costume.

Samantha Hewston as the little "Princess", unknown as the "Princess Zelda"

From the newsgroup RGVC, Lee Seitz posted a link to a site with costume contests, including skits. Thanks Lee. No reply from the web curator so here's a couple pictures and their link.

Pac-Man skit http://dragoncon.inanutshell.us/index.pl/dragoncon/2003
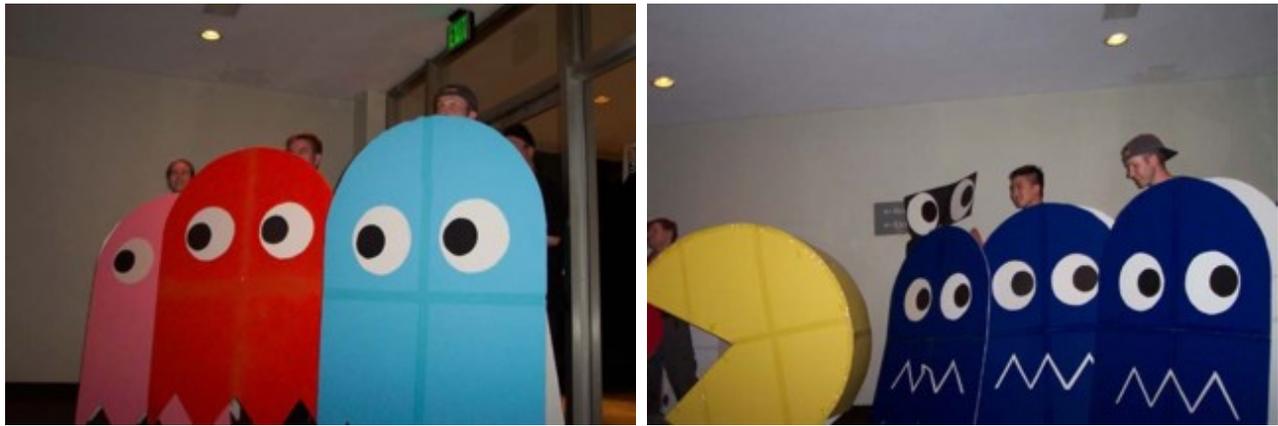
This group played Pac-Man sound effects and each person was an object from the game. Power Pill, Pac-Man, and 4 colored ghosts. The Ghosts were just 2-D signs in front of the person holding them. They chased Pac-Man, until he ate the power pill and then the ghosts, flipped around front-to-back, now blue and when munched by Pac-Man they became eyes and bounced away. Really awesome skit and they won a prize.

Finally, Insane David submits a photo of himself.

InsaneDavid as the "Xbox Fan Boy".

Collecting in Australia - PAL VS NTSC
by Tonks

One of the problems faced by an Australian collector is due to the different Television Standards used by Australia and the U.S. While there have always been many great games released in Australia, many don't make it down under. So for a person to get anywhere near a complete collection for their favourite console, they need to consider buying many games from the U.S. The problem arrises because Australia uses the PAL format (along with England, Europe and New Zealand) while the U.S. uses the NTSC format (along with Canada and Japan).

Here is some of the technical stuff. NTSC has a resolution of 352 x 240, and PAL has a video resolution of 352 X 288. PAL generates 25 full frames per second with 635 lines per frame while NTSC

produces 30 frames a second with 525 scan lines per frame. Due to screen interlacing (in which all the odd lines and then all the even lines of the frame are presented), the vertical scan frequencies for PAL are 50Hz (50 scans per second) and 60Hz for NTSC. This basically means that the NTSC system sacrifices video clarity to minimise flicker, while PAL accepts more flicker to gain an improvement in clarity. NTSC was developed earlier than PAL. PAL was developed in Europe to display colours more accurately. A common joke states that NTSC stands for "Never The Same Colour".

Modern consoles do not like playing games from other regions. PAL systems will not play NTSC games and NTSC systems will not play PAL games. In fact different cartridge shapes and lockout chips have tried to ensure that PAL gamers never get to play NTSC games. This all seems to have originated from Nintendo and Sega and has been passed on by Sony and Microsoft. The only exceptions are the NES Top Loader, Sega Master System, Atari Jaguar and SNK Neo Geo.

The problem with all this is that many PAL gamers miss out on playing some excellent games that are never released outside of the U.S. or Japan. Also the refresh rates between the two standards has often meant that PAL conversions run approximately 15% slower and the screen is letter-boxed. One of the worst culprits of this was Street Fighter 2 on the SNES. While NTSC owning gamers had a near arcade perfect home version, PAL gamers had to put up with a sluggish and slightly squashed looking version.

Classic gamers have it a lot better than modern gamers. Most classic consoles will play games from different regions. However, there are a few problems that do arise. What usually happens is that the game will appear in Black and White. Another common problem is that the screen will roll as if the vertical hold is busted. This can be corrected depending on how much control your TV gives you to correct your Vertical Hold. Most modern TVs are multi-sync and can accept the NTSC signal fine. But problems in colours still persist. For example, on an Atari 2600, the court in Activision's Tennis appears as blue, and the rivers in River Raid appear as purple.

It certainly seems that some classic systems are more effected than others. After reading up on a number of FAQ pages for various consoles I have made the following discoveries. This all refers to playing NTSC games on a PAL system, but I imagine the problems will be almost the same if trying to play PAL games on an NTSC system.

ATARI 2600 & INTELLIVISION - Cartridges are the same size and shape. However, the cart tells the console when to generate TV line sync pulses. This will cause most games to roll. Games usually have colour problems as mentioned above or appear in just black and white.

ATARI 7800 - Due to security encryption to prevent pirate games being made, the majority of NTSC games will not work on a PAL system. Either the game will not work at all, or the graphics are badly corrupted.

ATARI 5200 - This was only released in NTSC territories.

ATARI 8-Bit - It is claimed that 99.99% of NTSC software will work fine on a PAL system, but slower. However, for some reason PAL software has a lot of problems working on an NTSC system. I could not find any explanation for this.

COLECOVISION - Cartridges are the same shape and size. Many games actually work fine but play in black and white. About 25% of games just lock up the system.

ODYSSEY 2 - Sold in Australia and Europe as the Phillips Videopac GX4000. Fully compatible. All games work fine with the exception of Frogger.

VECTREX - Due to the Vectrex having its own dedicated screen all games work perfectly well.

COMMODORE VIC 20 - I have a number of NTSC cartridges and all of them work perfectly. Games

that come on disk or tape all seem to work fine. There have been some reports of games not working. Check out the forums for more details.

COMMODORE 64 - The vast majority of games work perfectly. Games that really push the hardware in the area of graphics or sound often suffer from timing problems.

8-Bit Slam Dunks
by Adam King

Lace up those high-tops because basketball season is once again upon us. Time for all the giants of the land to come together to do battle on the hardwood floor. And what better way to mark the occasion than for you and a friend to pop in a basketball video game. This way you can go for slam dunks and three pointers without having to invest in $300 sneakers. Here's some examples of b-ball games for both the NES and Sega systems.

NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM

Double Dribble (1987 Konami)
This game, which was the first basketball title for the NES, features 1 or 2 player action, and the 1P mode features three levels of difficulty. You can choose from four teams: Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, and Boston, though there's no real difference other than their jerseys. Once the ball tips off, it's fast b-ball action. You get all the rules of the game, from foul shots and slam dunks to three pointers. Sometimes when you go for a dunk, you see a close up video of your players stuffing the ball through the hoop. In 1P mode, if you beat all three teams, you win the trophy. The difficulty level determines which trophy you'll receive, however, and you need to win on Level 3 to get the gold trophy.

So how does *Double Dribble* measure up to the later b-ball titles on the NES? The graphics are decent, with good animation for the sprites, but there's not much detail or variety. The close up scenes during dunks are well done, though. The sounds don't have much music, but what's there is okay, and the sound effects are good. The voice clips can be hard to understand at times. The controls work well, allowing you to make good plays and making this an easy game to get into. Some players may be tripped up by the fact that B shoots and A passes. For the most part the players put up a good game, but it sometimes gets too easy to score, sending the points into the 100s before the final buzzer. Plus there's not much replay value, since there's only four teams. The fast paced quick action and ease of play does make up for it. Overall, *Double Dribble* is another excellent Konami title, and still one of the best b-ball titles on the NES. If you want a simple yet fun hoops title that two players can enjoy, slam this cart into your system.

Hoops (1989 Jaleco)
This is a different type of basketball game. You play not on an arena hardwood floor, but on the asphalt courts of the city streets for an old fashioned game of streetball. This game lets you play one-on-one against an opponent or you can have a teammate join you for two-on-two action. Two players can play one-on-one or two-on-two, either against each other or together versus the comuputer. You can play as one of eight b-ballers, each with different strengths and weaknesses. You can also set your style of play as well as what score to play to. When you begin the game you must first shoot for possession. After that it's all-out basketball action. Playing half-court has certain rules. Each basket counts for 1 point, and if you get the other team's rebound, you must clear the ball by

taking it to the line before you can go for points. Try not to play too rough; there are penalties, such as pushing and charging, that will cause a turnover. When you go for a jump shot, be sure to push B to shoot the ball, or you'll be called for traveling. On defense you can steal the ball and attempt jump blocks to prevent scoring. In the two-on-two mode, you can play a tournament against the other players. Each time your duo wins, you will get a password to save your progress. Win 15 games and you will be the neighborhood champs.

Hoops got lost in the sea of NES b-ball titles for a reason. The graphics are minimal. Other than the decent profile pics, the sprites lack detail, and there's not much in the backgrounds. If someone goes for a slam dunk, you get a close-up just like Double Dribble, only not as good. The sounds aren't anything to write home about. The background tunes are retty uninteresting, as are the few sound effects there are. The controls are very hard to work with, and it seems near impossible the steal the ball or block the computer's shot. The CPU doesn't have any problems stealing the ball from you, and they never seem to let you score. Thus you can fall very behind with no chance to catch up. Other than the tournament play, there's hardly any options. Not the worst basketball cart, as it does provide some fun here and there. But there are better b-ball titles out there.

Arch Rivals (1990 Acclaim)

This port of the Midway arcade hit features some ruthless two-on-two basketball action. Why? Because in this b-ball game, there are no fouls, meaning the players on both sides can really go at it. When you begin the game, you have a choice of one of four teams, which have no real difference among them. You then pick one of eight players to control, each with different strengths. The computer picks your partner for you, and your duo then takes the hardwood for some hard-hitting hoops. For the most part it's standard basketball fare, with 3-point shots, slams dunks, and so on. You and your partner have to really work together to put up a fight against the opposing team. You only control your player, the computer controls the other, but you can tell your CPU teammate to pass or shoot the ball. Don't forget there are no fouls in this game. When you're on defense, you can actually throw a punch and deck the other team to get the ball or prevent them from scoring. Or you can take them down with a flying tackle. If you're feeling especially mean, you can take a flying lunge and actually pull the other players' shorts down. There are other hazards, such as debris on the court that can trip you up.

For the most part *Arch Rivals* is faithful to the arcade game. The graphics are good, pretty close to the coin-op. The sprites have some nice detail to them and the animation is well done, though some flicker pops up when too many sprites bunch together. This game does feature the cut scenes that play after every basket, and they look good as well. The music that plays in the background during the game is pretty nice and never gets old. It matches up to the original as well. None of the voice clips from the arcade game made it over, though. The controls are easy to use, and communicating with you teammate is no problem. Just try not to get the buttons confused, or you may throw a three point shot from clear across the court. The computer is a good opponent yet it's actually beatable here, so you won't get too frustrated. For the most part, your teammate can handle himself okay. Of course this game is more fun when two players go at it. While this is a very good port, serious b-ball fans may be disappointed. There's no season mode, no tournament, and very little strategy. Once the final buzzer sounds, that's it, the game's over. Despite the light options, this game is still a fun fast-paced contest that's easy to play and get into if you're in the mood for a quick b-ball game. *Arch Rivals* isn't a champion but still does the sport proud.

Tecmo NBA Basketball (1993 Tecmo)

Tecmo had great success with their Tecmo Bowl football series, so they decided to try their luck at another sport, basketball. *Tecmo NBA Basketball* brings all the action and excitement of the NBA to your NES. This is the only NES basketball game licensed by the NBA, so you get real NBA teams and players (from the 1991-92 season). You can play either a quick preseason game or go through a full 82 game season. You can play a shorter season if you wish. No matter which mode you choose each game follows the standard basketball rules, complete with all the penalties. Each player on each team is based off their real life counterpart, so some players are better shooters, others are better defenders, and so on. On the offense you can pass, shoot, and call different plays. If you're close enough, you may get a slam dunk. On defense you have to block shots and steal the ball to get it back. During season mode you can begin playing at any point in the season as any team you wish, and you can even enter your own win/loss records to change the standings. If your team gets a good enough win percentage to be one of the eight top ranking teams in the conference, you'll get to compete in the NBA Playoffs. You have to survive two rounds and the championship round to win the conference title. Afterward you get to face off against the other conference winner in the NBA Finals for the World Championship.

Tecmo certainly worked its magic on another great sports cart. The graphics are okay. The players don't have much detail to them, and the only difference between them is their skin color. Plus there is a LOT of flickering when several players bunch up. This makes it hard to keep track of who's got the ball. Since this is a Tecmo game, you get some cut scenes during close plays, which are pretty good. As far is the audio goes, there's not much in the way of sound effects, and the music during the game isn't bad, but it's not memorable. The controls work pretty well. Making plays and scores are no problem. One thing to watch out for is the B button is for stealing AND shooting. Don't jam on it too much on defense or you could steal the ball and shoot it immediately after. Despite the less than stellar graphics and sound effects, it's the gameplay what counts, and this game doesn't disappoint. The game is still a blast to play, even with a friend. The many options make this the most complete basketball game on the NES.

SEGA MASTER SYSTEM

Great Basketball (1987 Sega)
Another entry in Sega's "Great" sports line. This one presents some fairly standard b-ball action. You can play either the computer or another player, and you get to choose from eight international teams. Once the game starts you just try to win the game. The standard b-ball rules are present in this title.

You're already thinking that this game is going to be terrible just by having the "Great" title in its name. While you'd be correct, it isn't totally unplayable. The graphics are weird, featuring tiny players and a giant basketball, not to mention a green court. The sounds consist of a nice background tune and some decent though fuzzy voice samples. The controls work fine for the most part. It's easy to pass and shoot, but remember you have to push button 2 twice to shoot; once to jump and again to let go of the ball. However the game is plagued with many quirks. No matter where you shoot the ball, odds are it'll go in, even though it shouldn't have. Plus in the rare chance you hit the rim, the ball will bounce high out of bounds, giving you no chance to get any rebounds. Plus every time you touch an opposing player a foul will occur on one of you. The game has virtually no replayability, with only two modes and no season mode or anything. Even with all these negatives, *Great Basketball* can be an enjoyable game for two players. This is one of the better "Great" sports titles, but that's not saying much.

Pat Riley Basketball (unreleased) (1990? Sega)

You know this game from the Genesis, but you probably didn't know that Sega planned to port this title to the Master System. They even printed a two-page article in Sega Visions magazine. Unfortunately Sega never released it; from what I understand the game wasn't even finished before it was canned. A playable prototype has surfaced, so through the magic of emulation, I played the ROM to see what could have been.

From what I've seen the game showed promise. You get a selection of eight teams from different NBA cities. One or two players can take to the hardwood, and there's even a DEMO mode so you can just watch two CPU teams go at it. You even get the option to change your starting lineup. Once the ball tips off, it's basketball action as usual. The players move across the court in a side-view, but when you go for a basket you get a close-up view of the scoring attempt. You have to stop a meter at the right spot to make the shot count.

Obviously you could tell there were some issues that needed to be address. Many of the graphics were messed up. The players moved across the court too slowly, though the close-ups were smooth and well done. The sounds were terrible. The controls worked okay, but there were times the buttons wouldn't do anything. But the thing to remember is it's hard to pass judgment on an incomplete game. In my opinion, *Pat Riley Basketball* had a lot of potential. Had Sega put some more work into it and finished it, it probably could have been the good b-ball title the SMS needed. It looks like we'll never know.

NEWSBYTES

• For those of you who still fancy yourselves as pinball wizards, there's a gaming show just for you. Get ready for the 2004 Texas Pinball Festival. This event will be held November 5-7, 2004 at the Holiday Inn Dallas/Fort Worth Airport North in Irving, Texas. The show is set to have over 100 pinball machines and games set for free play, plus adult and children's tournaments for trophies and cash prizes. Not to mention many vendors and collectors who will no doubt have parts, supplies, and videogames for sale. For all the information, including attendance fees and times of the events, visit the Texas Pinball website at: www.texaspinball.com/overview.htm.

Thanks to "Simon" for passing this news along.

• A new interesting device has been created for the Atari 2600, one that lets you play ROM files on a real Atari system. Recently Videogame Wiz has announced the release of the A26 Maxicart. This device works similar to the Intellicart. You connect the cartridge to your Windows PC using a USB port, and using a special loader program, you can download a 2600 ROM file into the cartridge. Then you can pop the cartridge into your 2600 system and play the game just like any other Atari game. You can actually play those ROM hacks in a real 2600 cartridge, and when you want to change games, you can simply overwrite the ROM file with another game. Plus homebrew author and test their creations on a real system. For more information go to the Videogame Wiz website at: http://www.vgwiz.com/.

Credit: Atari Age

• We've seen Namco Musems, and we've seen Midway's Treasures. Now Sega is bringing us a collection of arcade classics. They recently announced that they're releasing the *Sega Classics Collection*. This compilation will feature 10 games: Outrun, Golden Axe, Space Harrier, Columns, Fantasy Zone, Virtua Racer, Decathlete, Alien Syndrome, Monaco GP, Bonanza Bros. and Tant R. All ten games will feature several upgrades, including new stages and remixed music. Originally Conspiracy Entertainment was going to publish the game, but Sega decided to take the reigns. The

game is scheduled to be released January 2005 on the PlayStation 2.

Credit: [GameSpot](#)

Retrogaming Commercial Vault
by Adam King

Time to revisit the ever-expanding universe known as the Commercial Vault. This month I'd like to revisit an often ignored system in video game history, the Odyssey2. This month both ads feature the spokesman for the system, the Wizard of Odyssey, an aging fellow who sits in his crystal palace playing the O2 system. I covered one of the "Wizard" ads before, but since then William Cassidyt of the Odyssey2 Homepage has unearthed some more forgotten ads, two of which I present below.

You can download both these videos as well as find more Odyssey2 goodies at the Odyssey2 Homepage ([www.classicgaming.com/o2home](#)).

The Keyboard
In this ad, we are introduced to the Wizard, who proceeds to introduces us to the O2 Keyboard, which was the main selling point of the system. What's so great about the keyboard? You can type your name on the screen, change game layouts, and even play combination video/board games.

> "I am the Wizard of Odyssey, and I possess the key to greater video game challenge: the Keyboard from Odyssey2. You can type your name on the screen. What wizardry! Change grids, or assign new ones at will. Or play Master Strategy games like Quest For the Rings or 50 other games. Believe me, the Odyssey2 Keyboard is the Key to greater challenge!"

PICTURES:

Behold the Wizard in all his glory!

"This is the reason you should buy the Odyssey2."

"See? You can type your name on the screen with the keyboard..."

"...and it shows up on the game screen!"

"We also got these video/board games."

The Voice
For those of you who don't know, the Odyssey2 Voice module is just like an Intellivoice: it makes games talk. The Wizard demonstrates how the Voice works by playing a round of KC's Crazy Chase. During the commercial the Wizard almost has an argument with KC.

GAME VOICE: "WATCH OUT! HURRY!"
KID'S VOICE: "Who's that talking' Wizard of Odyssey?"
WIZARD: "THE VOICE! Odyssey2's new Voice module, warning me of the dreaded Dratepillar in KC's Crazy Chase."
GAME VOICE: "RUN! HURRY!"
WIZARD: "I'm hurrying! Got you, Dratepillar."
GAME VOICE: "INCREDIBLE!"
WIZARD: "The Voice and new Voice games from Odyssey2 where the Keybaord is the Key to greater challenge!"

PICTURES:

"Check it out: my Odyssey2 can talk now!"

"This is NOT an Intellivoice."

"Don't get cross with me, KC. I can end you in many different ways."

You can't tell from the shot, but KC is saying "Incredible!"

A look at the Voice lineup.

No offense to the Odyssey2 fans out there, but...come on, Dratepillar? What kind of name is that? What's next, the Willipede?

Just a reminder that on January 1, 2005, I'm going to stop selling the Commercial Vault CD. So If you still want one, e-mail me at Hal_3000@rocketmail.com. Hurry because once January 2nd rolls around, it's gone.

Don't forget you can find Nintendo commercials at my website, NES Times, which can found at come.to/nestimes.

The Many Faces of . . . Space Invaders
by Alan Hewston

After the gauntlet was thrown down last month with the Many Faces of Galaxian and then Galaxian vs Space Invaders - here's the long awaited Many Faces of Space Invaders. Of course complications in the home licensing agreements occurring at the infancy of the home console market may be the reason that only a few "official" versions exist. I've found no record that any other "official" classic versions were even in the planning stages. To learn more details about the history of "Space Invaders" (1978-2004) check out the upcoming issue of Classic Gamer Magazine at: http://www.classicgamer.com/.

Similar to "Galaxian", the folks programming the Bally Professional Arcade worked quickly to copy the Space Invaders arcade game and got their home version out first. I did not research much about lawsuits, but it did carry the actual name, "Space Invaders". Just prior to or right after Bally sold the system rights to Astrovision, the name changed to "Astro Battle" for the next release. Both versions are identical, but neither version is common - combined they sold about as well as most game for that system.

Yes, you all know basically how to play Space Invaders, but unless you're really an aficionado, or have read the various books on how to beat video games, then there is a little more to the arcade game than meets the eye. There were some hidden surprises programmed in for the really good/experienced game players - like the rainbow effect of shooting a certain sequence of invaders, or the Skull trail effect, left behind when the final invader is one from the bottom 2 rows (skulls) of the formation. More importantly, there is a secret about scoring that is worth learning. The maximum, 300 points scored for the Mothership, occur when the ship is hit with your 23rd shot and on every 15th shot there after. Otherwise you'd only get 50, 100, or 150 points. This makes a significant impact to scoring at the arcade, but not so much at home. To get a feel for what the arcade scoring may be like, check out how Atari scored the mother ship on the 5200 - page 8 of the 5200 manual - complements of ATARIAGE at: http://www.atariage.com/manual_thumbs.html?SoftwareLabelID=662.

Arcade: 1978, by Taito - programmed by Nishikado Toshihiro
Home systems: unless noted, all by Atari licensed from Taito

•Atari 2600 (Rick Mauer '80)
•Atari 5200 (unknown '82)
•Atari 8 bit (Rob Fulop '80)
•Bally Professional Arcade ('79 by Bally)

Classic Sequel: Deluxe Space Invaders (Taito '79)

Home Version Similarities: Except those in <> all home versions have: several variations to add gameplay or difficulty; the invaders speed up 4 times

My attempt to make the many faces look like a Space Invader.

as they descend, based upon how many have been eliminated; every time you clear a screen, another full wave begins <Bally - only has 6 waves then the game ends>; each wave the invaders begin a half a row little lower; the bottom most invaders cannot drop bombs when they reach their lowest active point on the screen; once they go a row lower, the game ends with a loud crashing/crushing sound; the mother ship's point value is dependant upon how many shots have been fired <2600, 8 Bit, Bally>, but always worth significantly more than the average invader. None of the home versions follows the arcade cycle of 9 waves and then start over again up high. They either end, or continue infinitely from the lowest height. One could say the home versions are probably more different than alike.

Disqualified: Bally Astrocade (31)
My first reaction was that we cannot omit the very first home version - but we'll not count it in the medal race as it was not an official licensed release. The Gameplay is (6) good enough to pass for the original, but is distorted. As is the case for all home versions of arcade games, a horizontal TV screen does not work well for emulating games made on a vertical arcade monitor. Thus, the formations cannot match the arcade, but this version is the worst. There's a small (8X4) fleet of invaders, but yet everything is oversized and fills the screen. The invaders are nearly on both edges at the same time. To compensate, and prevent them from reaching the edges too quickly, their marching is slowed down, allowing for almost too many mother ships to frequent the attack. Your missiles are not the usual thin missiles. Rather, once they impact an invader, or better still, a shield, a large explosion results, taking out large chunks of the shield each time. This is the only home version where your defensive shots will take out the enemy bombs, but at the same time, there are collision detection problems that allow your

shots to pass through the edge of an invader unharmed. You'll also see enemy bomb's start to fall and then vanish - possibly another bomb, lower down was just released, they collided and cancelled each other out. The Addictiveness is mediocre (5), and severely hampered by the fact that just as you get warmed up, the game is over after 6 waves. There is no pause, but considering the short games, you won't really miss it. There are no variations or any changes in the game other than each wave drops lower. Fortunately, there are 4 difficulty settings so the action is speeded up and the number of simultaneous enemy bombs goes up for each difficulty level. This is good in that it provides a greater challenge, but the bad news is that the more activity (bombs) on screen, them more likely a hiccup will occur changing the flow of the game. The invaders jitter and jerk and are not where you expect them to be - surely throwing off both your offense and defense. This is most noticeable on difficulty level 4. You can earn 1 bonus life at 1K, which arrives with a nice chime to alert you. There is another glitch that allows a vanquished invader to be completely gone and yet it somehow it can drop one final bomb. Not fair! But once you know about it, no big deal. Another problem is double-deaths, where you are not given much of a grace period as your next laser canon may be greeted with a bomb that cannot be avoided. Graphics are also the weakest here, (5), acceptable, but fairly blocky. There is some detail and multiple colors, but the large size and smaller quantity of invaders is the biggest disappointment. Sound is OK (6) and nothing is missing, but then all effects sound annoying. Controls are (9) typical of the Astrocade - not complex, but a bit hard to reach perfection all game.

Astro Battle on the Astrocade   *Space Invaders on the Atari 8-bit*

Bronze Medal: Atari 8 bit (36)
My first reaction was surprised how different the Atari cousins are. I am assuming that this 1980 cart was rushed out the door, as Rob Fulop usually did much better work. Gameplay is respectable (6) with most of the essentials in place, and some new features and options, but the most noticeable problem is the lack of shields. What would captain Kirk do without shields? There are 12 basic game variations, (double that for 1 & 2 player options), but half of these are a choice of 3 or 5 starting lives. A good added variation is that of selecting if the bombs are either, slow, fast or mixed (both slow and fast). Then there is a choice to have home-in bombs (invader's bombs use radar to home-in on you) which move a couple pixel widths in your direction. Any being capable of interstellar travel should have such trivial technology. A great element that is not part of the arcade (but not an optional setting) are these bombs that come at you from a 45 degree angle. Invaders fire these from the other side of the screen and can wipe you out - so you'd better stay alert at all times. The angle makes them much harder to dodge as well. The points scoring system is also unique in this version, where on every wave the first 20 invaders are worth 2 points and the remainder worth 4 points each. Since the mother ship points (scored) are not displayed on screen - I'm not sure how similar they would be to the Atari 5200 manual. The real mother-ship fiasco is that it does not arrive based upon any duration of time, but simply waits for you to fire enough times before it comes out. If you do not fire, it doesn't come out. Finally, the pace of the action is s little too fast. That factored in with the irregular mother ship makes the strategy a lot different than any other version. Addictiveness is good enough (6) to keep you interested in seeing what is next. The enemy waves keep coming lower until they reach the bottom, but just before they do, the action is interrupted by a sort of intermission where an alien ship comes on screen, reaches your horizontal location, descends and picks you up and carries you off. You do not score any bonus life or

points, but then suddenly the invaders are at their bottom most position, and there they remain (AFAIK) until you die. There is no pause button, but the edges of your L/R movement are well marked. Another poor feature that doesn't help to keep you playing long is that the score only has 4 digits, so rolling it over will come earlier. Like the Astrocade port, a vanquished invader might still pop out a bomb after its demise. Finally I found no documentation on the game, so my review may be suspect to some unknown details, but I'm pretty sure that there is no bonus life at 1 K or anytime soon after. Graphics are very good (7) among the best, with good use of multiple colors, animation and detail. The invaders appearances also vary a lot from wave to wave, and the most unique feature is a large green vehicle (the Father ship?) which is seen along the left edge of the screen all the time. We may only be seeing the edge of it, but it looks like a big Launch Vehicle (ie rocket ship) to me - sitting there on the launch pad, with openings that the invaders scroll out from - in formation of course. When the previous wave ends, this huge thing makes a thump as it drops down one level lower. So instead of the invaders being there on the screen to attack, you watch them enter your defensive perimeter each wave and can blow them away as they pour out. Your points scored for the mother ship are not seen on screen. The Sound is effective (7), but noticeably missing are the sound when you fire shots, and then the mother ship sound is pretty lame. The invaders have good marching rhythm, but not nearly as cool as on the 2600. A great enhancement was as the invaders get lower, their sound level grows louder and louder. Really cool! The Controls are perfect (10) as there is not much to mess up here- Left, Right & Fire. This cart is very common and easy to find.

Silver Medal: Atari 5200 (38)

My first reaction was they corrected most of the problems from its Atari 8 bit cousin. It is possible that they coded this one from scratch, but since all the same gameplay options are in place, they probably just modified the older code. Gameplay is pretty good (7), with shields added and there is no longer a large ship that the invaders roll out from. The speed of the invaders is still too fast, but the mothership is now on a regular schedule (ie regardless if you fire) and the scoring is a little more like the arcade except for you earn more points as the waves increase, up to wave 4. Wave 4 is the wave where the aliens reach the bottom, and is actually the 7th set (wave) of invaders that you face. The scoring is now based upon what color the invader is, as they now mutate & change throughout the wave. When mutating their point value is zero - boo hiss. Wave 4 continues for the duration of the game, and you'll know you're there because the invaders make no sound. The 12 gameplay options remain identical to the 8 bit. Atari got rid of the invader bombs that come at you from a 45 degree angle. Too bad this wasn't retained - at least as an option, as this was the best thing since sliced bread - I mean since invisible shields. Being the final release, Atari really missed their chance to add in all the 2600 options and maybe even have a 4 player simultaneous option, and many more such ideas. There's still no bonus life to be earned (like at 1K), but Figure 1 and Table 1 in the manual tells the exact values of the invaders and mother ship. A vanquished invader can still drop a bomb after it has disappeared. Addictiveness is very fun (8), with problems corrected from the Atari 8 bit and the addition of the pause <*>. The score is now one digit larger, rolling over at 99,999 and the mutants add a change in strategy that is refreshing. One minor glitch is that there is no longer a reference point on the ground that lets you know how far left and right you can move your laser canon. Graphics are very good (7), essentially the same quality as its cousin, with a little more color and variety. Sound is effective (7) better than its cousin, but not significantly. The mother ship sounds a lot better, but there is still no noise made when you fire a shot - Argh! Controls are well-done (9) but I recommend the 5200 Trak-ball. Though not yet released, the ATARI lords made Space Invaders Trak-ball compatible. The Trak-ball works well, being only slightly jittery, but my score was reduced primarily because pressing that fire button over and over and over again is a pain. Finally, why didn't Atari code in 256 game variations to this baby. An on-screen menu with 8 options to toggle on or off.

Space Invaders on the Atari 5200

Space Invaders on the Atari 2600

Gold Medal: Atari 2600 (39)

My first reaction was 112! Incredible - and of course, you the readers also voted this as your favorite home version. How many of you will admit that yes, you sat down with a friend and indeed played a couple waves of all 112 versions. Gameplay is impressive (8), the best with all those options. The 112 are really only combinations of 6 ways that 1 or 2 players can play, and then each having the choice of shields (moving or stationary), zigzag bombs (on or off), fast bombs (or slow), and invisible invaders. The scoring system remains fixed all game, which makes it the closest to the arcade - with the only difference being the mother ships are always worth 200 points. Addictiveness is enjoyable(8). The A/B difficulty is a very nice feature, possibly the best feature omitted in later releases. This adds a lot of value to two player competition mode where one player has significantly more skill. Some bad features are of course there is no pause, and the game remains the same for the duration, plus there are only 4 digits to the score. The darn double death syndrome is also a tough problem here as you may begin the next laser cannon and immediately be greeted with an unavoidable bomb. Graphics are respectable (6), with some detail & animation, but limited colors. The Sound is worth while (7), probably the best loved of the lot. I probably could have scored all versions a point lower, but somehow the effects are just right. That final crash as the invaders land and the cool sound of the mother ship are unforgettable effects. The Controls are perfect (10), and of course, this cart is about as common as they come.

As was the case for many casual gamers of the era, SI was the very first arcade game that I ever played. Likewise the home version of the game convinced me (and my parents) to finally buy the Atari 2600 . SI was my very first cart (besides Combat) - but I at least paid the $29.99 with my own money. I played it to death for quite some time, more so than any other games until Pac Man (albeit it sucked) and maybe Raiders of the Lost Ark. I have since lost much of that love for Space Invaders, and have not really played it much again. I hope that I was not too critical in my scoring, but let's face it, the gameplay is limited, the graphics are OK, but not that impressive, there's no music or much to the effects so hopefully gamers who did not grow up in our classic era will concur. But, we know its historic importance, we love the simplicity, the sound effects and the rhythm of Space Invaders - giving it a special place in many gamers hearts.

Come back next month when we take a quest inside a pyramid in the Many Faces of Quest for Quintana Roo on the Atari 2600, Atari 5200, 8 bit computers, Commodore 64 & Colecovision. Because of my limited experience playing this game and my free time really drying lately, I may not make it in time. But look for me to get it done by the next month. Contact Alan Hewston at: Hewston95@NOSPAMstratos.net or visit the Many Faces of site: http://my.stratos.net/~hewston95/RT/ManyFacesHome.htm.

The Vic 20 - A Possible Resurgence??
by *Tonks*

The Vic 20 has never been a highly collectible machine. It is completely unknown to the average gamer

and in most retro gamers' collections the Vic 20 is fairly low on their list. In magazine articles covering the retro gaming scene the Vic 20 is very rarely mentioned, and when it is the articles usually just state something about it being the C64's predecessor.

For those of us who are keen Vic 20 collectors this has been a good thing. Ever since I started collecting Vic 20 items have been very cheap. For just a few dollars you could get a nice collection of games. For between $20 and $30 you could pick up a whole system with a good selection of cartridge or tape games.

But I fear this time is passing us by. Recently Vic 20 items have begun to fetch quite high prices. I would guess that most items have at least doubled in their average price. Even common carts are fetching far more than they were a year ago.

But it has been the incredible prices that some of the rarer Vic 20 games that has been catching the eye, and dropping the jaw of many collectors. To give you an example, here are a few items that sold on ebay over that past couple of months.

8 boxed game carts from Sierra ended at US$280.

20 loose game carts, mainly from Commodore, ended at AUD$320

But the most impressive item was a copy of "Ultima: Escape From Mt. Drash". This extremely rare adventure game was only released in the U.S. A copy recently sold on Ebay for $3605. Yes you read that right, Three Thousand Six Hundred and Five American Dollars!!!!!!! This must certainly put this game for the humble Vic right up there among the most collected classic items ever. I certainly have never heard of any Atari, Colecovision or Commodore 64 items selling for so much.

So it certainly seems that the humble Vic 20 is growing in popularity, and some people are obviously prepared to pay huge money for the very rare stuff. I am very glad that my favourite retro platform is being recognised and becoming more desirable. And in some ways I hope that I am helping raise the profile of the Vic 20 through this forum. It feels good to raise the flag, but if you ever see "tonks" bidding on some rare Vic 20 items, please don't bid against me.

So on to a few game reviews. This month I have decided to review a few games I have on tape. Up until now I have only reviewed one game that came on tape. All other reviews have been for cartridges. All these games reviewed below require a 3k memory expansion. The extra memory allowed programmers to have slightly better graphics, better sound and at times, deeper gameplay.

COUNTRY GARDEN
Basically this is a Centipede clone. While there are many of these available for the Vic 20, this is certainly one of the better ones. The graphics are excellent, with everything looking as you would expect them to. The mushrooms look like mushrooms, rather than just blocks, and the Centipede's movement is quite smooth as it darts back and forth across the screen. A number of other creepy crawlies occasionally appear, either crwling across the screen or diving down towards you. These are also well defined. Perhaps my only complaint is a slight glitch in the controls. Moving left and right is fine, but movement up and down seems to have a very slight delay. When the action really hots up, it can cause you die unfairly as you try to dodge the increasing amount of segments baring down on you. It is a minor fault, but does irritate.
My Score - 7/10

CRITTERS
At first look Critters seems to be a very plain shoot-em-up. But after playing the game for a few minutes and you start to realise that this is a really fun and original game. Your job is to protect 5 apples from being stolen by some flying critters (or birds??). The critters fly about the screen and occasionally swoop down to steal an apple. You must quickly shoot the critter to save the apple. But shoot too late and the apple lands too hard and is destroyed anyway. Lose all 5 apples and it is game over. Apart

from the fun game play, the best aspect of this game is the terrific animation of the critters. They have a great flapping motion to them that actually used 4 animation frames. When you shoot a critter is slowly falls to the ground, tumbling over and over as it falls. This looks great and is far more entertaining than a simple explosion. Finally, your man also moves really well. He runs back and forth across the bottom of the screen, firing his gun as you press the fire button. Again a number of frames of animation is used, making your man's movement nice and smooth. A bit more colour or some sort of a back ground picture would have really capped this game off. The plain blue just makes it look a bit dull.
My Score - 8/10

Country Garden   *Critters*

COSMIC FIREBIRDS
This is a fantastic shoot-em-up for the Vic 20, and all the justification you need to get hold of a 3k memory expansion cartridge. Cosmic Firebirds has a lot in common with many other great shoot-em-ups such as Galaxian, Phoenix and Galaga. Swarms of birds swoop around the screen, bombing you with their deadly fire. You need to simply blast them out of the sky before they get you. But what sets this game apart from other similar games on the Vic 20 is the brilliant graphics. Everything is depicted in some of the best high resolution sprites I have seen. The movement of the enemy Firebirds is fast and smooth and there is lots of colour. This is certainly one of the best shoot-em-ups available on the Vic 20, and definitely one of the best looking ones. A highly recommended game.
My Score - 9/10

MOWER MANIA
Here is a fairly unique game. Your job is to mow your lawn. Sound simple? Well it's not. There are many flowers, trees, walls and garden furniture that you must ensure you avoid. Any time you mow over an obstacle you damage your blades. Hitting the wall or tree destroys your mower completely. As you mow you earn money. Any time you damage your blades it costs you money. So to get a high score you need to ensure you mow just the grass. To make your job even more difficult there are some cute little rabbits that hop around your garden. If you run over and kill one of the rabbits it costs you $100. The rabbit then turns into a grave stone. Hitting the grave stone will destroy your mower. With some very good graphics and simple but effective sound, this is one of the more unique games that is also quite a lot of fun. The only real problem with this game is that that movement is a bit jerky and some overlap of some of the character graphics can make judging some obstacles a little difficult.
My Score - 7/10

Cosmic Firebirds

Mower Mania

UPCOMING CLASSIC GAMING SHOWS

This is a listing of upcoming shows and their web address where you can find more information, including times, locations, and admission. If there's any I missed, e-mail me at Hal_3000@rocketmail.com.

•**2004 Texas Pinball Festival** November 5-7, 2004 - Irving, TX Website: http://www.texaspinball.com/overview.htm.	•**Vintage Computer Festival** November 6-7, 2004 - Mountain View, CA Website: http://www.vintage.org/

Results: Galaxian vs. Space Invaders
by Alan Hewston

We had 35 replies by the time I needed this wrapped up. Looks like the legendary Atari 2600 Space Invaders is the favorite at home, but Galaxian wins at the arcade, and since I put it on the ballot, Galaga beats them both. The number of votes on the left.

1) **Arcade version or MAME**
19 - I prefer the Galaxian arcade game to the Space Invaders arcade game.
08 - I like both arcade games about the same.
06 - I prefer the Space Invaders arcade game to the Galaxian arcade game.
02 - I do not like either arcade game.

2) **Home versions on any classic platform (not MAME)**
14 - I prefer a home version of Galaga over them both. (Hey! Who put that in there)
08 - I prefer any home version of Galaxian over Space Invaders.
07 - I like both games about the same.
04 - I prefer any home version of Space Invaders over Galaxian
01 - I do not like any classic home game from the "Death-from-above" genre.

3) **Which official home version have you played the most:**
15 - Atari 2600 Space Invaders
09 - Atari 2600 Galaxian
04 - Commodore 64 Galaxian

02 - Atari 400/800/XL Galaxian
02 - Atari 5200 Space Invaders
01 - Atari 5200 Galaxian
01 - Commodore Vic 20 Galaxian
01 - One voter went off the board with the Atari 2600 Communist Mutants From Space

Hmmmn. Well . .. Good thing I left Galaga off the third ballot & looks like no matter how low my scores were last month for the C64 & Vic20 Galaxian, those Commodore fans are die hard voters. If you like these surveys, please let our staff know. Maybe we can do some NES or SMS surveys as well.

Want Some Turkey With That CoCo?
by Mark Sabbatini

What I've always found amusing about infamous titles such as "Pac-Man" and "E.T." for the Atari 2600 isn't merely gameplay ranking among the worst of all time - it's picturing guys with ties in some Atari board room declaring them a marketable product and deciding on a manufacturing run of 10 million copies.

Consequently, I'd love just as much to be a fly at subsequent meetings when those executives (or more likely their replacements) decided to destroy the carts and bulldoze them into a landfill.

Point being, rationale people thought these were good ideas.

There's so much lousy software and hardware you'd probably die of natural causes before asking everyone involved "What WERE you thinking??!!" Some were obviously blind to the terrible quality of their work. Others misjudged what people would spend money on. Even "quick-buck" shysters who shamelessly copied programs and put out titles like "Custer's Revenge" had motives they obviously morally justified to themselves, be it "if people are willing to pay for it..." or "I really need the money and it's not like I'm robbing anybody," or whatever.

We'll never know what most of them were thinking, so instead we'll merely poke fun here at some of those notable disgraces for the TRS-80 Color Computer with my 2004 Turkey Awards. It's not enough to be merely be bad: Some extra element of misery such as being a huge seller, part of an infuriating trend, or a big-budget bomb needs to factor in.

Why, for example, did Tandy spend years putting 64K of memory into its machines and marketing them as 32K computers, especially given it was competing against the likes of the Commodore 64? Granted, it was one of the worst-kept "secrets" in the CoCo's history and users quickly figured out ways to use the memory, but why did the corporate gurus in Texas feel the need to short-sell a product trailing the market in quality and sales?

Definitely a 20-pound Butterball.

There's plenty of trimmings from Tandy as well, including shipping the original machines with only 13 of the user manual's 24 chapters written, shortchanging gamers with the most fragile joysticks in the industry and putting true lowercase capability in later machines but not letting users access it.

We start with the chicks and work our way up to the mega Butterballs:

DEBUG software
Remember the Dilbert cartoon about paying engineers extra for every software bug they find and fix (punchline: "I'm gonna write me a new minivan this afternoon!")? Here's a cousin: DEBUG, a service that asked you to send them $5 and a program you wanted debugged, and they'd see if someone could fix it. So far, so good. But the Turkey, a smallish one, is for the other half: They asked people to pay $9 for a collection of 20 or so buggy programs to fix. Uh, the idea of intentionally buying errant software is

too weird for reality. Seems like that's when you actually have to pay people using money from the other half of the equation. Their ads weren't around for long, so I assume it was a very short-lived concept.

Congo Bongo
I don't think I've ever seen a game for as many machines that got such consistently bad reviews as this sort-of 3D platformer. The CoCo's version was as bad as any, but takes a Turkey for being the only program I've ever seen that slammed itself in its own documentation - a comic book where the hero is as frustrated as the rest of us that half of the roughly dozen screens are repeats of a really lame challenge (basically he was lamenting "another dash down 'such-and-such' Canyon").

Dunkey Munkey
This somewhat warped two-screen Donkey Kong rip-off is merely bad as a game (it consists of a hybrid barrels/elevators screen alternating with the rivets screen; rates about a C-minus), but gets a Turkey for being the lamest challenger to a real contender. It sold for about the same price and had the same system requirements as Donkey King, generally considered the CoCo's best arcade conversion ever (some said it was the best Donkey Kong clone on any machine sold during the 1980s). I can't imagine how the author/company thought they were going to sell any copies - my best guesses are 1) hoping people might buy it if Donkey King was sold out or 2) confusing it with the more popular title.

Castle of Tharoggad
The little-known sequel to the famous Dungeons of Daggorath, this dungeon crawler isn't necessarily a terrible program, but does take home the Turkey for worst CoCo sequel. The programmer had a vastly superior machine (a CoCo 3 with about four times the graphics power of the original CoCo), 128K memory instead of 16K and all kinds of other advantages thanks to six years of computing evolution, and still cranked out a title inferior to the original in every way. The graphics were cartoonish, sound was awful, terrible gameplay (it tried to be flashy with a joystick interface, when people wanted to type their commands in from the keyboard like real Adventurers), and on and on. Considering the original is considered a classic, complete with a Windows port and a still-active users' group, it's little wonder the bashlash against it was so harsh.

Bustout
This Radio Shack ROM pack is maybe the worst Breakout game ever, with drab playing fields and horrible physics - the kind where ball speeds and angles can either be zero or totally insane because there's no effort to "round-off" the impact of hits to ensure reasonable response. It also included a "gravity" option so strong it was virtually impossible to make the ball hit anything. When this is one of your original games for a new machine, it bodes very, very badly for sales prospects.

Pinball
Another ROM pack just as bad as Bustout, this time with a sparse playfield consisting of nothing but a few bumpers that beep when hit. Gameplay suffers from more lousy physics. If Bustout didn't have you looking at Ataris and Commodores, then this game certainly would seal the deal.

Warehouse Mutants
Just as Adventures shouldn't kill/trap players without reason, arcade games need to ensure players don't lose all their ships/men/whatever due to a single misstep. This Pengo clone is a classic violator of that rule and, since it's a major company's terrible conversion of one of my favorite games, earns a nice fat Turkey. The playfield doesn't reset after the player dies, so there's a near guarantee a trapped player will simply lose all of their penguins the first time they die, especially since the game's speed is much faster than the arcade. To spend a lot of time working toward a high score only to have it wiped out by a single miscue is unforgivable.

Lotto number pickers
Spending $30 for a program that generates a few random numbers isn't always a waste - what is D&D, after all? - but the number of programs claiming to help pick winning lottery numbers never ceased to

amaze me. Some would just generate the numbers, others would ask to use to type in a history of the game's previous winning numbers first; either way these Turkeys were programs even a novice could write on their own in 10 minutes and if I have to explain why these are a waste...well, I guess maybe that means you bought one. There were certainly enough of them out there.

Slot machine simulators
First cousin to the lottery programs are the countless slot machine (and Keno) programs out there, from crude text-based BASIC programs in magazines to pricey modern commercial offerings that supposedly replicate Vegas machines pixel for pixel. Fancy or frugal, these programs all suffer from the same fatal flaw: You just sit there hitting the "spin" button and watching your "money" total go up or down. No skill, no variety and of course no real reward. Nearly everyone I see playing the real machines always seems to have a nonstop bored and dour _expression even when they win, so I'm clueless how anyone could spend hours on the virtual variations.

Aardvark-80 adventures
When companies talk about one- and two-word Adventures, they're usually talking about the player's role of typing in commands. With Aardvark it was an appropriate reference the game itself. In an attempt to make their programs work on as many platforms with as little memory as possible - everything from PCs to ZX81s - they pared down elements such as descriptions way past the essentials. So it gives prolific location descriptions like "At Cave" or "Near River," and a list of things observed like "rocks" with no elaboration when examined. The game therefore is essentially trying every word combination possible (but with no vocabulary list it'll be a long time before a gamer knows the right ones) in the hope something allows you to progress to the next location. The most verbose content seems to be the oft-repeated "You Can't Do That." The amazing thing is the company was around for a while and made a lot of games for a lot of computers. Somebody obviously was playing them - one just hopes these poor gamers knew about real adventures and were just seeking a challenge of a different kind.

Color Computer 3
These are still much-loved among hobbyists and they're not bad machines, per se, but Radio Shack was about five years too late to the market if they really wanted this to be a contender. It's raw numbers were a bit better than machines like the Commodore 64 and Atari 800, but way short of new competitors like the Commodore Amiga and Atari ST (not to mention the Mac and PC). It probably would have helped to repackage/rename the computer, since the Color Computer name wasn't exactly a barn-burner outside of its fan base (truth is, non-users considered the "Trash-80" a joke).

Programmers in denial
"I feel Mr. Smith didn't write a positive review of what I view as a very positive program." It's hilarious - or unbearably sad - witnessing someone unable to cope with the fact they've written a Turkey: One of my favorite portions of a major CoCo magazine was the "Reviewing Reviews" section. It was largely a dumping ground for those who felt their work got unfairly slammed (the quote above is real, with the name changed). If a harsh review didn't scare me off a product, the responses no doubt did at times. The Turkeys go to those whose screw-ups could cause serious problems in the real world: An author responding to a slam about his accounting program erasing the user's data if the end-of-year report feature was attempted said users could print out the data first if that was a concern; a tax software author shrugged off the fact his program contained and spit out forms with spelling errors ("Somehow this does not distress me. I do not lay claim to being a speller or a typist."). The side dish awards go to the game programmers who simply got slammed for lousy programs (common rebuttal: "those who tested it for me had very positive remarks" - family and friends can be like that), slow speeds ("this is a limitation of the machine, not the program") and bugs ("the user can fix this by locating and removing the POKE 65495,0 statement in line 130"), and so on.

MC-10 (Micro Color Computer)
"A scaled-down Color Computer. That's like saying a poor man's Volkswagen Beetle," one magazine writer scoffed. This was one of those tiny ZX81-sized entry-level computers like the Mattel Aquarius

that briefly flirted with the marketplace - and every single one of them bombed. The MC-10 came up short in memory (4K) and keyboard (really bad chicklets), and long in price ($119 at a time when far superior computers like the TI 99/4a were selling for less than $100). The nearly nonexistent software was totally lame, usually comparable to BASIC programs you could type in from magazines. I haven't researched it thoroughly, but this appears to be the shortest-lived Tandy machine ever.

And my top Turkey of all time:

Dallas Quest Adventure
Dallas Quest represents everything bad about Adventures, yet this overpriced and overhyped title was a widely praised best-seller. I have no alternative but to believe the "Dallas" theme is responsible, drawing in fans of the TV show (not exactly the high IQ crowd) who weren't regular gamers and thought anything featuring their favorite show on a computer screen must be cool. The success of that marketing approach accounts for much of what's wrong and unoriginal in today's computing world.

I could literally use this as an educational tool, showing programmers step by step every pitfall that exists in Adventure games and what they need do to avoid them: 1) Don't use a linear format where the user is nearly always stuck in a single room/setting until they solve a puzzle - allow them to wander and explore; 2) solutions to puzzles need to be logical - if you're being attacked by alligators on a leaking boat, intuition probably doesn't suggest the solution is offering a monkey some tobacco from a pouch; 3) do not rely on the same solution for multiple problems - appeasing the niccotine-addicted monkey must solve half the puzzles in this game, none logically; 4) do not kill your Adventurer without cause - solving a puzzle and moving to the next screen here frequently means a guessing game where the player has a one-in-four chance of surviving if they happen to guess the right direction (anything else and you're lost in the jungle forever); 5) If it can be solved in 30 moves once all the secrets are known, it probably lacks the depth to be a good Adventure.

This is only a fraction of the game's problems. Perhaps the worst overall was somehow being a top-seller despite a top-end $40 price tag, which went a long way toward convincing other software places they could market inferior products if they were flashy enough. This wasn't the only example, of course, but it was as bad as it got on the CoCo.

<div style="background:blue;color:white;text-align:center">

Game Over

</div>

Sadly we've come to the end of another issue. But don't fret, there's more retrogaming action coming your way next month. Remember, as long as you keep playing, the game is never over. Until next time, see ya!

- *__Adam King__*, Chief Editor