Retrogaming Times Monthly

Issue #8 - January 2005

Press Fire to Start

by Adam King

Welcome to another issue of Retrogaming Times Monthly, the first retrogaming newsletter of the new year. I hope everyone had a good holiday season. 2005 has finally arrived, and it brings new challenges and new opportunities, especially in the gaming world.

It's interesting that this year will celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Nintendo Entertainment System, the system that brought videogames back to life after dying the previous year. In January 1985, videogames were pretty much dead. Computers had taken over and only a few staunch gamers still had their Atari's and Intellivision's plugged in. But then Nintendo came along and revived the gaming industry. If it wasn't for the release of the NES, none of you would be enjoying your PlayStation 2 and XBox and other systems. So throughout the year I'm going to revisit 1985 every so often to talk about the release of the NES. It's wasn't an easy task, but in the end it paid off.

But enough about that. Let's this this issue started.

ATARI 2600 GAME HACKS

by Tonks

Something I have recently discovered are the huge amount of "game hacks", or modified Atari 2600 games that are available. I'm sure that many of you hard core collectors have already discovered these games. But if you have not yet been exposed to the numerous hacked Atari games, then let me introduce you to some fantastic "new" games.

Basically, a game hack is a modification of an existing game. Some clever person hacks into the original code and changes things like the graphics and sound. The results can be anything from wonderful to plain bizarre. What follows are some of the better game hacks that I have discovered.

Space Invaders Arcade   Galaxian (Jess Ragan)   Asteroids (Thomas Jentzsch)

SPACE INVADERS ARCADE - *by Rob Kudla*

Basically what you have here is the excellent gameplay of the Atari version of Space Invaders combined with graphics that are very close to the arcade original. What this means is nothing less than a brilliant game. If you love Space Invaders, then you really need to have this version of the game. The improved graphics really do make it a much more enjoyable game. It is one of the hacks that really makes you wish they had made the game like this in the first place.

GALAXIAN - *by Jess Ragan*

Similar to the Space Invaders Hack, this hacked version of Galaxian features graphics much closer to the arcade original. The multi-coloured sprites look terrific. It is just a shame that they couldn't have remained multi-coloured when they swoop down instead of reverting back to their monochrome glory.

ASTEROIDS - *by Thomas Jentzsch*

WOW!! This is my personal favourite hack. Another graphical improvement, but one that many possibly thought would be impossible - Asteroids with Vector graphics. It looks great and plays great, and actually has far less flicker than the original 2600 version. This is a great technical achievement and it certainly belongs in everyone's collection.

Jungle King   River Raid Plus   Hang On!

JUNGLE KING - *by Jess Ragan*

After a law-suit from the estate of Edgar Rice Burrows, the original Jungle King was forced to change the lead character. Out went the Tarzan look-a-like and in came the pith helmet hero of Jungle Hunt. This hack of Jungle Hunt restores the game's original design and we can once again swing through the jungle as "Tarzan". Jungle King looks great and is so faithful to the arcade original that the characters hair even changes colour with each level. The only problem is that there doesn't seem to be any change to the swimming level. All of a sudden "Tarzan" has put on a pair of pants.

RIVER RAID PLUS - *by Thomas Jentzsch*

If you think you are an expert at River Raid, then you need to try your hand at this version of Activision's classic. Balloons, which are present in some other versions of River Raid, have been added as extra obstacles. While they are easy to destroy and don't add too much of an extra threat, it is very nice to see them. The difficulty level is greatly increased with more ships, helicopters, etc,

tighter rivers to navigate and less fuel. All up, a great hack to really weed out the boys from the men.

HANG ON! *- by mojofltr*
This hack of Enduro features motorbikes instead of racing cars. The feel of the game remains very much Enduro, but the graphical change is an interesting one. With not many motorbike racing games available on the 2600, this could be the hack that pleases many motorbike fans. The game really has no similarity in gameplay to Hang On, so don't go looking for this game if you are after an actual version of the Sega classic.

INVASION *- by neotokeo2001*
Invasion is a hack of Megamania. Instead of all the weird enemies in the original Megamania, they have been replaced with the invaders from Space Invaders. Your ship has also been changed to the Space Invaders ship. I really feel this graphical change has improved the game. I have always enjoyed Megamania, but the graphics have never really impressed me. It just seems to be a bit more exciting to shoot at an alien invader than a featureless block.

All of these and many more are available as free downloads. Some are even available as actual carts for you to purchase.

There are also many funny games. One great example of this is "Kill Dr Phill". This is a hack of Space Invaders with the aliens changed to resemble Dr Phil.

Some hacks attempt to improve the game by allowing different controls to be used. Two examples worth noting are Super Sprint which has been hacked to use the Atari driving controller, and Robot Tank which has been hacked to use two joysticks to simulate tank controls. Unfortunately I haven't been able to test these fully as I have only used these hacks on an emulator rather than a real Atari 2600.

The very clever people who have done the hacks deserve a pat on the back. Many have made big efforts to make very real improvements on the games. For more information and downloads, log onto www.atariage.com/software_hacks.html

The Titles of Tengen - After Burner
by David Lundin, Jr.

Aside from the Atari created arcade games Tengen ported over to the NES, they branched out in an attempt to profit off what ever was hot at the arcades at the time. After Burner is one such case, one of Yu Suzuki's classic Sega arcade games, released in 1987. After Burner centers around flying an F-14 fighter plane through enemy infested unfriendly skies, making ground assault runs and refueling stops along the way. The action is viewed from behind your plane, targeting is controlled via a targeting sight that your flight controls lead around the play field. You have a vulcan cannon and air-to-air missiles at your disposal, moving your targeting sight against an enemy target will give you a lock, upon firing a missile it will follow the locked target and destroy it. No doubt, this game was based after the modern classic movie, Top Gun. The NES port shares things from the arcade games After Burner and After Burner II. It contains 23 stages where as After Burner (arcade) contained 19, however After Burner II (arcade) contained 23.

Graphically Tengen did their best to get this fast moving game to be playable on the NES hardware. Your plane is a decent size however both it and the enemy sprites are somewhat small compared to the scale of their arcade counterparts. The targeting sight grows around targets you've obtained lock on and your missiles track their targets smoothly and accurately, in other words the scaling detail is pretty good for an NES game. Graphical detail limitations don't allow stages to bleed into one another as they did in the arcade, instead your plane will automatically fly up high enough so that the ground will disappear off-screen and when you level back off the new stage terrain will be beneath you. Surprisingly the ground assault stages are in the NES version and they're actually really well done and measure up good when compared to the arcade version. If there's one graphical aspect of the game that simply does not translate well onto the NES it's the roll rotation. Banking left and right in the arcade version was extremely smooth as was performing a barrel roll. In the NES version you get multiple horizon angles that play out in sequence, it's basically like every fifth frame of a smooth bank or barrel roll. It takes a little while to get used to but it's not big enough of a distraction to hinder game play. When shot down your plane has all the multiple crash sequences it did in the arcade, a nice touch for the home version. The big difference between the two is the HUD. Instead of having your remaining missiles, score, remaining planes, and hit count on screen they come up when you reach a new stage or return from being shot down.

Tengen got all the music of the Sega arcade classic into the NES version, albeit in digitized 8 bit versions. Sound effects are pretty bland but it's not that big of a deal. Instead of having the digitized "the enemy!" clip when you are being tracked from behind, a beeping lock-on sound plays. Even though they're not exact to the arcade the sound effects in the NES version are passable for a home version of this era. The digitized soundtrack taken from the arcade version is what holds the audio together. The arcade cabinet was controlled via a flight stick with a trigger for the cannon and a button for missiles as well as a thrust control to activate the after burner. The NES version adapts the control pad for fight controls, the A button fires your cannon, the B button fires your missiles, and the Start button activates your after burner. It takes a little while to get used to hitting Start to engage the after burner but it's no more inconvenient than hitting Start to perform an uppercut in the NES classic Punch-Out!!

According to the manual there are 23 stages (the farthest I've ever been able to get to is Stage 17) which matches the amount of stages in After Burner II. Also the stages that involve landing on a runway and having your plane reloaded by a ground team were introduced in After Burner II, however the NES version doesn't have variable plane speed (that was introduced in After Burner II) so it sits as a hybrid between the two arcade games. While it may not deliver the fast and furious excitement the arcade version did, NES After Burner retains enough of the original games features to warrant it a decent port of a true classic. If you can adjust to the slightly sluggish response then you'll find a rewarding NES experience and a challenging take on air combat.

"InsaneDavid" also runs a slowly growing gaming site at http://www.classicplastic.net/dvgi

I had never seen a magazine like Joystik before I laid eyes on my first issue, nor have I seen a magazine like it ever since. Joystik was unquestionably a pioneer among its peers. It chose to focus on the growing interest surrounding the video arcade scene. It very rarely examined games developed for the home market, but as a magazine who's primary focus was arcade games, it always chose to cover home games that, like arcade games, were originals, and not ports of arcade games that they were likely to have discussed previously.

Joystik's origins are similar to that of Electronic Games. It was born out of a different magazine whose focus was tangential to, but not completely about, video games. Joystik magazine's roots are tied to Consumer Guide. I'm not familiar with the details, but before Joystik magazine was published, Consumer Guide published a book entitled "How to Win at Video Games" in 1982. It also published two smaller pocket guides, "How to Win at Pac-Man" and "How to Win at Donkey Kong" as well as a 64 page testament to all thing Pac-Man entitled "Pac-Mania."

When the first issue of Joystik was printed in September of 1982, it bore above the title the same logo as the "How to Win at Video Games" book, in order to catch the eye of those who read the well-received guide. In fact, many of the articles featured in the first issue are reprints of strategies posted in the "How to Win" book. What set the first issue apart was a fantastic interview with Eugene Jarvis, superstar programmer of Defender, Stargate, and Robotron, just to name a few, a detailed look at Zaxxon, and ninth key patterns for Pac-Man.

And so the experiment began to attempt to cash in on the success of their first book with a bimonthly-published magazine. And the result was spectacular. The second issue continued strong in November 1982. Then in December, the editors published the first of two departures from the usual content. Although labeled as Volume 1, No. 3, the third issue was entitled, "How to Win at Home Video Games." It provided in-depth coverage of 10 popular home video games, including Colecovision Donkey Kong and Odyssey2 K.C. Munchkin, and reviews for 60 more. It was later reprinted as a book under its own title. As a Joystik issue, it is one of the rarest to come by.

It then continued with the fourth issue in January 1983 exploring Tron and Donkey Kong Jr., one of the only issues I actually owned at the time of its publication. The next two issues were delayed a month each, coming out in April and July, which did a terrific job exposing many Xevious secrets. Joystik would resume its timely publication in September, followed by the second departure in October, entitled "How to Win Arcade Video Games." This issue was actually a collection of articles contained in previous issues, focusing strictly on game strategy and no additional content. As a result, this too would be reprinted as it's own book. The flame flickered out for Joystik with the remaining two issues published in November, which contained detailed coverage of Dragon's Lair, and December, making the complete set a total of 10 issues.
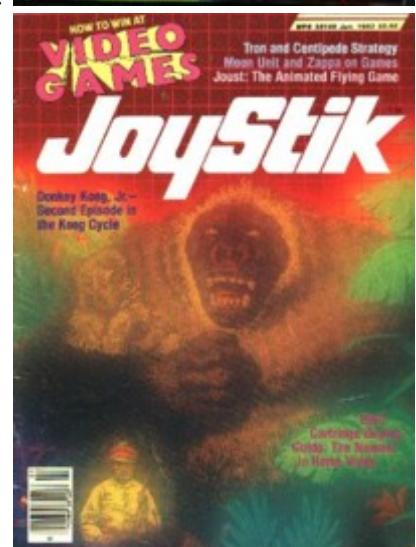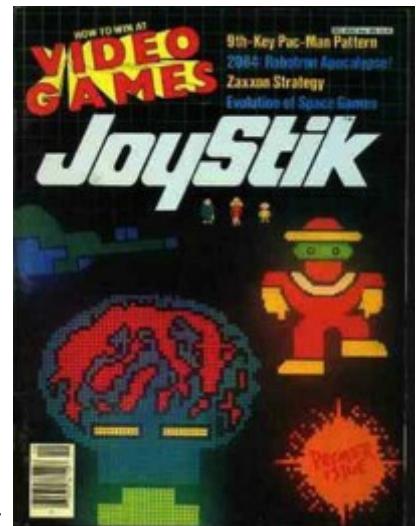
So what set Joystik apart from all the other magazines out at the time? In my opinion, it was two factors; content, and presentation. I'll start with the content. The original "How to Win at Video Games" laid out a blue print for discussing video games, that was adhered to throughout the life of the magazine. The blueprint consisted of an introduction to the game, possibly with an anecdote of the game's origin or popularity, then a dissection of the game's elements, that is, everything that you will ever encounter on the screen, as well as a breakdown of the entire control scheme, followed by the selling point of the magazine, a thorough analysis of the available strategies one might employ to get the highest score possible. While many hardcore players would be most interested in the strategy, possibly bypassing the introduction and the reacquaintance with the already familiar elements, it was the attention to detail with the elements that particularly attracted me to this publication, such was my fondness for sprites and video game iconography. While sprite captures these days are a common sight, back then, it was rare to see the pixilated form of your favorite characters blown up in such sharp detail. By collecting the elements of each game together, it was possible to create an encyclopedia of every creature one would encounter in the arcade halls of 1983.
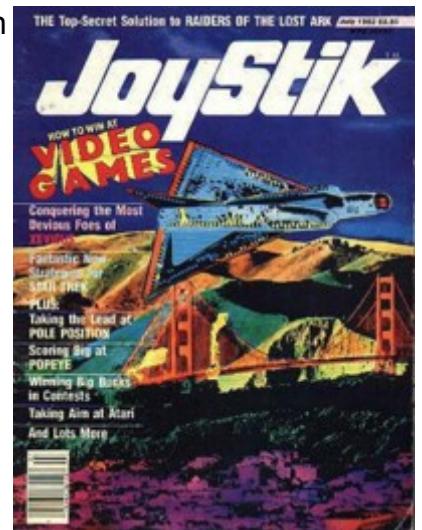
Content such as this would later be copied and expanded upon as time went by, but for its time, Joystik would never be surpassed in terms of it's presentation. The amount of artwork and computer graphics that were fused in to the magazine was almost as much candy for the eyes as real life arcade games. It was not uncommon for a game to be introduced with a two-page wide screen capture, zoomed in on the game in action. In all the other magazines, I have never seen this technique duplicated, and the effect it had on me was spellbinding. The bright depictions of Dig-Dug, Defender, Zaxxon, and Joust made you think you could play the game just by looking at the capture. When such a picture was not available, hand drawn illustrations were set as the wallpaper to an article, and colored by computer so as to give each picture an eerie glow, as if the pages were illuminated by the phosphors of a television set. An unbelievable effort in the days before Photoshop. Admittedly, some of it was over the top and could at times be a distraction from the words you were trying to read, but they breathed such a life in to the publication, that it had raised my expectations of other magazines so much that I was constantly disappointed.

So if my recount of this magazine has inspired you to seek it out for yourself, the key is patience. It took me close to a year to complete my set of 10 issues, as they appear on eBay far and few between. Because they are so rare, it's not uncommon for each issue to command the same range of prices, anywhere from $5 for an issue in poor shape to $20 or even $30 for a copy in near mint condition. I have never seen an entire set for sale, but I would guess in the ballpark of $200 as a bargain price. While other magazines are commonly sold off in auctions or garage sales, I think of this series as a trophy, the complete set being the holy grail of magazine collections.

If you can't wait, or don't want to attempt, to get your hands on the entire series, and would prefer to do your viewing online, you won't find any problem locating several sites with cover scans, such as http://cvmm.vg-network.com/joystik.htm which even links each cover to that issue's editor's message. Sadly however, most of the scans that were contained online seem to have disappeared. I am happy to report that I found one site that will allow you to download most of the issues in compressed archives (the server seems to have issues with the size of two of the issues) at http://dragonsden.emuunlim.com/ddmanuals.htm

While it was common for many magazines to focus on the emerging home video game market and sprinkle a few arcade articles in for good measure, Joystik magazine not only took the opposite approach, it did so with a style all its own. Therefore, you will not find a more interesting account of the arcade scene in the early 80s than in the pages of Joystik magazine. Joystik was the eclectic

magazine of its day, but Electronic Games was the king. And I'll begin to explore why next month.

NEWSBYTES

•This is a Buyer's Beware bulletin. Last issue I reported on the Majesco 6-in-1 unit that has 6 old Konami arcade games. However word is going around that the games are NOT the arcade versions, but rather versions on the Nintendo and Commodore systems. So if you're thinking about picking one up, just be aware you won't get real emulation.

Thanks to Jason Palmer for passing this along.

•Classic Atari action is coming to the Nintendo DS system this March. Atari is planning to release a complation of 10 arcade classics for the DS, which includes Pong, Missile Command, Asteroids, Breakout, Centipede, Tempest, Warlords, Gravitar, Lunar Lander and Sprint. Plus some of the games will be updated to support the DS's unusual feature set, allowing for touch-screen control as well as the traditional combination of D-pad and face buttons, and multiplayer options that take advantage of the handheld's wireless networking as well as allowing two players to go at it on the same machine. The set is scheduled to be released in the US on March 15.

Credit: Digital Press (http://www.digitpress.com/)

•For those of you who have fond memories of watching the Starcade TV show, get ready to relive those memories again thanks to the Starcade DVD. This disc contains 5 episodes that originally aired in the 80s, plus some behind-the-scenes bonus footage during the show's taping. You can buy your copy of the DVD at Good Deal Games for only $17.99.

Credit: Good Deal Games (http://www.gooddealgames.com/)

Retrogaming Commercial Vault
by Adam King

This month in the Valut, we take a look at some Coleco ads. No, not Colecovision this time. Coleco also released a set of table-top arcade games. If you remember these devices were LCD games that were released to look like the arcade cabinets. And who hasn't dreamed of having an arcade machine in their home?

The interesting thing about both these ads is that they both feature a character called Mr. Arcade. He's a mysterious person who has the power to shrink down upright arcade machines into table top size. Let take a look at a couple of his exploits.

Pac-Man Tabletop
Here, Mr. Arcade is entering a gameroom when a woman asks him for help with her husband. It seems he can't tear himself away from a Pac-Man machine to come home. So Mr. Arcade shrinks down a Pac-Man machine into a Coleco tabletop. Now he can take the arcade machine home with him.

PICTURES:

"Please help! My husband has Pac-Man fever!"*

"Not now, honey! I've almost reached the 9th key!"

"Watch me work my magic."

"Wow, Pac-Man in a travel size."

"Okay, dear, it's time to return to real life now."

Say won't the arcade operator be mad to find his Pac-Man machine missing?

*Everyone knew I was going to work this in anyway, so don't get mad.

Ms. Pac-Man Tabletop

Since Ms. Pac-Man features Pacy's better half, Mr. Arcade visits the gameroom with his significant other, *Ms.* Arcade. They come upon a couple who's enjoying a Ms. Pac-Man arcade machine a little too much. So Ms. Arcade shows off her powers and shrinks the machine into a tabletop model so they can take it home with them.

PICTURES:

Out on a date with the Ms.

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"I can shrink arcade machines too! Watch!"

An upright becomes a tabletop

"Hey! We can now have our own special time with Ms. Pac-Man!"

"Our work here is done."

Of course they ignore the fact that only one of them can play at a time. Let's hope this doesn't lead to Divorce Court.

As of now the Commercials CD is no longer available. However if you got your payment in the mail before January 1, I will still send you the CD once I get your payment, so don't worry.

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

The Many Faces of . . . Centipede
by Alan Hewston

This month we have another 25th anniversary tribute, honoring the 1980 Atari arcade game Centipede. This is the first arcade game written by a woman, Dona Bailey along with veteran programmer Ed Logg. Centipede is one of my most played video games and usually makes classic gamer's top 10 list of 1980's arcade games. Centipede's sound effects are very recognizable - right up there with the most identifiable games ever made. There's a whopping 11 official home systems that Centipede made it onto and we'll review 10 of them here. 11 versions ranks it second to Frogger (14 - which we'll review next January) and ahead of Defender (9 - coming next month).

In Centipede, you play the role of Oliver the Elf, or Lord Motley Bugnut, Bug Expert, or just a magic wand, and the embodiment of the ultimate shooter. Regardless of who or what this character is, the role is to zap those pests and stay alive. At home, the biggest difference is the playfield. Instead of the arcade's 33 x 30 mushroom field, there is more width than height, so the mushroom field's are roughly 30 x 22. With a reduced height, there's less distance between the Centipede and you, and when the Centipede is moving along at the same relative L/R speed as the arcade, it will still reach the bottom sooner. Likewise, there is not as much room to maneuver in the lower portion of the screen known as the "Player Zone". With these setbacks all versions lose a little in their gameplay scores, but otherwise they all capture the feel and all details of the arcade.

Arcade: by Atari - Dona Bailey & Ed Logg
Home versions all by Atari or Atarisoft:

•Apple II '83
•Atari 2600 '82 Larry Clague
•Atari 5200 '82 Frank Hausman & Sean Hennessey
•Atari 7800 '84
•Atari 8 bit '82 Dave Getreu
•Colecovision '83 Larry Clague
•Commodore 64 '83 Gregg Tavares with help from John Alvarado
•Intellivision '83 Mark Kennedy
•Sinclair Spectrum '82 [DK'Tronics]
•TI-99 '82 James Landowski
•Vic 20 '83

Arcade Sequel: Millipede

Home Version Similarities: Except those in <> all home versions have: a demo mode ; an unlimited pause <2600>; the scoring matches the arcade; each Centipede is at least 12 segments long ; after each Centipede is completely eliminated, the next wave begins with a new colors to both the mushroom field and Centipede; the Centipede also shifts one more segment from its body to a segmented head, until they all become heads; this cycle resets as the next wave will begin over with the Centipede as one body, one head; it takes 4 hits <3 on both the 2600 & INTV> to eliminate a

mushroom & they will change shape as they become damaged <2600, Vic>; but then the spider (limited to then player zone) can clear out any mushroom in its path; if the mushrooms become too few within the player zone, you'll be visited, one at a time, by the loud, fast falling, mushroom-dropping Fleas, who when hit will both speed up and then require a second shot to be destroyed; all other insects require 1 hit; the Spider's variable bonus score is displayed on screen; you only get one shot at a time; but holding down the fire button will give you rapid fire, firing another as soon as the previous shot reaches an object or the top of the screen; there are sound effects for every shot fired and every hit ; there is a background sound effect for the motion of the Centipede ; other sounds include the Flea , Scorpion , Spider , and the adding up of bonus points for repairing any damaged or poisoned mushrooms; poisoned mushrooms are caused by the scorpions, who infect an entire row at a time - which then causes any Centipede touching them to go berserk and plunge downward until destroyed or they hit bottom; a bonus life (limited to 6 total) is earned every 10k (or 12k or 14k on some versions & harder start levels) and you'll hear a chime ring out each time one is earned ; finally an Atari Trackball can be used to make the controls a lot more like the arcade. Only 4 versions have any difficulty options (7800, 5200, 2600 & CV). None of these cartridges are rare, but the CV may set you back the most money.

Trackball or not?
The Centipede arcade game is one of the most memorable for having a Trackball. I play most games much better with a joystick, but I realize that most gamers love that Trackball. Fortunately, most home versions (all Atari & Commodore) support the Atari Trackball, and so I played those versions exclusively with it. The TI-99, CV and Apple 2, I subtracted a point, but otherwise would have scored them a 10 in Controls. The INTV already lost points in Controls, so I did not deduct any further.

Have Nots: Sinclair Spectrum (N/A)
As you probably know, I have yet to find a Spectrum and I do not review games via emulators. But, I'm sure that the Speccy was able to make this a playable home version - but probably limited in sound and unlikely to have any multi-colored details. Sorry to busy to do any research.
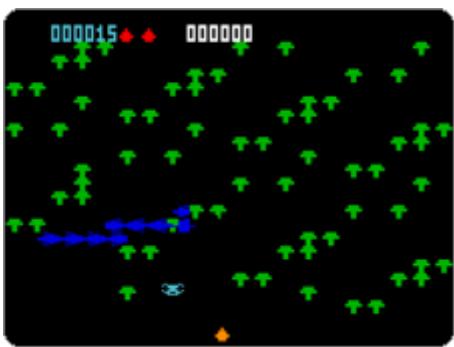
Centipede on Intellivison   Centipede on Apple II   Centipede on Vic-20
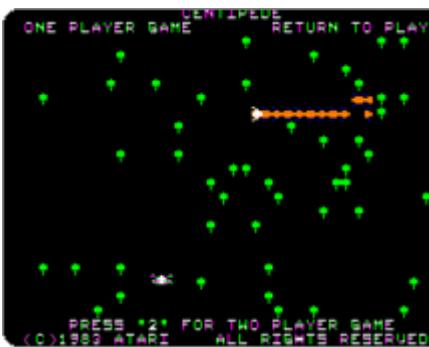
Have Nots: Intellivision (39)
My first reaction was how cool as they programmed in a rapid fire - toggle using the "Enter" button. This is really needed (kudos to the play testers/programmers). Despite this great programming, a tough field of (mushrooms) competitors puts this into a tie for last place. Intellivision fans should not count this version out, as my scores place Centipede in the top 25% of INTY games and it tops my list for most Addictive, scoring a superb (9). There's a collision detection glitch, but not too bad. The usual diagonal buttons or the "Clear" key will toggle the pause. The Gameplay is very good (7), but having the second smallest player zone and playfields (approx 22x22) make it claustrophobic. The cramped playfield and a Centipede 2 segments shorter, alter the strategy of the game. The Graphics are (7) effective, but have little animation and no multi-color characters. There is some detail, good clarity, and great variety in colors used, but it's just not enough to put it in the league of the contenders. The Sounds are sharp (8) and effects very distinct, but most noticeably missing is the rumbling sound of the Centipede. Controls score an (8). Using a stickler helps me significantly, up until the controller pops apart - give me a solid joystick any day. There's just too much fast action, and not enough room

to maneuver making it hard for the Intellivision controllers to cut it (for me). From the Digital Press Guide: read how "Santapede is coming to town."

Have Nots: Apple II (39)
My first reaction was - Where is the sound? Sound is mediocre (5) with shots fired and hits, and when you die, but nothing else. This could impact the gameplay score (but I did not deduct) as well, since you'd play differently, not instantly knowing which enemy just entered the mushroom field. Gameplay is otherwise complete and impressive (8) with nearly the largest mushroom playfield. The Addictiveness is fantastic (9) with the standard key for pausing. Graphics are enjoyable (8) with a little bit of detail, good use of colors, and some animation, but the only multi-color is the Centipede. Lacking most notably is the change to new colors with each passing wave. Controls would have been perfect, but the lacking a Trackball, they score a (9). If, however, an Apple mouse is usable then add that point back in. As usual, this title is only available on disk, but it may be hard to find an original now days.

Have Nots: Vic 20 (40)
My first reaction was that the Sound effects are unharmonious (-1) but otherwise very nice (8). Unlike the Apple, they are all present & distinct. The Gameplay is effective (7), with problems similar to, but a little worse than INTY - only 8 of 12 segments, and the very smallest of all playfields. Once hit, the Flea does not appear to speed up. Addictiveness is remarkable (9) & despite graphic limitations, you can really get into this game. The action does slow when too much is on screen but I never got cheated or frustrated due to that. The pause is toggled using the . Graphics are the big downfall (6), but good enough to enjoy the game. The small playfield is the biggest hit, but a lack of any multi-color, no details, no animation, not very smooth action and the action slowing down all contribute. Fortunately, each wave does refresh with new colors. The Controls are perfect (10) with joystick or a trackball.

Centipede on TI 99/4a   Centipede on Atari 2600   Centipede on Colecovision

Have Nots: TI-99 (41)
My first reaction was simultaneous sound effects went afoul. The sound is very good (7), with all but one effect (hitting the Centipede segments) in place. The firing sound is annoying and when firing (which is like - ALL the time), that sound wipes out the sound of the Centipede. Pretty much all the effects are odd sounding or shrill, but they are distinct & helpful. The gameplay is complete (8) and the only minor glitch is that the Flea only requires one hit. The Addictiveness is great (9) and provide plenty of action. The toggles the pause. The Graphics are very nice (8). Nothing is fantastic, but nothing is flawed either, as there is good detail, some animation, a little bit of multi-color and about an average sized mushroom field. Controls are perfect using an Atari stick, but score (9) as I penalized those that were not trackball compatible. This cart was the least mass-produced, but should only set you back about $5. This version has the worst manual.

Have Nots: Atari 2600 (42)
My first reaction was the title screen is impressive and the game matches it. Gameplay is very good (7) with nothing missing, but a point is deducted since the mushroom field (approx 26 x 20) is among the smallest, and there are only 9 Centipede segments. Despite no pause, the Addictiveness is still

great (9), gaining from having 2 skill choices. The standard skill level, plus an "easy" (Atari Teddy Bear) for children to learn - where the Spider & Flea are harmless and there are no segmented heads. Despite nearly everything being a block, the Graphics are very effective (7). It takes only 3 hits to eliminate a mushroom, which have no details - ie no signs of damage. The colors are plentiful, bright and crisp, but there's no detail, no animation & no multi-color. The 2600 does something unique (probably due to graphics limitations) from all other versions, and I like this the best. That is . . . when the Scorpion comes, if you kill it, then none of the mushrooms become poisoned. This gives you a great motivation to eliminate it, adding greatly to the game's strategy. If you prepared a path to shoot it, and succeed, you'll be rewarded by not facing those berserk Centipede segments. The Sound is remarkable (9) - close your eyes and you can tell what everything is - pretty good for the 2600. The Controls are perfectly trackball compatible (10).

Have Nots: Colecovision (43)

My first reaction was frustration - I keep getting stuck with this oversized wand. Then, the game is too hard even on the "easy" setting - thus eliminating any benefit by having 3 difficulty options. Gameplay is impressive (8) and complete - no points lost for its average-sized playfield. Unfortunately there is poor collision detection (you shoot through things yet they only need to be near you to kill you). When the wand gets you stuck (being larger than the openings) you'll probably agree the Addictiveness is the worst of all systems - but still enjoyable (8). Pause by using the "#" key. Graphics are fantastic (9), second only to the 7800, with the most animation, great colors, good detail and a little bit of multi-color. Sound is wonderful (9), among the best & Controls score a (9). Due to clever programming, both controller ports work simultaneously, so you can use an Atari controller in one, while still able to pause & use the keypad using the CV controller on the other. Too bad Atarisoft did not program the Roller Controller or the Atari Track Ball to function. Semi rare and the most expensive of all Centipede carts - about $10.

Silver Medal: Atari 8 Bit, Atari 5200 & Commodore 64 (45)

A three-way tie for runner up.

Centipede on Atari 8-bit   Centipede on Commodore 64   Centipede on Atari 5200

Atari 8 Bit

My first reaction was the 5200 is different. The Gameplay is complete (8), and the mushroom field is second largest to the 7800. The Addictiveness is first class (9), gaining a bonus for the pause but has no difficulty options. The Graphics are wonderful (9), with some animation, good detail, lots of color and even some multi-color. Sound is outstanding (9), probably the best and finally having perfect Trackball (10) Controls.

Commodore 64

My first reaction was programmer Gregg Tavares says on his web site that he was paid to port this one from the Atari 8 bit. Too bad it wasn't the 7800 version copied. The scores all match the Atari, but a finer point scale might drop this one out of the medal count. Gameplay is as complete (8) as the Atari, but the playfield is slightly narrower. Addictiveness is superb (9) with the pause . Graphics are wonderful (9) equal to the Atari description save for the Flea is mono colored. Sound is fantastic (9) with all effects in place, probably not as arcade sounding as the Atari. Controls are perfect (10) allowing use of the Trackball.

My first reaction was the graphics are more detailed but at the expense of one of the smallest playfields. This small 24 x 22 playfield deducts a point from Gameplay, making it very good, (7), but otherwise complete. The Addictiveness is awesome (10) with 3 difficulty levels and a . There's also an 8 digit score, so it'll take quite a game to roll it over. Graphics are superb (9), with good animation & detail, good color, multi-color, and one of only 2 versions with multi-colored mushrooms. But the greater detail came at the expense of larger objects, thus a smaller number of mushrooms. Sound is all there and great (9). Controls are perfect (10), but only if you use the 5200 Trackball - not the stick.

Gold Medal: Atari 7800 (47)
My first reaction was the addictiveness is like they say in the movie Spinal Tap "this one goes to 11". The Addictiveness is awesome (10), with a choice of 4 starting difficulties, and the simultaneous dual player mode allowing players to compete against each other or play as a team. We've mentioned this before in the Retrogaming Times - many games we'd love to see this option added to. The Gameplay is impressive (8) - even the demo shows 2 player action. The Graphics are magnificent (10). The best, with the largest playfield, best details, good animation, and the most detail, and everything is mutli-colored. Sound is well-done (9) as good as any. Controls are perfect (10), and YEAH BABY, both players can play simultaneously with trackballs!

Centipede on Atari 7800

Come back next month for the Many, Many Faces of Defender, found on all of these same systems again - except for the 7800. Contact Alan Hewston at: Hewston95@NOSPAMstratos.net or visit the Many Faces of site: http://my.stratos.net/~hewston95/RT/ManyFacesHome.htm

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The TI-99/4A Arcade
by Bryan Roppolo

For this issue (and all subsequent issues) I decided to shift the focus from reviewing TI-99/4A video game arcade conversions, to reviewing what I think are the games to try and get for the TI system. Interestingly enough, the 3 games in the last issue (Blasto, Hustle, and Treasure Island) are all very fun to play and I'd definitely put them under the heading as titles that are worth getting. Anyway, in this issue I will be focusing again on 3 more titles for the TI-99/4A: Meteor Belt, Bigfoot, and Sewermania. These 3 cartridges all have one thing in common besides being good games...They were all programmed by Milton Bradley for the MBX system (pretty much the same thing as the Voice Commander announced for the Atari 2600/5200) which allowed for Voice Recognition, better speech synthesis, and the use of a fancy analog joystick. However, don't despair, these games can indeed be played without the MBX system and I highly recommend them with or without the device as they are a blast to play!

Bigfoot (1983 Milton Bradley) - A mix of Donkey Kong and Roc 'n Rope

Now here stands a game that is literally at the pinnacle (or one of the pinnacles) of TI-99/4A gaming. As with Blasto and Hustle from last months article, Bigfoot is another one of those Milton Bradley masterpieces. Considering how well Milton Bradley programmed their games, one has to wonder why they never came out with their own video game system as it sure would have been a great machine. But enough of my rambling, on to the Bigfoot review!

The game pits you, a mountain climber, against the dreaded Bigfoot who stands at the top of the mountain. The goal of the game is to reach the summit and lower a cage to capture the beast. As with any video game it wouldn't be a challenge if all you had to do was simply get to the top of the mountain, so there are a number of obstacles that stand in your way of getting there. The biggest obstacles are the boulders that Bigfoot himself rolls down the mountain at you. These big rocks will roll along the ledges of the mountain until they fall off at the bottom of the screen. The only way to avoid them is by clinging to the ropes that you can throw to each ledge (as seen in the screen shot to the right). This can prove to be very tricky since you have to keep a sharp eye out for the boulders and make sure you throw a rope out before they get too close or otherwise you'll be knocked off the ledge and plummet to your death.

In addition to the ropes helping you avoid boulders being rolled down the mountain, they also are your only device to get to the summit or travel from ledge to ledge. This is perhaps the most interesting aspect of the game since there is no predefined path like in a game such as Donkey Kong. Many games from this time period would have had ladders on the mountain that you would have had to climb, but not here! You must seek out your own path to the top, which not only makes this game more difficult but also much more unique. It's mostly because of this twist that the game has been considered one of the top TI-99/4A games. Now in addition to just climbing the ropes and avoiding boulders, there are actually crows that will fly past at random that can snatch the rope you are on and leave your climber yelling "Put me Down!" (if you have the speech synthesizer or MBX system). Well the crow does indeed put you down, he drops the rope right in mid-air! Needless to say this leads to the loss of one of your lives.

The final aspect of the game that needs to be mentioned is that you cannot just climb to the top of the mountain, but actually need to pick up the gold and climbing supplies which are strewn about on various ledges. However, you must collect these items in a certain order (one of the climbing supplies must be gathered before you can pick up one of the gold piles) and only after all these things are collected can you reach the top and cage Bigfoot.

Overall, this game really shines not just in terms of its gameplay but also because of the beautiful graphics and the speech synthesis. From the realistic sound of a metal hook latching on to a ledge to the sound of your climber yelling "Put me down...Ahhhhh!!!!!" (as he falls his voice slowly fades away) this game really demonstrates how well Milton Bradley knew the TI-99/4A! In addition, if you happen to have an MBX system then the player can take advantage of the comfortable 360º Analog Joystick that Milton Bradley made for the device. All in all, this game is a MUST HAVE and is in my TOP 10 games for the TI-99/4A. I've seen this game pop up on eBay every now and then and it is highly recommended for anyone interested in collecting/playing on the TI-99/4A system, so be sure to grab it.

Meteor Belt (1983 Milton Bradley)

As with all the games in this months article, this title was also made by Milton Bradley and could take advantage of the MBX add-on. Meteor Belt takes place in outer space and pits two space fighter ships against one another, it can be played head-to-head against a friend or against the computer for a one-player game. The first element of the game that sets it apart from a regular space shoot 'em up is that while whoever ends up with the highest score at the end of the game wins (the game ends once all of someone's ships are lost, and technically someone that loses all his ships first could still win if he has the higher score) the way one goes about achieving the highest score is not simply by blasting every asteroid/satellite that comes onto the play field between each player. Instead, some strategy needs to be implemented.

The first reason why blasting everything in sight is not necessarily good is because of the fact that red asteroids actually take AWAY points from your score instead of adding to it. Many times during the game, the screen can be filled with red asteroids and therefore you must be careful where your laser is aimed. Trust me, on my first time playing this game I didn't understand this fact and always wondered why I never ended up with the highest score! The other reason why strategy plays such a crucial role is because the ships are equipped with two lasers. One laser simply destroys the asteroids or satellites, while the other laser can be used to deflect a satellite (not a meteor) towards the opponent. If that satellite enters your opponents game space (past the yellow or blue triangles shown in the picture to the right) then you receive a substantially greater number of points than if you just blasted the satellite or asteroid.

There is a catch however, by using your deflection laser the white marker on your status bar, which is located next to your score, will go all the way down to the red end (using the destruction laser, your status usually stays in the green area unless you use the laser very rapidly). Once that white marker goes into the red, you must wait for it to re-energize back into the green area before being able to shoot again. Many times I've been caught with a depleted laser and ended up having to avoid satellites and other things the computer/opponent has shot or deflected my way, which definitely adds to the challenge.

The other element tossed into the game are the barriers which are made up of colored triangles. These barriers help stop lasers and satellites from hitting or entering your (or your opponents) territory, but they can be depleted after taking numerous hits. One other purpose the barriers have is to serve as "drones." If you press up on the joystick when behind one of the barriers it will launch into the play field and just like a heat seeking missile try and hit your opponents ship. These drones are not affected by the asteroids or satellites, and can only be stopped by laser or when they hit the opponents barrier field.

As with Bigfoot, Meteor Belt really adds some great elements that help set it apart from others in its genre. The best way to play a game of Meteor Belt is with a friend, not because the computer itself doesn't serve as a good opponent, but rather because it's a lot more fun playing the game head-to-head. Also, the speech and sound effects (gotta love that opening theme!) really add to the game. If you have the MBX system, the addition of their wonderful joystick and also the improved speech (the speech the MBX provides is very remarkable, since it actually is better than TI's own speech synthesizer) are great compliments to an already great game.

Sewermania (1983 Milton Bradley)

Have you ever wanted to explore the depths of a murky sewer? Neither have I, but Sewermania allows you to do just that! The game starts out with a little van driving along the road (the road is at the top of the screen) that eventually stops and a voice from inside the vehicle tells you to look for a bomb under the sewer. You control the movement of a little guy who's task is, as mentioned earlier, to search for a bomb which is hidden somewhere in a 2-screen sewer maze. The neat thing about this game is that if you have an MBX system, it can use the voice commands! So all the player has to do is put on a headset and simply speak some preset words for the guy who you're controlling to respond. You can use the voice commands to pick up shovels, kill the rats, close doors, etc. The voice recognition really adds to the game since not many video game devices from back in the 80s (and even to this day) have this capability. In the sewer there are 3 different types of enemies: Black Rats, Red Rats, and Alligators. The Black Rats actually do not harm you and can be killed by sticking them with a shovel (a little bit gruesome I guess!).

However, these innocent Black Rats should not be completely left unguarded as they can turn into Red Rats, which are apparently rats with rabies. These rats can indeed kill, so you have to be pretty sharp with the shovel in order to fend them off. The final type of enemy that roams these sewers are the Alligators. These alligators not only can kill you, but cannot be killed themselves unless you trap them with a door. The doors are the little red objects attached to the walls of the sewer and can be used to not just close yourself off from any oncoming enemies (these doors are especially handy in later levels when the rats turn red frequently) but to trap one of your pursuers, because once trapped that creature will then die adding to your point total.

Now as to the bomb it's not simply sitting out in the open, instead you must explore each cavern until it's found. Once found, your guy will say out loud "Found the Bomb Boss", "Got the Bomb Boss". Then your boss from the van can be heard saying "Quick, Get it out!", all of which is said in a great accent BTW! After picking up the bomb you are given 20 seconds to get out of the sewer and place it on the road where it will be diffused. However, getting out of the sewer can be VERY hard at times since cars and motorcycles (which can be heard while your exploring the sewer below) are traveling on the road and the sewer lid can only be opened once there are no cars in sight. So hopefully there is plenty of time on the bomb and no rats or alligators on your tail (or not enough time on the bomb), since you might end up either getting devoured or blown up all due to traffic running above ground.

Looking at this game as a whole, you've got to love the speech recognition and synthesis, as it does indeed add a lot of fun! Hearing the phrase "Oh no, an Alligator" being said in a Boston accent almost makes you want to run into that alligator just to hear it again. While Sewermania might not hold as much replay value as the other two games in this article, mainly due to the fact that there are only 2 separate screens to explore, it's still a fun little game to play. One thing that I was upset about was the fact that that big red generator, which sits in the top left on both screens of the game, initially was going to allow you to flood the sewer! This function was taken out of the final game for unknown reasons, but it would have been very cool to see all the rats get flooded just by the turn of the blue wheel. Maybe some day a prototype of Sewermania will turn up and in it the generator will be able to serve its original function, that would be very interesting to see. But in the meantime, here's your chance to do some sewer exploration at its best!

For more reviews, graphics, and information on TI-99/4A video game cartridges stop by the TI-99/4A Videogame House at <http://www.videogamehouse.net/>. This site is run by a staff of TI-99/4A enthusiasts, including Bryan Roppolo himself and has been responsible for finding unreleased TI-99/4A video game cartridges such as Lobster Bay.

The Thrill of Defeat: Gaming on computing history's losers
by Mark Sabbatini

The names are punchlines in themselves: Mattel Aquarius. Coleco Adam. IBM PC Jr. Osborne 1. And dozens of others. Those not enjoying a nostalgic chuckle either missed these bumbling computers with useless keyboards, 40 percent failure rates and other mishaps - or were suckered into buying machines that sunk corporate giants and startups alike. So today more gamers know Mario instead of Miner Willy and Madden instead of Match Day (not that American gamers would ever abandon "our" football for "theirs" anyway). But plenty of lesser-known games are plenty entertaining - or so awful they're great camp - and the intense loyalty often seen among "secondary" machine owners is ensuring their place in history. Many quality titles were victims of machines that failed due to bad circumstances instead of bad circuitry. Others ran on machines that became obsolete before most people knew about or had a desire to own a personal computer. Some were simply momentous programs that defied their hardware. "The Thrill Of Defeat" plans a detailed tour of those platforms and games, beginning this month with a sampler using the simplest of means - browser-based emulators with built-in software. Most can be played by simply going to their URL, with instructions and controls generally available.

This is by no means a complete list of even browser-based offerings, merely a preview of the available range. Similarly, instead of looking just at hits, an attempt to mention a game in one of three categories (Hit, Average and Yuck) is made where possible. Specific machines will generally be the focus of future columns, starting with older machines and moving toward the modern age. Likewise, that's how this sampler will be approached; those looking for relatively sophisticated titles need to endure to the end.

TRS-80 MODEL 1
Even today $599 for a complete system including monitor sounds like a good deal, so Radio Shack captureed some attention with this offering in the late 1970s. It had a black-and-white screen, 4K of memory and cassette-based storage. It and its successor, the Model III, were reasonable successful, but outdone by the color machines that established the mainstream market. Much of its software is typical for various machines of the era, including text-based games in BASIC endlessly copied with small variations. Jeff Vavsour's TRS-80 Emulation Page (http://www.vavasour.ca/jeff/level1/entry16.html) features 18 such programs, plus an ingenious method for saving and loading others using an interpreter that generates and reads text files.

Trek III.4 (HIT)
A true classic and the heart of today's galaxy explorer games, Trek gives the player the now-common task of exploring space and eliminating Klingons. It's turn-based rather than action-oriented, with players typing in commands like the sector they want to warp to and enemy coordinates, but with various computers and other information to keep track of it is a complex and intriguing challenge. Instructions and tips (make sure you have pencil and paper for maps and notes) are included.

Hamurabi (AVERAGE)
For fans of Warcraft, SimCity and other resource management games, this is the original - and call me nuts, but I still enjoy it despite regularly being declared "national fink." Players must hold onto the throne by buying and selling land, planting crops, feeding subjects and warding off rats. This is done through a simple set of decisions each year, after which harvests, number of people starved and other developments are reported. Starve too many and you get tossed out of office. Tough until you figure out the proper ratios for success, which comes only through experimentation since no guidelines are provided.

Horse Racing (YUCK)
Forget those indecipherable racing forms. In this one-player game you start with $1,000 and place a bet on horse 1 to 5 - no odds listed. The horses (who look remarkably like their namesakes) then

crawl toward the right edge of the screen, with a random number generator acting as the whip. In other words, you're betting even money guessing a number between one and five and then spending a couple of minutes watching the outcome.

SINCLAIR ZX SPECTRUM
How can one of Europe's most successful computers of the 1980s - maybe the most successful - be in this category? Two reasons: It never caught on in the U.S. despite impressive price/performance machines offered through Timex and its vast software library features many titles sold on various foreign machines, making it a good introduction for people interested in them. It also sold a number of well-recognized U.S. games (Donkey Kong, Pitfall, etc.), so direct comparisons to U.S. machines from the likes of Atari and Commodore are easy. The following games are among an estimated 30 well-known titles at Jasper (http://www.spectrum.lovely.net/). It's not even close to the biggest and best online collection - JZ Speccy at www.ciunga.it/jxspeccy/index.html has more than 5,500, and will be the subject of a future column - but it's probably the easiest place for an introduction that isn't overwhelming.

Manic Miner (HIT)
Many gamers are probably familiar with this 20-level platformer, since it's been ported to everything from the Commodore 64 to Windows to mobile phones. Sequels (notably Jet Set Willy) and imitators surpassed it, but like the original Donkey Kong it retains its original charm. The player collects items from various caves before their oxygen runs out, avoiding various obstacles and bad guys. It's not overly original, but the levels are clever and the simplistic gameplay executed in near-perfect fashion.

Lords Of Midnight (HIT)
When I talk about being astonished by how much some programmers squeezed into the limited memory of old machines, this is what I'm talking about. This fantasy graphics role-playing adventure has more than 32,000 locations squeezed into 48K of memory. Players control four characters using predefined commands in a Tolkien-like story, with a limited amount of text descriptions and lack of help being the only real drawbacks. Worth a browse, but don't get immersed unless you're using an emulator capable of saving your progress.

Chaos (AVERAGE)
This battle between wizards in an arena is rated as the second-best Spectrum game of all time in one modern survey, despite middling reviews when it came out. I put it in the latter category. Those into spellcasting will find it a fun strategy game, but nowhere near as interesting as a decent RPG. Two to eight wizards, either player- or computer-controlled, battle using a set of spells assigned randomly from a master set. Learning spells and their effectiveness against those of opponents is obviously the key to success. Probably most enjoyable with multiple players, for the human interaction if nothing else.

The Hobbit (AVERAGE)
One of the most loved graphics adventures on the Spectrum, but I have never been enthusiastic about it because it is far too slow to be enjoyed. It takes an eternity to draw screens and most modern players are unlikely to ensure more than a couple minutes of this before giving up. But look at it anyway just to see what the fuss was all about and what compromises gamers were willing to accept in judging a "quality" title.

Skool Daze (AVERAGE)
Most good "original" games are simply creative variations on common genres, as this multi-screen platform game captures in humorous fashion. You control a troublesome student who must steal a dreadful report card from the school safe using a catapult to get various parts of the combination from teachers, all while attending class and dealing with other tasks. Fun, but complex enough that reading instructions is necessary and the slow scrolling as you move screen to screen is somewhat annoying. A bigger and better sequel, Back To Skool, is also part of the emulator's library.

Batty (YUCK)
There aren't any truly terrible games at the Jasper site, but this Araknoid clone is wedged into this category because it commits some common sins of poor games: 1) the color scheme is awful - the yellow paddle on a yellow backdrop is difficult to see, for instance; 2) keyboard control in ball-and-paddle games is nearly always a chore (to be fair, a joystick option exists); 3) it's one of a hundred clones in this genre. Why programmers think the world needs another copy of Tetris, Balderdash and games like this is bewildering.

MSX (MULTI-MACHINE)
Here's one for the anti-Bill Gates crowd: An operating system from Microsoft that failed (sort of). MSX stands for MicroSoft eXtended BASIC and attempted to establish a "standard" operating system and set of specifications for lower-end computers. It had some success overseas and still has an active base of fans, but never caught on in the U.S. The Java MSX Emulator (http://www.classicgaming.com/jmsxemu) offers a number of hit titles - so there's nothing to really list in the "YUCK" category - but they play in a tiny window.

Zanac (HIT)
Overhead shooters are as common as Tetris clones, but everyone needs at least one quality version and this qualifies as it was ported to the 8-bit Nintendo and other machines. Lots of weapons and power-ups are provided, a good thing since the enemies are plentiful as well. Perhaps the most noteworthy aspect is an AI system that adjusts enemy intelligence based on the player's performance.

Kings Valley (AVERAGE)
Platformers are another seemingly endless genre, so the key to success beyond quality gameplay becomes a title's unique aspects. This game twists the Mario hammer theme, for instance, with a sword than can be thrown and retrieved. It's a good basic example of this category. Controls are tricky, since two keys are needed to move up and down stairs, but since you don't die by falling off platforms this isn't a major problem.

Knightmare (AVERAGE)
This top-down shooter, the first in a trilogy, is rated as one of the best MSX games ever. Hmmm...maybe, but it's worth playing regardless. You control a knight trying to reach a kidnapped queen by shooting enemies that appear from the top of the screen and bonus boxes, and collecting various power-ups that boost shotpower, freeze the game and so on along the way. Sequels, not included in the online emulator, added deeper platform/RPG elements.

COMMODORE PLUS/4
One might sympathize with engineers assigned to making a sequel to the top 1980s home computer, the Commodore 64 , but given the company's cut-all-corners-and-make-money attitude some mirth at corporate expense is also justifiable. The Plus/4 was largely incompatible with the 64's software and hardware, and came with terrible built-in software for word processing and other tasks. It actually sold a fair number of units (again overseas) and had some decent games, about 60 of which are playable at Minus4Java (http://plus4.emucamp.com/playonline.htm).

Dizzy: Prince Of Yolkfolk (HIT)
This isn't an original for the Plus/4, but this character has such a dominant presence on computers featured in this series - and was ported to best-sellers as well - that at least one title has to be included in this article. The two guys that wrote these platform games were the retrogaming equivalent of Shakespeare: They pounded out a ton of crowd-pleasing stuff in a hurry for money, but their natural talent resulted in a steady string of quality games almost in spite of themselves. Dizzy is an egg-shaped character who must solve various puzzles by collecting things and using them in the right places. Moves at a good pace, with the only drawback being some puzzles may be tough for newcomers to figure out (hints are all over the Web).

Trailblazer (AVERAGE)

A very ordinary game in a fancy wrapper. The player controls a soccer ball rolling along a 3D platform in outer space, avoiding gaps and obstacles along the way. It's the same gameplay found in a basic auto racer, but many programmers have made successful games by tweaking appearances. Antarctic Adventure, another game in this collection that's considered a huge hit on a number of machines, is the same thing with a penguin waddling over various icefields.

Blitz 16 (YUCK)
This is a great game - if you happen to be playing on a ancient machine like the TRS-80 Model I or it's something you wrote yourself in BASIC. The oft-repeated concept is simple: You drop bombs from a plane as it flies across the screen, taking out buildings below as the plane slowly descends toward them. It's sort of like Breakout where you're constantly moving in one direction. The tacky black and white graphics ensure this game's place here.

Airwolf (YUCK)
The only good thing about this game is offers an unlimited lives option. You'll need it because this game of navigating a helicopter through a cave is a series of frustrating experiences. One is the chopper is instantly placed exactly where you die after a crash, so it may take 10 deaths before you manage to escape. Also, navigating the cave is excessively difficult, with nary a pixel margin of error and controls that are hard to use precisely.

The Centipede Board Game
by Alan Hewston

Since I'm reviewing Centipede this month, here's the Board game by Milton Bradley. 1983, two players, ages 7-14. Lots of pieces, but nothing is really critical if you have the rules. The 2 Centipede units are not too rugged, so the little strips of plastic may easily break (the link). You can still move them along even if broken. The mushrooms are somewhat hard to insert properly making setup a bit frustrating for kids. Also could put wear on the board if plugged in/out often. Here's the words straight from the box.

"Be the first player to move centipede into your opponent's home base. Enter the world of centipede. A strange land of squirming centipedes, deadly scorpions, dangerous spiders and poisonous mushrooms. Danger lurks at every turn as your centipede snakes through the winding mushroom field. Try to reach your opponent's home base before your opponent reaches yours. Shoot your opponent's centipede with your gun to slow it down. Move the scorpion to plant poisonous mushrooms along the path. When your centipede hits one it turns and takes a shortcut. Use the spider to attack your opponent's gun or to destroy poison mushrooms so your opponent can't use them. Move fast and shoot straight and you'll win the game."
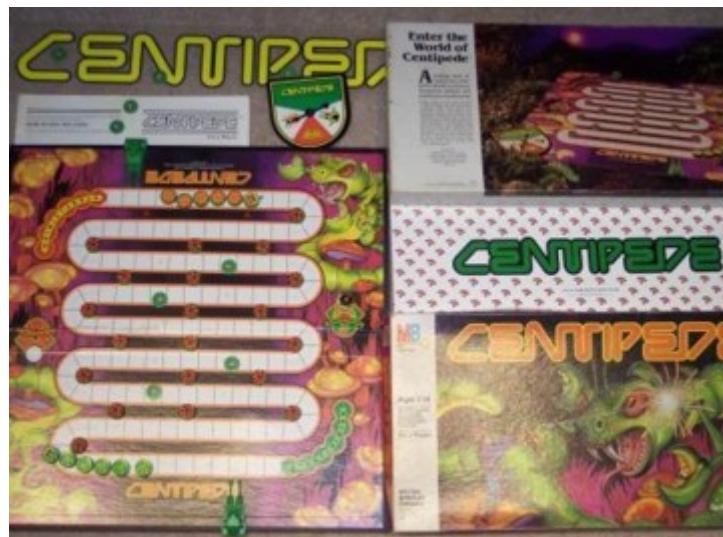
Alan Hewston, 39 year old staff writer plans to play this a few times this holiday season with his daughter Samantha (7) & son Timmy (4). He has a spare game to trade or sell, but it is not mint.

Game Over

This issue wasn't the behemoth that it was last month, but I hope everyone enjoyed it the same. Thanks for dropping by and we hope you come back next month for more of the longest running online classic games newsletter.

- ***Adam King***, Chief Editor

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