

# Retrogaming Times Monthly

Issue #9 - February 2005

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## Press Fire to Start

by Adam King

Greetings, gamers, and welcome to this February Edition of Retrogaming Times Monthly. In this issue we have quite a few gaming articles. We pay tribute to THE forefather of all videogame magazines. We have several arcade game reviews, and we look at a few ports as well. Plus we have a commercial for a game that was never released, and a few pieces on old computers as well. So start clicking that scroll bar and let's get gaming.

## Syntax Era: Electronic Games (Part 1)

by [Scott Jacobi](#)

I believe that when most people think of the quintessential vintage videogame magazine from the 80s, they think of Electronic Games. I don't have any statistical evidence to back that up or anything, it's just been my experience that most people that I've talked to remember Electronic Games as the shining example of what videogame periodicals were like back in the day, and rightfully so. It was the very first videogame magazine on the newsstands, it had the longest run out of all of the competition, and it seemed to have a distribution network that placed it anywhere you could think of to find gaming mags. The closest competition it had was from an equally impressive magazine with a far less inspired title, "Video Games." (Stay tuned for a review on that magazine in two months.)

Before I dive in to the review, don't be fooled by the part 1 bit. Even though Electronic Games did try to make a comeback in the 90s with a second volume publication, part 2 will not be about that. I just felt that it was appropriate to dedicate more time to the father of video game magazines because it ran for so long, and a profound change came



across the magazine during the second half of its publication which I will explore next month. This magazine was so integrated to the success of the gaming industry that its growth and decline occurred side by side with the industry itself. And next month I will explore the attempts it made to rescue itself from obscurity, despite the inevitable warning signs.

Electronic Games began its infancy as a collection of video game reviews in Video magazine, a periodical dedicated to all things television, primarily VHS (and presumably Betamax at the time.) In addition to the game reviews contained in Video, once in 1980 and again in 1981, the famous "Arkies" were awarded to the games of each year which editors Arnie Katz and Bill Kunkel thought were the best available. Eventually, by the end of 1981, they felt that videogames were becoming a large enough fascination that they deserved their own dedicated periodical, and thankfully, others agreed. In the Winter months of 1981 and 1982, Electronic Games was born. Arnie Katz (under a pseudonym of Frank Laney Jr. for contractual reasons for the first couple of issues) and Bill Kunkel, along with Joyce Worley had created America's first videogame magazine, and an industry followed them.

Since Electronic Games is considered by many to be the quintessential videogame magazine, its content needs little introduction, as it set the standard for others to follow. An intro from the editor, a letters column, videogame news tidbits, deep explorations into key popular videogames, along with shorter reviews of games due out around the publishing date, and even shorter preview of games due out in the coming months were all par for the course of Electronic Games, and just about every other gaming mag that ever followed. Some of the focus of that very first hallowed issue include a deep analysis of the competition between Space Invaders and Asteroids, strategy guides for Atari VCS Space Invaders and Breakout, a look at Tandy's "new" TRS-80 Color Computer (particularly, the games,) and a cursory evaluation of all of the home systems available at the time (Atari VCS, Odyssey 2, Intellivision, Zircon Channel F, and the Bally Astrocade.) Reviews of videogames were separated between home console games and computer games.



Electronic Games continued coming out bimonthly for the first three issues, until apparent demand was strong enough to warrant a monthly distribution starting in June of 1982, and was uninterrupted until January of 1984. The last issue of Electronic Games was published in April of 1985, unless you count the short lived continuation of the magazine "in spirit" under its new title Computer Entertainment, which published three issues, ending in July of 1985. In addition to those 37 issues, 3 special issues were published, the 1983 Buyer's Guide and the 1983 and 1984 Software Encyclopedias, which attempted to capture micro reviews of every game available at the time, broken down by system.

During the first few issues of Electronic Games, key features that defined the magazine took shape. Q&A with the Game Doctor was an addition to the letters section that answered many common questions about the often ill-understood technology available at the time ("Can I play my Atari VCS cartridges in my Atari 800?" "Will Intellivision come out with their computer keyboard add-on soon... eventually... ever???" ) Inside Gaming presented readers with intelligent interviews of the industry's leading developers. The yearly Arkies were joined by the Video Game Hall of Fame which added inductees once a year. And many issues of Electronic Games would not be complete without "Players' Guide to" whatever they chose as the hot topic that month, which presented reviews of games that fell under a particular heading in rapid succession.

As I mentioned, I will go in to more detail about the lifespan of the magazine next month. The best source for online images of the covers of this great magazine (as well as many of the other classic video games I have, and will continue to explore) is Phaze's Classic Videogame Magazine Museum

housed over at <http://cvmm.vg-network.com/> which contains, in addition to large scans of each cover, copies of the editorials paired with its cover. While I have never successfully located complete scans of any issue of the magazine, it is (not surprisingly) the most referenced vintage magazine on the net. While you will probably not find scans of any one particular issue, it is not uncommon to find an article or two typed out, or possibly scanned, if you look in the right places.



So if you'd like to glean some of the information contained in its pages, your best bet is probably going to be eBay. The success of Electronic Games is a double-edged sword in the modern marketplace. The magazine was in such abundant circulation by 1983, that finding any issue between 83 and 85 is not too hard and not too expensive. Before 1983, life gets a little tougher, as the early issues of Electronic Games are some of the most sought after on eBay. The first issue will commonly sell for over \$50, and I have seen some in good condition sell for over \$100. The second and third issue rarely command no less than a \$20 price tag and usually sell for higher. After that, the remaining 1982 issues can usually be purchased for between five and ten dollars. After 1985, the issues will typically remain very cheap, but the problem is by 1985 many people ceased collecting the magazine, so they are inexpensive but still very hard to come by. Tune in next week for a more thorough look in to the growth and decline of the magazine that set the standard for all others.



## ***MAME Review: BurgerTime***

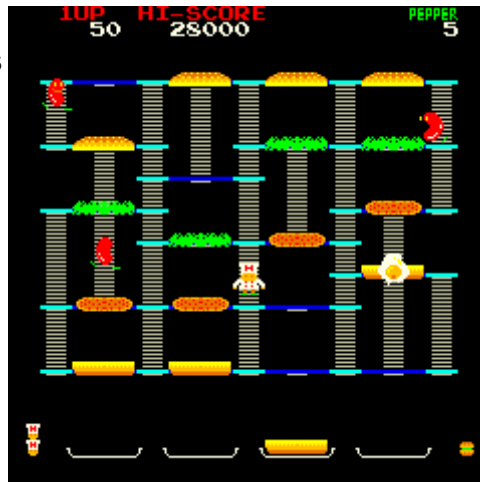


by ***Blaise Warren***

Burger Time from Data East which hit the arcade scene in 1982 for me was an instant hit.

Part of the platform with ladders genre this game requires a bit of strategy. The object of this game is to build (you guessed it) burgers and avoid the apparently angry food whose only goal is to send you to chef heaven and smash your dreams of hosting a show on the food network.

To build burgers simply walk across a section of burger, which sends it falling down on to the section below creating a cascade of food. Once all of the burgers are stacked you move on to the next level. The first two levels are pretty easy with hotdogs and fried eggs chasing you down. Level 3 they introduce another baddie Mr. Pickle. The ladder configurations favor the baddies leaving little room for error, as they like to cut you off. However you have a weapon a pinch of pepper to toss on the baddies temporarily immobilizing them so you can make good your escape. You should use the pepper wisely as you have a small supply and can only replenish your pepper by grabbing bonus items that appear on the screen. To eliminate the baddies you can drop sections of the burger on to their heads. A good way to wipeout a few at once is to lead them on to a section of burger and have it drop out from under their feet thus sending them to their doom.



The graphics are well done for the time period and the music adds to and does not overpower the game. The sound effects work well and the playability is great. This game is highly recommended for all of the arcade faithful. Next month I will review Taito's 1990 platform game Liquid Kids. Any questions or games that you would like info on drop me an email at [bwarren@jackdouglascenter.org](mailto:bwarren@jackdouglascenter.org).

***The Many Faces of . . . Defender***

This month we have another 25th anniversary tribute, honoring the most complex arcade game from 1980, and probably from that era. Defender was first released in Europe in late 1980, and wasn't seen much in the US until it was mass produced around mid 1981. And mass produced it was, as some say it may have been the second most manufactured arcade game of all time, trailing only Pac-Man and having well over a billion dollars in earnings. A lot of these earnings were due to the game not being easy, but because it was hard, and sucked in those quarters quickly. Everyone knew it was the hardest game in the parlor and that made it all the more reason to give it a try and see for yourself if you could overcome the world's greatest arcade challenge. Make sure to watch the DVD "Once Upon Atari" ([www.scottw.com](http://www.scottw.com)) and hear about a Defender story at Atari.

After 25 years this legend is still quite a thrill and challenge to play on the actual arcade hardware, but we are not all that fortunate, so we play along on our classic game systems. Unless you've been turned into a Mutant, then you know what Smart Bombs are and how they are synonymous with the game "Defender". As Craig Kubey "The Winners' Book of Video Games" says (about the end of a game), 'A full set of unused Smart Bombs is perhaps the saddest sight in all of video games.' The use of Smart Bombs and a scanner that covers action going on elsewhere in the game were signs of things to come. Games having radar and a coherent play area larger than the screen are elements that were first seen on games like "Defender" and "Radar Rat Race" (oops I mean "Rally-X"). These concepts, as well as an all powerful Smart Bomb really add a lot of depth and strategy to games. With a fast, action packed and difficult game to control, Defender demanded some pretty intense use of your peripheral vision and hand-eye coordination. You could not possibly focus and absorb all that is going on in the world of Defender at the same time. A successful Defender player is either lucky all the time or they have mastered glancing at just the right things at the right time, and then of course to react appropriately and make those controls comply.

As usual, within these Many Faces of reviews, we know the classic home systems can only hope to recreate some of that arcade feel and will always fall short of the original. The complexity of Defender's arcade controls, a stick plus 5 buttons makes for one of the greatest challenges to port to the home systems. Our goal here is mostly to point out all the features and differences that we can, but also to rank and score every home version relative to each other, and finally to score them relative to ALL home games from the classic joystick era. With so many gameplay elements, a veritable plethora of sound effects and a huge variations in graphics, I'm sure that my breakdown and scoring will not make everyone happy, but the relative rankings should be close to yours. We hope to be critical of only those elements that are most important to knowing (seeing & hearing) what is going on in the game and being able to plan and control your strategy accordingly. With 9 home versions it was quite a challenge and hopefully I did not nitpick too much - as there were over 60 game elements that I had to sift through. Note that through this review, "SB" equals "Smart Bomb"

**Arcade:** 1980 Williams Electronics by Eugene Jarvis, Larry DeMar, Sam Dicker & Paul Dussault

**Home versions** all by Atari or Atarisoft

- Atari 2600 ('81 Bob Polaro)
- Atari 8 bit ('82 Steve Baker)
- Atari 5200 ('82 ?Steve Barker?)
- Apple II ('83 Steve Baker)
- Commodore 64 ('83 Joseph Simko)
- Intellivision ('83 Peter Farson)
- Vic 20 ('83 Greg Omi)
- Colecovision ('83 unknown)
- TI-99 ('83 unknown)



The usual collage with a "Bob Polaro" signed copy of

**Arcade Sequel:** 1981 Stargate, aka Defender II  
Williams Electronics by Eugene Jarvis & Larry DeMar

2600 Defender.

**Home Version Similarities:** Except those in <> all home versions have: a demo mode <CV, TI, C64, 2600>; a choice of 2 or more skill settings <CV, INTV>; a pause <Vic 20, 2600>; 10 humans to protect <2600 (5)> for 5 levels at a time and then the world resets with 10 humans again in levels 5, 10, 5, 20 . . . ; arcade scoring, with bonus points earned for each surviving human X1, X2, X3, X4, X5 per each level respectfully after the world is reset; a bonus life and extra Smart Bomb every 10K points; a button(s) for hyperspace <Vic, 2600>; a button for Smart Bombs <2600>; enemies wrap around the screen top to bottom; enemies try to ram you and/or fire shots at you, or to lay mines (bombs); the humans are vulnerable to your shots <2600>; a Mutant takeover occurs when all humans are killed; this is a graphically catastrophic event <TI is boring> and at that time all Landers become the aggressive and deadly Mutants; Landers materialize <2600, INTV> at the beginning of each level; if you are really fast at eliminating the Landers, some versions will end the level early, but plan for more Landers to materialize another 2(?) times throughout each level; Baiters will arrive (and continue to accumulate) if you do not conquer a level in a timely fashion; Bombers and Pods are present at the onset, and once hit, the Pods turn into a vicious pack of tiny attacking Swarms; Swarms are very hard to hit, and come in groups of 5 or more <C64 (only 3), 2600 (2 sets of 4, but each set acts as one object)> and they even fire at you as well; a SB used to eliminate a Pod will usually eliminate its Swarms <2600, C64, INTV, TI> as well; the level # is only shown at the completion of each level. The scanner shows the entire circumference of the planet and its multicolored blips of varying sizes determine which enemies are of which type <Vic, INTV, TI, AP2> and where they are located. Likewise the human <INTV, TI> locations and if they are being abducted can be observed. The best versions allow you to fly by radar (just like the arcade) and use only your peripheral vision for the on screen action.

### **Sounds Pretty Good**

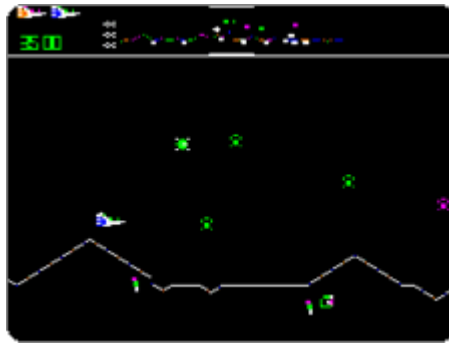
Defender is another one of those games really loaded with distinct sound effects, and pretty much all of them made it home as well. I probably missed a couple effects but here goes with versions <missing the effect are in these brackets>: red alert/startup each life <AP2>; death explosion; defender firing; enemies firing <Vic, AP2, TI>; Landers materializing <Vic, INTV, 2600>; Bomber destroyed <2600, Vic>; Landers & enemies in general destroyed; Swarms released <AP2>; Baiter arrives <AP2, CV, 2600, Vic, TI>; hyperspace <CV, Vic, INTV>; SB fired; human cry for help; falling human <TI, 2600, Vic, AP2>; catching the human <2600, AP2>; safely landing the human <AP2>; shot or splattered human or becoming a Mutant; the Mutant takeover; end of level bonus <C64, INTV, Vic>; and bonus lives.

### **International Date Line (IDL)**

Keeping in mind that the Defender screen wraps around, from left to right. The IDL is the term I've seen that refers to the spot on the Defender screen where the enemies can be tricked. It is in their programming to come at you by the shortest path. If the IDL is on the screen (note that it is NOT a visible line) and the enemies are on the opposite side of the IDL, then they move away, thinking that the closest path to you is all-the-way around the world. In a nutshell - you can jump back and forth across the IDL and confuse the enemies and bait them into getting picked off by your shots. The <2600, Vic, INTV> I could not determine if there was an IDL, but not penalize them. See if you can find the IDL hint get a Baiter after you and play hide & seek near the 2 tall mountains close to each other.



Defender on Atari 2600



Defender on Apple II



Defender on Vic-20

### Have Nots: Atari 2600 (38)

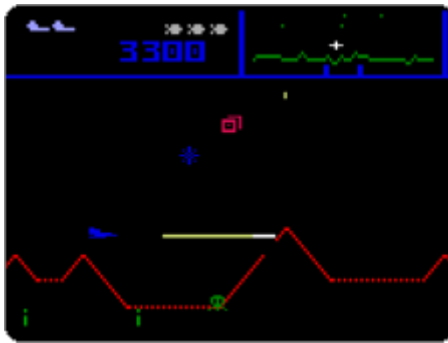
My first reaction was the ship disappears, and is invulnerable when you fire wasn't this everyone's first reaction? The Gameplay is effective (7), but clearly the worst due to the 2600's limitation, and even more likely due to Atari rushing this one out the door to capitalize on sales. The worst problem is the missing a SB and hyperspace buttons. Yes, functionally they are in the gameplay as you can perform them at the bottom/top of the screen - but this is unacceptable. Atari did not want to use more than one controller, which it then did the next year for Star Raiders. Other problems were a lack of humans, only 5 to protect, and then if you catch and carry a human, no more can be abducted. Regardless of setting or options used, any game including the Mutant takeover can be played forever. Even at their hardest difficulty, the Swarms, Mutants, Baiters are too easy. I probably do not emphasize it enough here, but if the consequences of a mutant takeover are not severe then it kinda throws away the reason why we are trying save the humans in the first place. There's no killer/kamikaze instinct, and you cannot even accidentally kill your own humans. Fortunately, the scanner was well programmed and is effective, and a child's option allows the younger children to play a swell. Addictiveness is fun (7) but suffers most for being too easy. There is no pause, but simply go all the way up or down and you can pause indefinitely. The Graphics are worth while (7), clean and easy to determine what is going on. But there's not much detail, almost no animation and the enemies are all mono colored and found in limited numbers. The Sound is very good (7), but missing many effects as listed in "Sounds Pretty Good". Controls score a perfect (10) as you always get what you want. I've taken away the point(s) in the gameplay for improper/different use of the SB and hyperspace.

### Have Nots: Apple II (39)

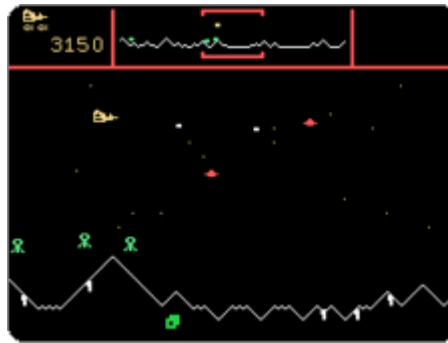
My first reaction was the sound here really bytes. Despite the same programmer as the Atari 8 bit version, this one must have been rushed out the door, or he was unable to force the Apple to match the guts of the Atari. The Addictiveness is of good quality (8) but the game is too hard. The collision detection is so bad that your ship might as well be twice its size. The Landers seem uncharacteristically more interested in ramming you than abducting humans. Then, shots can literally disappear and then reappear right off your bough, at which point you perish. This frustration may cause you to stop playing right away, but hang in there and give it a try. It is difficult, but maybe you can get used to it. The <ESC> is the pause. The Gameplay is outstanding (9) despite a scanner problems (see below). The Baiters are a bit too slow, but the Mutants are all the more deadly. The Graphics are very nice (8), with good details, lots of action, a good mix of colors and some multi-color. But the multi-color is deceiving as enemies are really alternating between 2 sets of colors. They're either blue or red (or some of both), or they are green or purple (or some of both). This adds some animation eye-candy, but in reality makes it much harder to ID them in the scanner. Fortunately the humans are not a problem to detect. Sound always leaves much to be desired, with the internal speakers, but is respectable (6). Nearly all effects are included but they all sound similar, and not very good at that. The lack of the humans "catch" and "landing" sounds detract from the gameplay. Controls score an (8), with a sluggish analog stick especially changing from L/R. The limited Hyperspace button, only the "H" key instead of using the entire keyboard as other systems did. Note that all computer versions used the <Space Bar> for the SB. As usual, only found on disk.

### Have Nots: Vic 20 (39)

My first reaction was without a pause and hyperspace, this review gets off to a tough start. Despite no chance for a medal, its one of the best Vic 20 scores I've posted to date. The objects may be a little oversized, but the action and Gameplay are impressive (8). Deductions mostly from a poor scanner and lack of hyperspace. The Addictiveness is fun (7), but there is no pause, and there is a bit of a collision detection problem. Another glitch is that the action slows a bit and then speeds up if there are too many enemies and bullets on screen. Graphics are exciting (7) with a star field and many multi-colored enemies. But there's not much detail, things are a bit oversized and there's no animation. This may be purposeful, but you also cannot see enemies for several seconds after a mutant takeover. As itemized above, several sound effects are missing and most are not as pleasant to the ear as the medal winners are. Regardless, the Sound is effective (7). Controls scored a (10) as did the 2600. Despite no pause or Hyperspace, the controls themselves never cause a loss of life. Similar scoring has been used for CV titles for several of the Many Faces reviews that is, I try not to double penalize. Vic 20 Defender is harder to find than its cart rarity or value indicates.



Defender on Intellivision



Defender on TI 99/4a



Defender on Colecovision

### **Have Nots: Intellivision (40)**

My first reaction was it looks great, and I want to play it more, but those darn controls just won't cooperate. Among the top 5 INTV games I've reviewed here and the well-done programming leads to an Addictiveness score of (9). The standard INTV pause is there <diagonals>. The Gameplay is impressive (8) but the Landers seem to wander and move around too much. The worst offender is the scanner providing no clue what enemy is coming or where the humans are. The Graphics seem almost beautiful (8) at a glance with several colors and several enemies can fire and Swarm at you at once. But most are mono-colored, there is no animation and the details are mediocre. Sound is crisp (8), with nearly all effects in place and most are appealing. Controls are the downfall perhaps too generous scoring them a (7). There's just too much maneuvering required for this disc controller, and the firing and trying to use the SB when you want is horrible. The <any key> for the hyperspace works well, but you may do this by accident when trying to pause.

### **Have Nots: TI-99 (41)**

My first reaction was most enemies are not as fierce and do not attack as they should but the mutants will make you pay. This ranks up there second only to Star Trek:SOS as the TI-99 game I've played the most. Gameplay is impressive (8) but minus 1 for a scanner that cannot detect humans or enemy types. The <+> key selects the skill and # players, and any key activates the hyperspace. The Addictiveness is outstanding (9) and there's not much to detract from you coming back for more other than the pause <P> is a bit hard to use. The Graphics are beautiful (8) with a star field, lots of action and good details. Not much multi-color and no animation. Sound is worth while (7), but could be much better. Despite more effects than the 2600 or Vic, a careful ear will realize than none are very appealing and most of them are the same set of effects repeated. You make the call rush job, or poor programming - the TI can do much better. Controls score a (9). While using an Atari style stick is perfect, the pause is not easily accessible. I could have gone to a 10, but some of the other scores are marginal, and so I am hoping this averages it out.

### **Have Nots: Colecovision (44)**

My first reaction was there are no options other than 2 players. But then typically CV games with

multiple skill levels are too hard even on the easiest setting - so nothing is wasted here just play. The Gameplay is superb (9) the most arcade like with no penalties. The Addictiveness is fantastic (9) with a pause <\*>, but is not the best. Fortunately I did not penalize the lack of an easier game play or option that much, so it still matches the medal winners here. Graphics are great (9) among the best, with stars, lots of action, and plenty of details. There's no animation and only a bit of multi-color, but nothing detracts from the gameplay or your enjoyment. Sound is pleasant (8) with most effects in place, but a couple are missing (see "Sounds Pretty Good") and a few are duds. Thus the sound separates the men from the boys. Controls score a (9) due to being forced to use CV controllers. All 3 special functions are right on the keypad/controller, but the stick is the problem for me. I would have scored it a 10 if the Super Action controller were compatible so it just misses the medal stand but is still a great game.

#### Silver Medal: Commodore 64 & Atari 5200 (45)



Defender on Commodore 64



Defender on Atari 5200 & Atari 8-Bit

#### Commodore 64

My first reaction is the Sound, Graphics and Addictiveness are all the best so how come no Gold Medal? As with most versions, there are so many effects occurring simultaneously that some have to cut in and interrupt the others. The medal winners all did a great job of keeping the most important sounds active, and not missing anything important. The Gameplay is a little lacking, but still superb (9). The only nits are the SB never takes out both the Pod and its Swarms and then there are never more than 3 Swarms, even on the hardest difficulty. Those C64 Baiters like to come out early, but at least they let you know when they've arrived. With no drawbacks, the Addictiveness is remarkable (9) including a pause <F5>, and 3 skill levels and yes, the easiest setting is easy, but gets harder. The Graphics are fantastic (9) with lots of action, color, the best detail and most animation and most multi-color. Only things missing are the unnecessary star field & walking humans. The scanner objects are a bit tiny, but this can be remedied with a larger monitor/TV. Likewise the sound is nearly awesome (9) with all effects in place and most stand out and want to be heard. The only minor effect missing is the end of level audio cue. The Controls score a (9) and this is the downfall. I'm probably being a bit too critical but if they were done the same as the Atari using and edge button, <F7> or <left arrow> for the pause, and then any other key on the board for hyperspace - then I'd be justified in giving it a 10.

#### Atari 5200

My first reaction is that the joysticks are once again a detriment, but not as bad as I expected. The 5200 analog controllers will likely give you some troubles, and regardless if you are able to use a Wico controller or the Masterplay interface, the Controls only score a (9). Just like the C64, it's not easy to use all the buttons flawlessly using 2 controllers - so that is the difference between this and its cousin. Besides the obvious Controls differences, see the Atari 8 bit scores and descriptions below as the games appear to be identical. The Pause is the <Pause>, hyperspace is any keypad key. SB is the upper fire button set.

#### Gold Medal: Atari 8-Bit (46)

My first reaction was the Gameplay is the best (9) and a "very" complete demo makes up for its only subtraction that of poor physics when changing directions (L/R). This is awkward and is so weird that

you end up moving backwards from where you were and need to account for this movement in advance and post-haste. In other versions you'd be able to escape, but if you get too close here you are wasted. I feel that practice will allow you to plan and overcome this, but if you disagree, then there's a three way tie. The Addictiveness is wonderful (9), with the <ESC> as the pause and good difficulty settings. Graphics are well done (9) with a star field, lots of details, multi-color and action, but not quite as much animation as the C64. The biggest difference is that the Atari graphics are too busy. The large explosions and slowly disappearing debris cloud make it easier to die from a stray bullet lost in the cloud. Fortunately this difference was not enough for a point differential. The Sound is terrific (9) just about as good as the C64 with only minor differences in quality of some effects. Controls score a (10), while not perfect, they are close and for a system with all buttons (SB, hyperspace & pause) in place, this one will lead to the fewest control mishaps. The joystick is perfect and then it is easy to smack the keyboard and almost always get the desired response. So overall on a finer scoring system there would be a tie. The C64 is better in 3 of 4 categories but gets the same scores here. The C64 controls are just a slight bit more likely to lead to failure than the Atari but that's how it goes sometimes.

**WTB:** I'm still looking for Vic 20 "Battlezone", "Mountain King", "Moon Patrol" & the Sierra (disk) version of "Frogger". And also the Apple II version of "Threshold".

Come back next month for the Many Faces of "Missile Command" or "Venture", and a long shot, maybe both. While writing this review my brain kept on playing the Buckner & Garcia song "The Defender". And I forgot to report the same for last month with "Ode to a Centipede". Contact Alan Hewston [aka "Pitfall Harry" to Bob Polaro] at: [Hewston95@NOSPAMstratos.net](mailto:Hewston95@NOSPAMstratos.net) or visit the Many Faces of site: <http://my.stratos.net/~hewston95/RT/ManyFacesHome.htm>



## *Arcade Review: Dragon's Lair 20th Anniversary Edition*



by [Mark Sabbatini](#)

Dragon's Lair, one of the ultimate love-it-or-hate-it coin-op games, has received an update sure to continue that tradition.

The Dragon's Lair 20th Anniversary Edition by Ultracade is a reissue of the 1983 breakthrough laserdisc game. It apparently came out (appropriately enough) in 2003, but I saw one for the first time this month at the Circus Circus hotel in Las Vegas. Purists will immediately note it is not an exact remake and probably find many faults, but casual fans and those who never played the original will likely find it a fun and worthwhile quarter sponge.

A bit of Dragon's Lair history (those familiar with it can skip to the next two graphs): The Don Bluth creation caused a sensation with its Disney-like animated graphics, which far exceeded the quality of any other game in its day, and unique gameplay. The action centers around Dirk the Daring, a brave but somewhat goofy knight trying to rescue the fair princess Daphne from the evil dragon Singe. Dirk makes his way through a series of challenges in Singe's castle using a four-direction joystick and sword button, but doesn't really "control" the knight. Instead, pre-drawn animation sequences run and if the player selects the "right" choice when creatures, lava and other hazards appear, the animation progresses to the next



challenge. Choosing a wrong option or failing to respond with proper timing results in an alternate animation (a leading cause of those black-screen delays) showing Dirk meeting a death often more amusing than the main sequence. The game is more about memorizing patterns than responding to the action, although flashes of light sometimes provide hints about which way to move. Many of the challenges repeat themselves and a "mirror" effect can be triggered, requiring a reversal of the right-left pattern sequence.

It was a runaway commercial success, but the limited and quirky gameplay attracted plenty of critics. It also was the first game to widely charge 50 cents instead of the usual quarter (a big money eater as the "continue" option was near mandatory to get far into the game). A second laserdisc game, Space Ace, proved a hit as well to a lesser degree, but a number of other poor-quality games including a Dragon's Lair sequel caused the genre to all but disappear within a few years. Its fan base remained however and various home versions - exceptionally limited at first before technology allowed the full game to be translated - proved highly successful, although that this point new gamers used to more sophistication were more critical than ever. Personally, I got a kick out of finally being able to watch all the death sequences by triggering them intentionally without worrying about wasting quarters.

Perhaps the most significant difference in the new coin-op version is it's software-driven instead of on laserdisc, so there's no longer the black-screen transition between screens. Fans of the original will immediately notice the console is smaller than the original - there are 19-inch and 25-inch screen versions - and statistics like score and men remaining are now displayed on-screen instead of an overhead LED display. The other immediate difference is the standard cost is now only a quarter, although apparently some machines have a 50-cent option I'll get to in a minute.

A logo very similar to the original is on the side of the machine, with a 20th anniversary edition bit of splash added. An ad for the game mentions Space Ace and Dragon's Lair II are on the chip, but there was no option to play them I saw.

Graphics and animation are dead-on, although the game feels a bit faster due to the lack of black-screen time. The joystick emits the classic electronic "beep" when a correct move is executed and a lower-pitched one for a wrong move.

The game itself always starts with a "drawbridge" sequence I've seen in various home versions, but do not remember ever seeing in the arcade (they always seemed to start with a "ropes above fire pit" or "brick wall" screen). The selection of screens continues in a manner more consistent with home versions, making me think the game is based on them rather than the original. Many of the screens normally not seen until later in the game appear early, for instance, and after two failed attempts the newer version moves to a different sequence.

Another major difference is the version I played had visual "hints" in the upper left corner of the screen revealing the correct move for each challenge in real-time (apparently this is an option that must be purchased for an extra quarter on some machines). Using the hints is a mixed blessing at best, with at least two notable drawbacks: 1) it's often tough to respond fast enough to succeed, especially during a complex series of moves and 2) watching the cues often means missing the action, depriving both the enjoyment of watching the animations and a feeling of being into the flow of the game. On the other hand, the hints can be a huge blessing when used judiciously: Anyone whose wasted entire games trying to get through that pair of huge rotating paddles at the beginning of the "throne and thorns" screen will love knowing the exact moment to go.

I own two different home versions and can get through both easily, but it still took a number of quarters to work through the new arcade version for a couple of reasons. The first is at first I expected it to be closer to the original coin-op and was caught off-guard by changes such as the drawbridge screen. I also lost a number of Dirks trying to use the visual cues before deciding my memory and responding to the action was more reliable.

Obviously I'm in the Dragon's Lair fan camp and therefore it's no surprise I recommend the updated coin-op even though it doesn't quite have the feel or enjoyment level of the original. Even purists ought to play a few games just to get familiar with the update since, if nothing else, it will enhance their appreciation of the few laserdisc machines still in existence. Those who've mastered home versions and moved on may get less enjoyment out of it, although it's a good way to kill a decent length of time and/or impress onlookers if such as occasion arises.

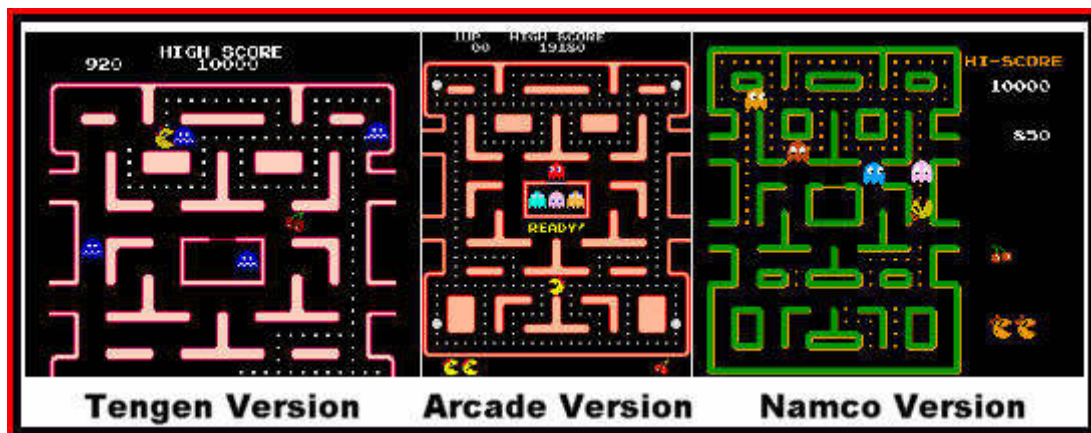
## ***The Titles of Tengen - Ms. Pac-Man***

***by David Lundin, Jr.***

Undoubtedly one of the most popular arcade games of all time is Ms. Pac-Man, the dot gobbling better half and sequel to the groundbreaking Pac-Man, released by Namco in 1980. There had been home versions of the Namco classic on nearly every video game console and home computer but in 1990 Tengen released an NES version with all the charm of the arcade and a pile of new play modes. Although I can't imagine anyone that doesn't all ready know the basic play mechanic of the original Pac-Man games, for the uninitiated the game centers around guiding Ms. Pac-Man around an overhead maze, eating all the dots while avoiding the four ghosts that inhabit the playfield. Each maze has four power pellets near the maze corners, eating one of these will cause the ghosts to turn blue and become edible for a short amount of time. Ghosts that are eaten disappear, except for their eyes, and return to the center of the maze where they are regenerated. Each maze has a different bonus item food that bounces around the maze and can be eaten for bonus points. After all the dots and power pellets are eaten, the player gets to start the next maze. With each stage the ghosts get faster and the effectiveness of power pellets becomes shorter. After certain stages the player is treated to a short intermission sequence showing how Pac-Man and Ms. Pac-Man's relationship grows. (okay, it's not all that deep but it's part of what makes this game a classic.

With the Tengen version on the NES you get a port of the arcade original plus a whole lot more. After the title screen the player is presented with an options screen with different play modes and settings. The first of these is the "Pac Booster" which can be turned on, turned off, or set to be activated by either button A or B. The Pac Booster makes Ms. Pac-Man speed up, it takes away most of the challenge of the game but is a nice feature to have as an option. Next is the game difficulty selection: easy, hard, crazy, or normal. They're all pretty much self-explanatory and control the speed of the ghosts. The next option is where the Tengen port really shines, maze selection: arcade, mini, big, and strange. "Arcade" is just that, all the arcade mazes and game play. "Mini" is a series of half-size mazes. "Big" is a series of large mazes with long winding alleys. "Strange" is a series of oddly arranged mazes with lots of different nooks and crannies to navigate about. Lastly you have the option to choose your starting level, stages 1-7.

In the graphics department Tengen did a decent job with attempting to port over the look of the original game. The colors are a bit off but everything is close enough to the arcade original to warrant it graphically proficient when compared to the arcade version. The arcade and larger mazes scroll vertically, following Ms. Pac-Man as the player navigates the maze. Scrolling is smooth and far enough ahead of Ms. Pac-Man so there aren't any surprises with ghosts suddenly appearing in front of the player. About two thirds of the maze is shown on screen at a time. Some people don't like this scrolling motion but it allows the game to have good-sized sprites and maintain as much of the arcade detail as possible, remember the arcade version had a vertical monitor. Sprites move smoothly and with a bare minimum of flicker.



The audio falls a bit short, while all the sound effects are there they simply sound slightly off. The music at the start of the game and during the intermission sequences is actually really close to the arcade version. Namco released an official version on the NES three years after the Tengen port, which has near-perfect arcade audio but the audio in the Tengen version is more than adequate. Controls are just what one would expect, the control pad controls Ms. Pac-Man's direction of travel and if you have the Pac Booster enabled as being activated by button A or B then button A or B activates the Pac Booster - imagine that. In the arcade mode all the arcade stages are there but the additional play modes give what was already an incredibly addictive game infinite replay value. It's almost like getting a near-perfect 8-bit port of Ms. Pac-Man along with a myriad of maze expansion packs. As I stated earlier, Namco did release an official version of Ms. Pac-Man on the NES in 1993, however it looks rushed visually and while the game play is there it just doesn't seem like good old Ms. Pac-Man. You also don't get all the additional mazes and play modes with the Namco version. Even though I personally think the audio in the Namco version is better, over all the Tengen port is simply a superior game on the NES. The two versions are easy to tell apart since the Tengen release is in the signature black Tengen cartridge while the Namco release is in a standard gray NES cartridge. Ms. Pac-Man is yet another example of the quality job Tengen could do with arcade games on the NES.

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

## Retrogaming Commercial Vault

by Adam King

Welcome back to the Vault, where we spotlight all those ads you try to avoid. This month we take a look at the commercial for the CBS Electronics title Wings.

Suddenly everyone's asking "What in Activision is Wings?" Well, Wings was going to be an air combat game for several systems, but it was canned. I don't know the whole story, so let's get to the ad."

This spot will remind you of Top Gun. You watch as a young pilot does battle with several enemy planes while controlling his jet with an Atari joystick. All while some rock music plays in the background.

"Earth is under attack! Our only hope is you and your Wings. Wings with RAM-Plus to mega-charge your Atari VCS and make it three times as exciting. Free Booster Grip included. Now, you're in the cockpit, and they're everywhere. Bank left! Bank right! Clouds; fly by instruments only. Now FIRE!"

"Good luck! It's rough up there."

"Wings, the new videogame from CBS Electronics, where the excitement never ends!"

**PICTURES:**



Watch out for the plane flying at you.



"Why is it I always have to save the world?"



Good thing these planes don't use 5200 controllers.



"Ha! Who needs Tom Cruise!"



"Your turn."

This commercial makes it seem like we missed out on something special. Anyway you can download it at Digital Press ([www.digitpress.com](http://www.digitpress.com)). Also Atari Age ([www.atariage.com](http://www.atariage.com)) has a ROM of the game you can download and try to play.

Don't forget you can find Nintendo commercials at my website, NES Times, which can found at [come.to/nestimes](http://come.to/nestimes).



**Apple Corps**



**by Alan Hewston**

A few Apple ][ notes from some of our readers from last month that we forgot to include.

### Apple 2 Notes & picture from Cameron Christison

I had asked here in the RTM if the Apple 2 "Track & Field" had a special controller by Atarisoft. Sure enough, they used the same Atari Track & Field controller as packaged in all other versions and included a cable to convert from the Apple 2 configuration to the Atari 9 pin plugs. Cameron has also recently confirmed that the Apple ][ mouse does not work with Atarisoft Centipede.



Apple 2 to Atari converter packaged with Apple ][ "Track & Field".

### Apple 2 Notes from classic video game programmer Jimmy Huey

Classic gaming programmer Jimmy Huey who has programmed several titles on the Vic 20, the Apple 2 version of Atarisoft "Mario Bros" and several more games since then recently told me that the C64 version of "Mario Bros" was programmed by Gregg Tavares and Juan Alvarado. Jimmy was amazed that they fit the game in 16k.

Jimmy notes that he was pretty much finished working on the Apple II version of "Mario Bros" when Atarisoft cancelled it. Thus there never was a commercial release, but there may be several unfinished versions out there. [RTM will describe this game, and hopefully more Apple II games next time we review more of the "Lost Faces".] Anyhow, the latest version that Jimmy worked on would have used wrap-around graphics - to allow you to get to the other side of the screen. Jimmy says that when Jack Tramiel bought out Atari, they "cancelled" all the titles... which meant they didn't get paid for their work either. The Atari QA department reported a giant list of bugs in Jimmy's final product ... which sorta seemed bogus ... because he thought the game was fairly bug-free. Perhaps this was their way to justify its cancellation.

So, this is some great new information from Jimmy, but unfortunately he was not interested in giving the RTM a full interview at this time. We'll check back with him later in 2005. Since I know that you're interested, yes, you can check out Jimmy's web site is at:

<http://www.ministryofthought.com/biojim.html>

And ... Jimmy even provided me a link to Greg Tavares' massive site at: <http://www.greggman.com/>

You can use Greg's "search" or specifically this link <http://greggman.com/edit/editheadlines/2004-10-19.htm> There you can learn a little more about Greg's C64 Atarisoft version of "Centipede" - which was in fact, copied from the Atari 8 bit version. This was pretty timely news at the RTM as we reviewed the Many Faces of Centipede this month [oops that was last moth].

Alan Hewston welcomes your feedback at [hewston95@@@stratos.net](mailto:hewston95@@@stratos.net) Share your Apple 2 notes with our readers here in the "Apple Corps". Shoot me an email & we'll provide more coverage here.

## NEWSBYTES

•A once-mighty computer company may be on the verge of a comeback. Recently Tulip Computers, the current owner of Commodore Computers since 1994, sold the company to the US business, Yeahronimo Media Ventures for 17 million pounds. If you remember Commodore went out of business in 1994, unable to compete with IBM's PC clones using Microsoft operating systems. Tulip Computers bought the company but just sat on the name and did next to nothing with it for 10 years. With Yeahronimo taking the reigns, could we see the return of Commodore?

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

•Speaking of Commodore, there is a way to relive some of your favorite C64 games without all the bulky hardware. Mammoth Toys has released a plug-and-play device called the Commodore 64 30-in-1, and it contains 30 C64 classics, all on a joystick you plug into your TV. The 30 games include:

Bull Riding (Event from World Games, Epyx, 1986), Championship Wrestling (Epyx, 1986), Cyberdyne Warrior (Hewson, 1989), Cybernoid (Cybernoid: The Fighting Machine, Hewson, 1988), Cybernoid II (Cybernoid II: The Revenge, Hewson, 1988), Eliminator (Hewson, 1988), Exolon (Hewson, 1987), Firelord (Hewson, 1986), Flying Disk (Event from California Games, Epyx, 1987), Gateway to Apshai (Epyx, 1983), Impossible Mission (Epyx, 1984), Impossible Mission 2 (Epyx, 1988), Jumpman Junior (Epyx, 1983), Paradroid (Hewson, 1985), Pitstop (Epyx, 1983), Pitstop 2 (Epyx, 1984), Ranarama (Rana Rama, Hewson, 1984), Silicon Warrior (Epyx, 1984), Speedball (Image Works, 1989), Summer Games (Epyx, 1984), Super Cycle (Epyx, 1986), Sumo (Event from

World Games, Epyx, 1986), Surfing (Event from California Games, Epyx, 1987), Sword of Fargoal (Epyx, 1983), Tower Toppler (Hewson, 1987), Uridium (Hewson, 1986), Winter Games (Epyx, 1985), World Karate Champion A (World Karate Championship, Epyx, 1986), World Karate Champion B (World Karate Championship, Epyx, 1986), Zynaps (Hewson, 1987)

For more information, go to <http://www.mammothtoys.com/products.htm>.

*Credit: Armchair Arcade* (<http://www.armchairarcade.com/>)

•In other comeback news, Variety has reported that Disney has hired screenwriters Brian Klugman and Lee Sternthal to fashion a remake of Tron, the cult-favorite 1982 film.

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

 **The TI-99/4A Arcade: MBX Gaming (Part 2)**   
**by [Bryan Roppolo](#)**

In last month's article I reviewed the MBX games Meteor Belt, Bigfoot, and Sewermania. Well, considering that the MBX is such a unique device I decided to follow up this month with 3 more cartridges made by Milton Bradley for their MBX gaming add-on. For those of you who missed last month's article and are unsure as to what the MBX system is, it's basically the Voice Commander that was announced by Milton Bradley for the Atari 2600/5200. This system allowed for Voice Recognition, better speech synthesis, and the use of a fancy 360° analog joystick. Luckily most of the games can be played without the MBX system if you don't happen to own one, but the big drawback is that some of the unique features cannot be used (such as the voice recognition). Anyway, sit back and put on your gaming gloves (if you have any) and get ready to read about how gaming is done the MBX way!

### **Championship Baseball (1983 Milton Bradley)**

Here it is! The game that you hear people talking about all the time when it comes to the MBX gaming add-on! This was the cartridge that Milton Bradley advertised with the MBX system and demoed most actively at the various CES shows that they attended. Championship Baseball was without a doubt the MBX's flagship game! It received lengthy reviews not just back in 1983, but also in the 1990s when people were starting to get into collecting classic video games. In my opinion, if there was one type of game that could best implement the voice recognition, speech synthesis, action-input keypad, and special joystick the MBX had to offer it would be a baseball game. Speaking along those lines, I should mention that Championship Baseball was the only game to actually use all the features of the MBX to their full extent. This was because most of the other titles were games where it wouldn't make sense for them to use all of the bells and whistles the MBX had to offer. Anyway, enough of my rambling, lets get on to the review!



At first glance, it may seem that Championship Baseball is just your run-of-the-mill baseball game. However, screen shots can not portray just how involved of a baseball game this title is since most of the frills come from external devices (similar in a sense to the Colecovision driving controller used with Turbo). First and foremost, this game requires the MBX system to be plugged in (so if you don't have an MBX system, you will have to get one if you want to play this game) and is actually one of the few cartridges that require it. As with most baseball games, the game takes place inside a baseball stadium and features two teams (each team must be controlled by a human player, since there is no computer controlled team). When the game starts, the players rush out onto the field and get into their

positions. The person up to bat is controlled by the MBX joystick and this is where what makes this game stand out from the rest begins. On the joystick the trigger button will simply swing the players baseball bat, but the control knob located on the top of the stick allows you to actually adjust the speed of your swing! Turning the control knob a little towards the right allows you to hit the ball deep while turning it completely to the right provides a faster, more powerful swing. If the knob is turned a little to the left on the other hand, it allows you to bunt the ball while a full turn to the left provides a slower and less powerful swing. These additional options provided by the MBX joystick help add more strategy to the game.

In addition to the control knob on the joystick, the 3 buttons on the back of the controllers also provide the player with a few options while running the bases. By pressing "Button 1" on the joystick while pushing up on the lever, you can actually make the player slide into a base. There actually is a purpose behind sliding into a base, as doing so speeds up the player which can be the difference between being safe or called out on a close call. Other options also available in the game are the ability to overrun first base by pressing the trigger button when near first, being able to "lead off" from a base, steal bases, and also run back to the previous base you were on if needed. As demonstrated by all these options, there is a lot being offered here and I've only covered the team up to bat!

Before continuing I should make note of the great calls the umpire makes throughout the game, phrases like "Yer out!", "Steerike!", and "Ball!" all sound realistic and add to the appeal/addictiveness of the game. All you have to do is listen to the umpire to hear how the game is being called, which is much more fun than if the balls, strikes, etc were all simply just tallied on the board at the bottom of the screen without the voice. Now as to the players in the outfield (which again must be controlled by another person as there is no option to play against the computer), they are controlled through totally different means than one might think. Instead of using a joystick of any kind, the action-input keypad on the MBX unit itself is used to control which players you want to move to catch/throw a ball and also how you want the pitcher to throw. An overlay for the MBX membrane keypad is included with the game which uses pictures to show which buttons perform which functions. The use of the action-input membrane keypad really makes selecting which players you want to catch/throw a ball to very easy. In addition to being able to select someone on the field, there is also the option for tagging a player where the person with the ball will go after the runner if he's not on a base. It's just another feature that helps recreate the whole baseball experience more accurately on your TV set.

Another important aspect of the game is how the pitching is controlled (I know, this is a fairly lengthy review but believe me in that I am not trying to ramble on all that much. It's just there there is so much in this game to talk about!) . As mentioned earlier, selecting your pitches is all done on the action-input keypad on the MBX itself. However, there is not simply just one or two or even three ways to pitch. You can select from a variety of options to try and strike your opponent out. On the keypad you first select the speed of your pitch (slow, medium, or fast) and then where you want your pitch to be thrown (inside, middle, or outside). There is also the option to throw a curve ball which is a nice way of catching your opponent off guard. As you can see, there are a wide variety of pitching combos to choose from which again just adds more elements to an already great game. As a matter of fact, it almost feels like you are playing at an arcade because of the ability to use the keypad and fancy joysticks for controlling the players on the field!

In the final segment of this review I just wanted to comment on the speech recognition capabilities of the game, which is available on most MBX video game cartridges. The neat thing about Championship Baseball though is the ability to train the game to recognize the players by name. For example, instead of voice training the game to call the Shortstop by its position ("Shortstop"), you can actually train it to go by the name "Bill". It's just another feature that really makes the Championship Baseball all the more entertaining. As with a number of other MBX games, Championship Baseball also stands up there in the TOP 10 video games for the TI-99/4A system and definitely is recommended to all sports video game fans. What really sets it apart from even modern baseball games is the voice recognition capability, which probably will be a coming attraction in a few years

(still!). If you're interested in seeing what the future of baseball video gaming holds you might have to take a step back 22 years! The only downside to the game though is the lack of a computer to play against, but hey bring a friend over and have a hot dog since this one is definitely a home run!

### **Space Bandits (1983 Milton Bradley)**

Space Bandits is quite possibly the most unique game out of all the MBX titles. You take control of a robot who must collect Earth's Energy Crystals that were stolen by "Computer Controlled Androids". The uniqueness of the game comes from the fact that not only can you walk up and down the corridors on the bottom of the screen, but also on the sides and top of the screen. Therefore, the game has a 3D aspect to it which makes your mission much harder to complete, especially considering that the controls change accordingly with the different sides of the screen (if you are controlling your robot on the bottom part of the screen all that is needed to move forward is a press "up" on the joystick. However,



once on the top of the screen, a press "down" on the joystick moves you forward). This change of joystick movement helps create a more realistic feel that really helps the game out and makes it more fun to play, however frustrating it may be first. After you have the controls for the game down, which can prove to be very tricky, the next step is to go about completing your mission to get back all the of the Earth's Energy Crystals, which are represented by little red diamonds throughout the 3D maze. However, there are a few curve balls thrown in. If you are unable to collect the crystals after 40 seconds, they become radioactive. This means that if you touch a crystal once it's radioactive (they turn white after becoming so) you will lose a life and fall off into space towards a purple alien ship which appears in the center of the screen. On the other hand, if you do collect all 4 crystals from that round, you might think your job is done, but that's not the case. Even after all the crystals are collected you must still blast the white androids which follow you throughout the maze. Only after all of the androids have been killed will you be able to advance forward.

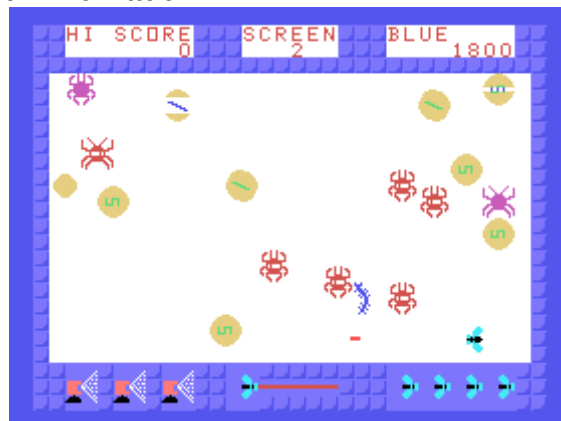
The robot you control in the game is also equipped with an electronic vapor gun that will shoot a pulsar beam all the way around the screen which can actually come back and hit you if not careful (and the range of your shot increases as the game progresses, so an accurate hit is necessary later on!). When you do manage to hit one of the androids through they do not simply vanish from the screen, but instead leave behind an energy mass which cannot be passed through by your robot. On later levels when there are many androids roaming about the screen a well planned shot is necessary, because you could actually cage yourself in due to the energy masses. However, there is a way out of a jam if you find that all the crystals have turned radioactive (and therefore cannot be collected) or if you find yourself caged in by energy masses. By the press of a button, you can Beam Up to your yellow ship and then be presented with a fresh board and start all over (but then you lose any crystals you might have managed to collect and the game gets a little harder). One other thing to note about the androids is the fact that they can shoot anti-gravity spray at you, so getting out of the way of their line of fire is another challenge faced on your quest to save the earth. One last little nifty feature of the game is the ability to wear a defensive shield which makes you invincible to anything on the screen. However, the shield can only be used for as long as the red bar on the top of the screen indicates (you actually can take off the shield at any point after putting it on to save the energy bar from being depleted). The shield, and all these other little bonuses tossed into the game, can all be accessed by either the press of the button or by voice recognition if the MBX gaming add-on is attached. All one would need to do in order to activate the shield, for example, would be to simply say "Shield" into the microphone!

Space Bandits is a very interesting game, and has a lot of unique features. However, the mainstream gamer might be turned off a little by the easiness of the first few rounds. At first I wrote this game off as being too easy, but after playing it through to the 5th level I found myself being caged in numerous

times by the androids who were out to get the crystals I had collected! So when you give this game a try, play into it a little as the challenge can pick up fairly quickly. In addition, as with all MBX cartridges, this game uses voice recognition and synthesis very well. Being able to speak plain English into a microphone to tell your robot what to do is really a great added dimension to the game. So if you're a space shoot 'em up junkie, you might find all the options available in Space Bandits interesting and entertaining.

### **Superfly (1983 Milton Bradley)** - Sequel to the TI-99/4A game "The Attack"

Here's a game that for some reason seems to be overlooked quite a bit when it comes to MBX gaming. Not only does Superfly offer some really unique features, but it's also the little known sequel to the ever popular 1980 Milton Bradley game The Attack on the TI-99/4A. Considering how much attention The Attack got through the years, it's surprising that Superfly isn't more talked about today since it offers many improvements to its predecessor.



Superfly pits you, a housefly, against all the baddies of the fly world. There are Red Spiders, Purple Spiders, Spider Larvae, and Spider Eggs all out to get you! However, these spiders don't know what they are messing with as you are no ordinary fly, but Superfly! The object of the game is to advance through various levels blasting away at all the creatures on the screen before they can devour you. As Superfly, you have the option to use two different ranges of firepower, either a short or a long ranged shot. Since you have to wait for your "shot" to either hit an enemy or a wall before being able to fire again, using short ranged firing can be beneficial especially in tight spaces. The concept of the game is pretty unique, pitting a fly that can shoot against spiders who have to hatch from their eggs and evolve before being able to attack you. It's important to note that the eggs (the yellow round things with green markings) are completely harmless but also cannot be destroyed until they hatch. After they hatch, unharmed little blue larvae will climb out and if you happen to see one of the larvae curling up into a ball you better be on alert as it will soon be transforming into a Red Spider! These Red Spiders are the true enemies of the game since they aggressively seek you out for a meal. The Purple Spiders on the other hand don't seem to come from the eggs/larvae, instead they are already placed on the screen at the start of each round and don't seek you out as rabidly as the Red Spiders do. However, these Purple Spiders can't be trusted since not only do you lose a life if you run into them, but also they can change into a Red Spider at a moments notice. One thing that I have noticed, which could just be a glitch in the game, is that if you fly into one of the eggs while it is hatching then you sometimes end up losing a life. So a tip to those who play this game...Stay away from hatching eggs since they can end up killing you too. An additional weapon your fly has at his disposal (besides shooting) are Spray Cans which can be used by the press of a button to exterminate all the spiders/larvae (not eggs) on the screen. So if the game ever gets too intense (and I have run into may times in later levels where the action was simply too much) these spray cans can come in very handy!

Now for the true meat of the game which really makes it stand out from others in its class. If you are playing with any non-MBX joysticks (and therefore without the MBX system, since only the MBX sticks work with the device), then the fly is simply controlled like in almost all video games. Meaning you can only move up, down, left, or right while shooting in the same direction you are facing in. But if playing with the MBX Joysticks, the fly can be flying in one direction (for example, flying towards the left of the screen) while shooting/facing in the opposite direction (such as towards the right side of the screen). This special movement is accomplished by using the rotation knob on the top of the MBX Joysticks, which actually allows the player to rotate the fly on the dot 360° and face/shoot in any direction regardless of which way he is flying. Therefore, if spiders are coming at you from behind you can actually control the fly in such a way so that he is flying backwards but shooting in the opposite direction. This life-like control (well maybe not too life-like for a fly, but for a human anyway) really

helps set apart Superfly from not just other games, but also other MBX games. Milton Bradley was really using their creativity when it came to how the fly could be controlled. Perhaps the best setting for a rotation knob like this would be in an action RPG where the player could walk in all directions while facing in any direction. Superfly has a lot to offer to both the person with and without the MBX device. It's a fun game to play even without the rotation knob capability, but needless to say it's even more of a blast with it! As with all MBX games, Superfly includes some great speech synthesis with lines such as "Kill the Fly" or "Never Trust a Worm" all being said in some truly unique voices. Actually, the speech in Superfly is so unique (especially with the MBX attached) that I would say it demonstrates some of the best speech synthesis of any TI-99/4A game around. This game also makes my personal TOP 10 TI-99/4A games of all time, along with "Bigfoot" and "Championship Baseball" (other MBX games) simply because there are so many options here and the fact that Superfly is just simply an all out entertaining game.

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 II***

***by [Mark Sabbatini](#)***

A mandatory screening for state-of-the-art pixel-pushers contemplating this time capsule voyage to text-only games for computers from "a long, long time ago." Set your browser's hyperdrive for <http://www.asciimation.co.nz/>. Not amused? Skip this article - you're lost to the dark side of technology.

Hopefully it proves text can be entertaining, especially with the creativity and perseverance obviously involved. I found it more amusing and artistic than Episodes I, II and VI combined (and if that isn't enough hints about the site, well so much for our "only hope").

I can reminisce about my first arcade visit, home computer or whatever, but my absolute first computer gaming was fencing with a text-based computer psychologist (Eliza) on a minicomputer in an office where most machines read programs from paper rolls and cards punched with holes.

Soon after I discovered a huge range of text-based adventure, arcade, sports and strategy games and became hooked for life. Much of my current working life is centered around seeking out the latest and greatest technology, but free time is still consumed by a huge range of text games old and new. Do a Google search and you'll find plenty of programmers devoting themselves to offering all sorts of them free for the downloading.

Maybe it's old-time nostalgia, wonder at programmers wringing so much from primitive building blocks, or simply the camp value. A magazine ad for Infocom, maker of the finest text adventures ever, bragged no computer would ever be capable of displaying their images because they were created in the mind. Well, the company lied - market forces eventually forced them to write graphic adventures that never sold as well. Still, it's a great pitch that occasionally resonates - I refuse to concede any modern Zork title matches the quality of the original text trilogy.

So part two of this series on computing history's "losers" doomed to obscurity through obsolesce or inability to compete in the market looks at the very first generation of games appearing even before Pong took the world by storm. It's as much history lesson as entertainment, some of which is undoubtedly familiar to most gamers, but a must when compiling a list of games and machines shoved into history's background.

This isn't even close to a complete list of dinosaurs, by the way, just ones I have some hands-on

knowledge and experience with. I got to do some typing on old room-size IBM computers, for instance, but never a chance to discover if any games - much less worthwhile ones - existed.

I'll play titles on old machines when I can find them (government surplus outlets are great sources, even if I've been forced to buy a palletload for \$20 instead of just one), but unlike many retrogamers I have no problem with emulation. It's not always perfect, but is often the most practical and a means for those who might never experience the machines otherwise. Virtually every machine in these articles can be emulated with free software available online, but for simplicity's sake I am providing only a few browser-based versions as an easy-enough-for-anyone taster.

Games are rated with two letter grades, a "then" score for my humble opinion of how entertaining they were in comparison to other games of the era and a "now" score for fun value today. I confess the latter scores may be on the kind side, especially since a few hours after writing this I played a few Atari 2600 favorites like "HERO" and "Jr. Pac Man" and they felt incredibly sophisticated in comparison. Brought back the full impact of just how much it was loved in its day.

Next month will deal with one more category of machines predating the true home computing/console era: those TV-based home "Pong" games that even as a kid became dull far faster than my parents wanted to know after buying them. Was anybody able to do anything interesting with balls and paddles? Actually, it turns out a couple of companies did, including a well-known one and another largely obscured by history.

Meanwhile, a great read is Creative Computing's "Basic Computer Games" series, free for viewing at [www.atariarchives.org](http://www.atariarchives.org). The images include sample runs of hundreds of text-based programs, allowing insight into gameplay without the hassle of finding and downloading the programs themselves.

Now, at last, the machines and their games. First is another another bit of pure whimsy:

### **Chess**

Not a computer game; this is an ancient concept of using a chessboard as a computer (or at least a calculator). The theory, and other sites offering the ultimate in primitive computing concepts dating back to the 1500s is at Emulators of Historical Systems (<http://ei.cs.vt.edu/~history/emulators.html>).

And speaking of calculators, plenty of people came up with:

### **Pocket calculator 'games'**

Even as a kid, I didn't find "insulting" a calculator by typing "7334" and reading it upside down all that funny, but there were some interesting challenges such as this: Take three different single digits and find a combination besides 6X21 (126) that contains all of the numbers selected. Trust me, this is really, really hard.

OK, enough. Time for real computers and their games, beginning with maybe the very first:



**EDSAC (Grade: Incomplete due to lack of experience)**

Noughts And Crosses, a tic-tac-toe game, was written in 1952 by A.S. Douglas for the EDSAC, a computer built in 1949 at the University of Cambridge. The machine had a 35-by-16 display of "dots" and could execute 600 instructions a second. Humans played the computer by entering moves using a dial similar to those found on old telephones. An online emulator of the system is at <http://www.cl.cam.ac.uk/UoCCL/misc/EDSAC99/simulators/india/applet/>, but I'm not sure if any games are part of it or how to use them.

**DEC PDP**

Time for the meat of this article in terms of quantity and quality of games. The PDP-1 was a "breakthrough" computer in the early 1960s, with the PDP-1 selling for a mere \$120,000 when other machines cost more than \$1 million. It had 4K of memory expandable to 64K (considered massive beyond belief), performed 50,00-100,000 calculations a second, took "only" 17 feet of floor space, and read paper tapes at 400 feet per second. But it wasn't a total dinosaur. Among other things it could read a light pen, sort of the precursor to today's mouse. Later models with imaginative titles like the PDP-7 and PDP-8 were much more advanced and widely found. Not all of the games below originated on PDP computers, but it ran many of the "classics" and is a good representative sampler.

**Space War (then-A; now-C)**

Anyone even minimally familiar with gaming history knows this two-player space combat shooter programmed during the 1960s by MIT students on a PDP-1 is generally considered the first true video game. It therefore gets brief mention, even though it isn't a text game. Those wanting to try it will find an online emulator at <http://lcs.www.media.mit.edu/groups/el/projects/spacwar/> and luckily players get to use keys for controls instead of the dials on the original machine.

**Advent (a.k.a. Colossal Cave) (then A; now B)**

Everyone probably knows about the original explore-the-cave text adventure as well. In fact, it's probably tougher to find machines that don't have a version written for it than those that do. Those wanting to play it online can find a version at <http://ww1.freearcade.com/Zplet.jav/Advent.html>.

**Life (then B; now D)**

Maybe the first strategy/simulation game, of sorts. John Conway wrote this for a PDP-7 in 1970, with an initial grid of "cells" evolving in successive generations depending on how crowded the surrounding areas were. Too much or too little crowding would kill cells off, but this was all a part of the "natural" cycle that would then allow necessary increases. He offered a cash prize for any pattern that generated life indefinitely. Another program copied in many forms as a basic exercise. A modern online emulation of it can be found at <http://www.ibiblio.org/lifepatterns/>.

**Hunt The Wumpus (then B+, now C-)**

Five arrows, 20 caves, pits and bats to avoid, and a monster to hunt. The first RPG? Basically, you move into adjoining rooms by selecting tunnel A, B or C, with the ability to "smell" the wumpus one or two rooms away. Shooting an arrow (instead of moving into a tunnel) correctly will kill it, but a miss is one of several things that can wake him and trigger his occasional wanderings in search of you. The effects of hazards vary; bats, for instance, drop you in random locations. Plenty of fun and like other titles copied so often some may not be aware of the original anymore.

**Eliza (then B+; now D-)**

I've never forgotten a former girlfriend telling me the most helpful people usually don't actually give advice for problems. Instead they listen well and make fairly neutral comments that reassure the talker (who probably already knows the solution) they're being heard. If that's true, this "landmark" artificial intelligence program should be one of the best shrinks of all time. It can be entertaining and often frustrating at the same time. You type in sentences (i.e. "I'm depressed") and the computer responds

("Why do you think you're depressed" or "I see, tell me more"). It quickly becomes obvious the program extracts certain words based on some rules of grammar (type "no" as part of a sentence and response is often "You seem quite negative") and puts them into a limited number of canned responses. Many quirky spin-offs of this program exist, but perhaps more interesting is looking at modern artificial intelligence programs and seeing how they expand on the concept.

### **Chess (then C-, now F)**

At one point some considered chess on a computer impossible. Even if a machine could perform an unthinkable million calculations per second, they said, it would still take far longer than any human could endure for the computer to figure out moves. They were wrong - programmers got around this using algorithms that calculated a limited number of possibilities (today, of course, there's no problem considering everything). Many resulted in skilled virtual opponents, but they weren't necessarily fun or easy to play. This PCP-8 version was too hard for me to follow by using letters such as "BK" and "WQ" to designate pieces. The recommendation with that and other primitive versions, including my Sinclair ZX-81 years later, was to keep a real chessboard nearby to perform the actual moves on.

### **Cosmac Elf**

The "advanced" machine of this bunch, built in 1976 around something known as an 1802 processor. It was controlled with a 16-key pad used to type in hex numbers (that's base-16 for math types, where the "range" of numbers goes from zero to "F" for 16). It's included because 1) I saw one running at a show recently and was intrigued enough to try the emulated programs below and 2) the processor is the basis for a primitive gaming system that is part of the future series of articles.

### **Mouse Trap (no grade due to lack of experience)**

I am fairly impressed with this program for one reason: It uses less than 256 bytes of memory, or about the same number of characters as a short paragraph. As best I can tell you somehow use the hexpad to capture a dot moving across the screen as it passes through the trap at the bottom center. I haven't yet figured out how.

### **Meistermind (no grade due to lack of experience)**

A "guess the code" game based on the two-player peg game Mastermind. Players can have the computer select a number between three to five digits, guess what each digit might be, and the computer uses an "A" and "B" system indicating 1) how many numbers are correct and in the right position and 2) how many numbers are right but in the wrong position). If the correct number is "1234" and the user types "1456," for instance, the result is "A1, B1." I never enjoyed any version of this game, but it was a good beginning programming exercise for untold thousands of computer users.

**Game Over**

Time to close out another edition of RTM. Thanks to everyone for reading our little newsletter, and we hope to bring you some more great articles next month.

- [Adam King](#), Chief Editor

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