

Retrogaming Times Monthly

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Press Fire to Start

by Adam King

If it's a video game newsletter, it must be Retrogaming Times Monthly. This month we got a mixture of old and new. We take a second look at an old Many Faces review, a look at a newsletter every kid had in the 80s, and some other stuff. We also have a new writer debuting this month, who also looks at old games which are new again. So fire up that 2600 and let's get this issue cookin'.

Syntax Era: Nintendo Fun Club News

by [Scott Jacobi](#)

This month we will be taking a bit of a time leap forward, to a time when there was little to no press about video games to be found. In the middle of the 80s, after the video game market had crashed, and retailers considered buzz words like "Atari" and "joysticks" to be a dying fad, one company wasn't ready to throw the towel in. Sure, it happened to be a Japanese company, and at the time Americans did not have the greatest appreciation for Japanese business practices, so the little company known as Nintendo found itself between a rock and a hard place.

Nintendo had their fabulous system, the Famicom, and they knew that American children would eat it up just as the Japanese children had. They only needed to convince American retailers to sell it to those children. But in 1985, nobody wanted to touch games with a ten foot pole. Of course, Nintendo had tried to go through an obvious avenue: Atari. They were ready to sell the rights to distribute the Famicom in America to the once great video game company of only a few years before, but the company was imploding, and no one could attend to the deal before Nintendo took it off the table and attempted to go it solo.

At the time, Nintendo of America had a very small, but loyal staff. There was Minoru Arakawa, who was assigned to be the president of NOA by his father-in-law Hiroshi Yamauchi, who happened to be the president of Nintendo. And there was his famous lawyer friend Howard Lincoln. But among the rest of the NOA staff, there happened to be a red haired young man who was very passionate about video games, named Howard Phillips. Howard Phillips was one of the first



Americans to get to try Donkey Kong. He worked in Nintendo's warehouses. And he was instrumental in setting up many of the various in-store displays that Nintendo arranged to promote the Nintendo Entertainment System, as the Famicom has been decided to be named in the States.

Towards the end of 1986, the NES's popularity began to swell, and when the time was right, NOA began to think of another method for promoting their product. I like to think that they took a page from Atari for their next idea when they decided on a publication. After all, throughout the Atari 2600's heyday, Atari was supporting the publication of Atari Age, a magazine specifically aimed at promoting Atari developed video games and products. Atari Age, as well as the many other publications around at the time, had quite a hand in encouraging consumers to go out and buy video games that they otherwise would not have been familiar with. The problem for Nintendo was those publications were long gone, and no one had come along to fill in the vacuum they left behind. So if anyone was going to, Nintendo would have to do it for themselves. And so they did.

The first Nintendo Fun Club News came out in the late Winter of 1987. It was exactly 6 pages long, and the front page (since there was no proper cover) featured a lengthy article on a game that would rise to super stardom, but at the time had yet to make a dent in the market. That game was Super Mario Bros. Turning the page, readers would find more information on games such as Excitebike and Hogan's Alley, and a Nintendo sponsored charity event. Sneak Peeks (another ironic similarity to Atari Age) offered brief glimpses at Pro Wrestling and Slalom. On the fourth page, you could read a little bit about the red haired gentleman that I mentioned earlier, Howard Phillips. Howard, it seemed, had risen through the ranks of Nintendo from being a warehouse employee to Nintendo's lead game tester. Howard was part of a team that had the responsibility of pouring over the Famicom's already vast line up of cartridges and selecting the best of the bunch that would be made ready for the US launch of the NES. He would also be on an advisory board that made recommendations on how Japanese games should be altered in order to be more suitable for the American market. But the job that I envied most, was role as the President of the Nintendo Fun Club.

In my youth, I believed that being the President of this newsletter meant he was the one responsible for it, but in truth it was Gail Tilden who was the editor for the publication, as well as it's eventual evolutionary successor, Nintendo Power. Gail Tilden was later promoted to the head of marketing for all things Pokemon, but that wouldn't happen for many years. For now, Gail, along with Howard Phillips' help as the front man, were responsible for publishing a news letter that promoted all the games that Nintendo had and would put out. In the beginning, like Atari Age, the Nintendo Fun Club News articles never strayed from the first party Nintendo titles. However, things began to change by the third issue when they began printing ads for third party companies. And in issue 5, a new regular feature called "Louie Reviewee" began covering one third party game in depth per issue.

When the second issue came out in the Summer of 1987, it looked very similar to the first issue, only it doubled in size to twelve pages. And the feature on the cover this time was none other than the Legend of Zelda. More tips were featured in this issue's Pro's Corner feature, which filled up an entire page with tips, strategies, and easter eggs. The NES Advantage controller was debuted in it's pages, while Metroid and Kid Icarus were given Sneak Peeks. A score board appeared with the names of ten players who had broken the 9,990,000 mark in Super Mario Bros., and Nintendo began promoting some merchandise in the form of t-shirts, sweaters, a "How to Win at Super Mario Bros." book (edited by Howard Phillips himself) and score pads.

Issue 3 arrived in the Fall of 1987, and it had finally matured as a magazine so it was given a proper cover the prominently featured artwork from the Legend of Zelda. Metroid and Kid Icarus were officially previewed, calling a great deal of attention to their "new" password feature. (The Legend of Zelda, Metroid, and Kid Icarus had originally been designed as disk games which could be saved through the Famicom Disk System. When making the transition to the states, Zelda was given a battery back up feature which would emulate saving to a disk, while Metroid and Kid Icarus were instead given passwords which amounted to save files that were encoded with text.) After a brief

sneak peek at the soon to be released Mike Tyson's Punchout, players were treated to the first feature that made the magazine so popular among all the kids at school: a full blown map of the overworld in the Legend of Zelda. Even the game didn't come with as detailed a map as could be found in those pages. This instantly elevated the status of the magazine from text-laden advertisement to goldmine. If that wasn't enough, artwork from Zelda II was tantalizing printed a few pages later in order to make every reader drool with anticipation.

The fourth issue arrived at the end of 1987 and featured the one and only Mike Tyson in his pre ear biting prime. Now you were playing with power. After the morsel of artwork from the last issue, Zelda II was given a full two page preview that launched a torturous wait for the games ultimate arrival over a full year later. Dragon Warrior was also given a page sized preview, but it's role playing aspect was severely downplayed, I suspect due to perception that American players would not enjoy RPGs as much as more action oriented titles. The fourth issue's treasure trove of info was in the form of a strategy guide to beating the various underworld level bosses in Zelda, as well as showing a shortcut to the end of Metroid, illustrating the infamous wall jump technique in Metroid, and finally cracking the code to the treasure rooms in Kid Icarus. When I was 12, this info was more valuable to me than the hottest stock market tip available.



With issue 5 and on, the magazine didn't gain many impressive features, but the valuable content just kept coming. Tips and secrets galore. The boxers in Mike Tyson's Punch-Out were dissected and the NES Max, perhaps my favorite joypad ever, was introduced. In issue 6, the early regions of Zelda II were mapped out and the second quest in the first Zelda was explained and explored. And issue 7 contained advanced techniques for Metroid Players as well as tips for every Nintendo produced sports title. In these issue, three non-Nintendo published games also shared some of the spotlight: Goonies II, Wizards & Warriors, and the ever popular beat'em up, Double Dragon.

The fact that Nintendo began to fill the pages with reviews of third party titles, as well as more heapings of advertisements is evidence of two things. For one thing, the Nintendo Fun Club News had done it's job, and done it extremely well. Nintendo's popularity was going nowhere but up, and the fan's demand for content was ravenous. The more secrets that the newsletter revealed, the more popular it became. But in order to fill that demand for content, Nintendo had to look beyond it's own little camp, which leads to the second thing. Nintendo was not quite like Atari. Atari looked upon third party companies as vultures and jackals, trying to hone in on the market that it created for itself. Nintendo, on the other hand, was smart enough to realize that not only are third parties beneficial to their system, they could be an even greater source of revenue then their own developments.

Nintendo was content to let some of the other companies produce a majority of the titles that were made available for their system. Once the system's popularity was set in motion, all they had to do was sit back, let the third party contracts roll in, and release the occasional blockbuster triple-A title just to show the world that when it comes to games, Nintendo is still number one. Since Nintendo was slowing down the development of smaller titles and focusing on bigger games like Super Mario Bros. 2 and Zelda II, there really wasn't enough content coming from Nintendo itself to form the basis of a newsletter. And Gail Tilden and Howard Phillips knew it. So while issue 7 highlighted no new games coming from Nintendo, it had an even bigger announcement, the announcement of an even bigger magazine. That magazine was going to be called Nintendo Power, and it would cover every game imaginable, whether it was made by Nintendo or not.

Unlike Atari Age, while I had to say goodbye to my new favorite magazine, I was going to be saying hello to a dream come true in a few months, so it wasn't as heart wrenching. It's no easy task to evaluate just how instrumental the Nintendo Fun Club News was to Nintendo's early success with the

NES, but with every pearl of wisdom that got printed in it's pages, players only became more excited about each new release. Nintendo obviously saw the value of this when they decided to move to a larger publication. While the newsletter pails in comparison to it's larger sibling, each one still holds a special place in my heart when I glance at the pages that humbly announce games that would go on to be legends in their own time.

The Lost Many Faces of . . . Demon Attack

by Alan Hewston

This month we uncover 3 of the Lost Faces of Demon Attack. We'll actually review all classic "Joystick" era home versions, but focus more on the 3 that I had not previously reviewed in the Retrogaming Times. My plan was to make this a catch up "Lost Faces of Demon Attack" review or a bonus article, and still have the regular Many Faces of review. I got too far along on this one and had to delay the Many Faces of Venture - my apologies.

The original Many Faces of Demon Attack review I wrote over 4 years ago, back in RT issue #36. That was only my third set of reviews, so I was still early on my journey reviewing the Many Faces, as I am now up to nearly 350 reviews. At that time I had not completed the necessary background research to make sure I accounted for all official releases. I missed 3 versions, most notably I was told of a great C64 version that came out only on disk. "You've gotta review that one". I also missed the TI-99 and CoCo versions, which I now have, but back then I didn't even have those systems, yet alone the carts. The TI-99 version of Demon Attack I did mention in my original review as an unreleased prototype. It was never officially released, but I still have yet to do my homework for the TI-99 version to determine why the cart labeled as "Super Demon Attack" has a title screen that says "Demon Attack". Was an earlier version planned for release? Was there a licensing problem? Was the early version delayed, then enhanced, then released as "Super Demon Attack"? Was this a sequel? Well now that I've played the game I can address some of this. It was not a sequel but more or less a copy of the Intellivision version. So the TI-99 cart "Super Demon Attack" is hereby considered official and welcomed into our Many Faces of Demon Attack family. I'm sure that TI-99 fans will want to know what happened with this name change etc. So . . . we'll ask RTM staff writer Bryan Roppolo to investigate this and perhaps report back to us next month or so.

In the previous Many Faces of Demon Attack review (See RT#36), I did not labor nearly as much to discover and document the details or scores anywhere near what I have done lately. I made some general notes on the categories (no scores) and gave just an overall score for each version, and handed out the medals. Reader feedback indicates that several of you do appreciate the added details and ask that I continue to provide as much as I can. Hopefully the details encourage you to both play these great games again, and maybe to look for the details and shortfalls of different versions as I do. Now that I've been doing this for almost 5 years, this is my chance to update all Demon Attack scores and medals. That means replaying every version again, and focusing on the new versions in my collection.

Take Two . . . The Many Faces of Demon Attack, the game that Atari sued Imagic over saying it was too much like Phoenix; the game that original programmer Rob Fulop calls a "Death From Above" game; and finally the Imagic game that I think had the best TV advertisement.

All home versions by Imagic

- Atari 2600* '82 Rob Fulop
- Atari 8 bit* '82 Dave Johnson (only works on 400 & 800 models)
- Commodore 64* '84 unknown
- Intellivision* '82 Gary Kato
- Odyssey2* '84? Dave Johnson (the rarest cart version)
- TI-99* '83 Bill Mann (Smith/Western Games Design Group)

- Radio Shack CoCo '84 by M. Woorsanger (Imagic/Radio Shack)
- Vic 20 '83 Bruce Pedersen

Home Version Similarities: Except those in <> all home versions have: a demo <O2, TI>; pause <2600, 8 bit, O2>; a choice of starting at a higher difficulty (approx Wave 13) <TI, C64>; a choice of regular or tracer shots <TI>; play 1 or 2 players, or alternate in 4 second intervals throughout the game <TI, C64, Vic>; Demons dramatically warp in to attack <INTY, TI>; three rows (altitudes) of demons are present <INTY, O2, TI>, with the lowermost dropping bombs <TI, INTY>; you only have one shot to fire at a time, which appears ready to go on your laser base <CoCo, O2, TI, Vic 20, INTY> once the previous shot has hit the enemy or cleared the screen; holding the fire button down will automatically release your next laser cannon fire when available; even better - the INTY version alone has an automatic continuous firing capability which can be toggled on via any keypad button, and off via the fire buttons; once a Demon or complete pair has been eliminated, a new replacement Demon will "warp" <INTY, TI> into that slot, provided all Demons per wave have not been exhausted; the Demons seem to dance within their row <INTY, TI> and move hypnotically to avoid being hit, and once the lowest row is empty, those above will descend to fill it; there are up to 12 unique waves of increasing difficulty; in each wave, all Demons have the same armament, either a spread of bombs or a pair of lasers aimed downward <INTY, O2, TI>; after a few waves, the Demons, when hit will split into a pair <TI, INTY> of two smaller Demons, each then moves separately, only one will drop bombs but once one is eliminated, the other (except early stages) will stop dropping bombs and begin to dive at you, letting out a chirping sound while dropping in a fast pendulum like motion until it has reached the surface where it disappears; as the waves increase, the action will speed up <CoCo>, the Demons will become more deadly, attacking at lower altitudes <INTY, TI>; drop either heat seeking bombs or tracer bombs/lasers <C64 ? unsure>; ultimately becoming very small and harder to hit <INTY, TI>; on the 2600 the 12 waves continue over and over for 6 more cycles before the game ends abruptly upon completion of wave #84; lives remaining are shown on the screen; extra laser canons can be earned (up to a max of 6 at one time) for each wave that is completed without losing a laser canon; a jingle is heard at the end of a wave where you've earned a bonus life <INTY, O2>; there is a slight break between each wave before the Demons begin warping back in to start the next wave <INTY, TI>; there's a so called 2 player "co-op" version <TI, C64, Vic> where 1 player is in control and scores points then the laser canon changes color and the other player takes over, where the action switches indefinitely every 4 seconds, alternating players - in reality this is a "competitive" game, as your points are separate, (is there much value in such an option anyhow?); when you lose your final laser cannon, you'll hear <CoCo, TI, INTY> a fleeing spaceship sound - similar to Imagic's Atlantis, but not actually see anything on screen.

A negative "feature" of the software on nearly all versions is that of double-deaths. You lose a life, the action continues on and your next cannon may appear directly underneath Demon droppings and all-too-often you cannot escape yet another death. The C64 is the only version that resets each wave to prevent this injustice. On the CoCo you'll encounter fewer or no double deaths if you are careful. For one, the Demons are a bit higher up which helps. But if you do not move or shoot, the Demons will be moving, but they do not fire until you move or fire. So the action is suspended so to speak. The INTY version doesn't reset, but gives you a sporting chance. If you are quick to think as you die, shift your controller L or R so that the next canon, although arriving almost immediately, gets shifted (L or R) away from a possible double death before it materializes.

Home versions with the screen 2 aka the Demon Base Pandemonium:

Intellivision: The first version to have a second screen, that of attacking the flagship. After surviving 48 Demons (6 waves of 8 Demons which occur seemingly non-stop) at the Moon Station Tranquility, your Laser Cannon lifts off and goes on the offensive versus the Demon flagship. You are immediately greeted by Suicide Patrollers that spew forth early and often from the mothership and come directly downward on a collision course with your canon. Though they do not fire, you must hit them or be eliminated, all the while you need to attack the mothership. With 6 or more descending

simultaneously, they provide an added Demon shield, to prevent your shots from reaching their mothership. When you do hit the mothership, its flickering shield become weaker and weaker, eventually allowing a shot that passes through the Window of Vulnerability (a weak spot in the revolving shields). A fantastic explosion will occur if your shot hits the Core of Pandemonium. If you lose a laser cannon on this screen, your next one immediately comes into play and the flagship stage continues. This stage is very difficult, and so busy with the patrollers that learning the game play mechanics of the Pandemonium's shield system will be tough. Unlike the Moonbase screen, you cannot earn a bonus life after this wave (same for all versions), but instead, the mothership's demise will earn you 1000 points.

Commodore 64: After only 3 Demons waves on the Moon, you take on the Demon flagship. But you only get one chance with each visit to Pandemonium. Lose a cannon and you're back on the Moon base. After your first attack on the flagship Pandemonium, every wave alternates between defending the Moonbase and attacking Pandemonium. I'd prefer 6 or at least 3 waves and then face Pandemonium. Like the INTY version, the patrollers coming down out of Pandemonium, and you must defeat them and the flagship. You have more time to watch the patrollers descent and attack them before they get on top of you. A completely different shield system is used by the mothership, making it invulnerable to your laser cannon's attack. The key to defeating the otherwise invincible mothership is to use its Suicide Patrollers against it. You must hit a newly spawned patrollers just inside the mothership's shields. You'll see the patrollers working their way out of the multi-colored defense shield layers and once they are near the edge, they become vulnerable to your cannon attack. Their explosion causes damage to the shields removing the outermost colored layer, and revealing the next layer - closer to Pandemonium's core. I love this concept. Is this the first VG or first boss where you use its own weapon's against itself? When hit a replacement patroller will soon spawn out of the core and start coming for you. If you evade, miss or ignore them, when they reach your level they don't go away (like the divers) they become hyperactive, doing flips like "following the bouncing ball" in a relentless attempt to hit you. Once Pandemonium's shields are gone, a single blast into its roving "eye" does it in. Subsequent visits greets you with more patrollers, possibly up to 6? [The CoCo version has 6]. Unlike the panic mode of the Intellivision version from the first time you face Pandemonium, the C64 offers a nicer progression of difficulty where you learn how to defeat the enemy, but it will be several more visits before you have met your match. There is actual strategy here, not just kill or be killed. Avoid or destroy the lower patrollers but focus on hitting the ones just inside the shields.

TI-99: The same as the Inty, and still not much time to react. Once the patrollers have been dispatched, and the shields gone, a BIG bobbing head doll pops up in front of the Eye. Fireballs are unleashed your way - how rude and the big head blocks your shots as well. There's not much time to see what is going on. Keep dodging or shooting the fireballs, and hope that you get a shot past the fireballs and bobbing head and hit the Eye. A great explosion will then occur.

CoCo: Almost exactly like the C64 but the shields remain the same size. A color layer does not peel away, but each hit makes the density of the shields lesser (thinner). Once the eye is vulnerable, you simply need to hit it as it roves back and forth. A little different than the C64 version in that you make it to Pandemonium after 6 waves of Demons on the Moon. But you still get kicked out as soon as you lose one cannon, and continue to alternate 1 wave of Demons on the Moon and then 1 versus the flagship.

Have Nots: Odyssey 2 (31)

My first reaction was at least you have more than one life. Only 2 rows of Demons, a single block represents their bombs, but still most of the Gameplay is in tact for a respectable (6). There's even tracer bombs by the Demons, but no demo. The strategy/fun is clearly changed with 1/3 of the Demons now gone. Addictiveness is good enough (6) to make this one of the best O2 games to play, but it is very difficult and has terribly unfair collision detection problems. The Graphics are acceptable (5), a little bit choppy, not much detail, but some animated flapping and dancing. The Demons still dramatically warp in, have multi-colors and split. Sound is average (5), with chirping and all the effects save a bonus life. But everything is repetitive and limited, and there is not much change in frequency or hypnotic rhythm found in all other versions (Oops, not the TI either). Controls are analog so you cannot easily park and shoot (9). This is the rarest cart to find, but is found on the O2 multi-cart.



Have Nots: TI-99 (33)

My first reaction was the game is by no means SUPER. Looks like the programmer never saw the 2600 version and the result is a poor Intellivision copy. The programming included crummy controls to boot - more on that later. Sure they used brilliant hi-res graphics for the Moon surface and Earth, and added lots more color and detail than the Inty could provide, but the Demons seem to be even more oversized and silly looking. I guess I expected too much, and was let down. Gameplay is close to matching the INTY, and worth while (7), but the oversized objects take away some of the playability. There's no demo and no option for the tracer shots. The Demons have semi intelligent bombs to give you something more to worry about. The Addictiveness is good enough (6) to play for a while, but this is the version you'll quit playing soonest. The pause <P> works fine and you might use it often due to the long, non-stop battle before you finally make it to screen 2. There's no starting wave difficulty, which is fine since the difficulty is already too hard to begin with. Then the collision detection is a mess, and then the added background graphics make it hard to see the bombs in front of the Earth. The Graphics are effective (7) with many details to the Demons and the great hi-res background. But for this version and all with background graphics - why didn't they move the Earth up higher in the sky - to avoid the difficulty seeing the bombs? Despite no warping in of the Demons and not so much as a single flapping wing you'll discover the most creative and animated Demons this side of Neptune. Sound is mediocre (5) lacking most notably any sound for shots fired. Then, there's none of the charming 2600 effects like warping in, diving, weaving and other rhythmic sound effects. You hear them being hit, but not yourself. There is a jingle when you earn a bonus life, but nothing when the game quietly ends. Controls score an (8) due to buggy programming. You cannot move if the fire button is pressed. So you either have to release it each time you want to move, or if you are already moving, then you can hold down the fire button. This is really clumsy and to me is at best a joke that if I didn't tell you about, you may have tried to destroy your controllers before you figured out what the heck was going on. Of course, that info is not found in the manual. Finally the enemy and it bombs can move L/R faster than you - geez. Gimme a break - it looks great, but where's the strategy, where's the challenge, where's the fun.



Have Nots: Intellivision (35)

My first reaction was despite the game being nothing like the Atari 2600, it has grown on me over 4 years and now gets a little higher Gameplay score - impressive (8) with god depth. It's hard to be fair in adding in points for new game elements all the while subtracting points for something that is missing. I've added points for the variety of enemy weaponry, unique attacks and of course, having a second screen is huge. But then subtracting for having almost no strategy, compared with the original, 3 rows of warping in, dancing, multi-bombing, splitting, diving Demons. The spastically moving Demons makes it play more like a mindless shoot'em up to me. The Demons are too large, taking away some of the playfield as well. Addictiveness is very fun (8) and the standard INTY diagonal buttons <pause> is great, especially since the first screen seems to last so long. Playing 6 waves nearly non-stop - without so much as even a jingle before you blast off to the second screen is a bit much. The option to play a harder starting level seems somewhat wasted as the regular level is plenty difficult. The 3 Demon types are OK, but hardly have the charm of the 12 varying waves of slightly harder Demon types from the 2600 original. The bombs are a little harder to see with the background graphics, but not too bad. Graphics are good enough to enjoy (6) especially the Pandemonium Flagship, Earth and Moon graphics. But the Demons lack detail, are mono colored, and are lifeless. Sound is OK (6) with effects to match all gameplay elements except for the missing bonus laser cannon. Overall this version has the fewest sound elements - no warping in or diving Demons. Controls (7) are frustrating to me for such a fast-action, non-stop firing game. Toggling the automatic & continuous firing feature on (any keypad button) and off (any fire button) will help at times. The cart comes in 2 label variations - same code inside.



Have Nots: TRS 80 /Color Computer (39)

My first reaction was AWESOME! I wanted to play it all night. We don't get to see the CoCo here very often, and I was nearly done with my reviews before I realized that I had forgotten it completely. Oh for shame (on me), as this version would hands down win a Gold medal if given out for effort alone. This game is one of the finest examples of programming as best as possible given the capabilities of the machine. Demon Attack pushed the CoCo 1 to the limit - well done. The Gameplay is phenomenal (9), matching the C64 with the best of both worlds - ie every element and all types of enemies of the 2600, plus the thrill of attacking the mothership from the Inty (screen 2). The Addictiveness is very fun (8), close enough to match the medal winners. The hi-res backgrounds again make it hard to see the Demons bombs, but not too bad. The pause is tricky but works <P> to toggle on and <R> to resume. Most of the starting options are there, like 2 players, tracer shot attack and higher difficulty - which included invisible Demons. That's right, now you see them, now you don't - alternating every 3 seconds.

Their bombs remain in view, but watch out for the invisible divers. The only big drawback is the game speed is pretty constant and does not speed up, so you'll have to get used to a slower paced game. There are minor, infrequent glitches like a stray laser heading up from the wrong place and a stray bomb comes done from the wrong Demon. Another factor to add slight difficulty (which also changes the strategy a little as well) is that when a Demon is diving, the level above will begin bombing you right away. Graphics are exciting (7), but limited to 4 colors (R/B/BI/W). The Demons warp in with multi-color, have some detail, are animated and dance well. The graphics are mostly smooth, with only a few glitches and the hi-res backgrounds are nice. The Sound is the biggest liability (6), good enough to enjoy the game. There's not really much missing, but most of the effects are different or not very realistic. Effects seem to be similar or repeated. Controls score (9) due to the analog joystick making it very hard to precisely stop and center the stick exactly where you want to without bumping it either.

A keyboard control to augment this would have helped, but otherwise just realize you'll lose a few lives this way and /or spend a lot more time playing each wave than you would if you had more precise controls. The cart is not too common, but then there's also not too much demand for CoCo

games either.

See RTM CoCo expert Mark Sabbatini's review back in issue #02 - he scored this one a grade "B". Mark will probably agree with most of my scores, but hopefully not feel cheated as his favorite still falls short of a medal.

Silver Medals: Atari 8 bit, Atari 2600 & Vic 20 (42)



Demon Attack on Atari 8-Bit



Demon Attack on Atari 2600



Demon Attack on Commodore Vic-20

It is amazing how similar these titles are. I kept playing these 3 over and over trying to find any weakness to break the tie - but they all deserve a medal. They all scored within a half a point of each other on all categories. Gameplay (8) is all there and complete. Addictiveness (8) is enjoyable across the board. They all have the dreaded double deaths. The 2600 A/B difficulty is nice and not offered on the others. The Vic doesn't have the 2-player co-op game, but then more than makes up for that with a pause <R/S>. I also like how the Vic begins each wave with a warp in at the top level, the Demon descends and subsequent warp ins always occur at the top. Sure this makes it easier, but really makes the game funner by eliminating another random bad luck element of the first Demon warps in on the bottom and smokes you right away. That never happens here, as you always have a fighting chance to control your own fate. OK, where were we . . . Graphics are beautiful (8) with nice detail, multi-color, explosions, animation, and variety. The 8 bit is the best, and the Vic the worst, but still all within the same range. The Vic has the least smooth graphics and also lacks the next shot ready, but is the only version where the diver changes color for the duration of its descent. The Sound is crisp (8) for all versions and there's nothing missing. The Controls are perfect (10). Overall, the 8 bit is probably the best here, but not by much. If were to pick one to play, it would be the Vic due to the pause feature. The lack of a pause button is a real bummer in a game that has an ending (wave 84) that seems within reach. Sure I will probably not find time to do play or be good enough to marathon this game, but I know for sure that I will not try it on a version lacking a pause.

Vic 20

My first reaction was the game is reported to be so well coded it may have been a direct port of the 2600 source code. Andrew Tonkin wrote a Vic 20 review back in Retrogaming Times issue #72 and scored this a 9/10.

Atari 2600

My first reaction was it was the original and is still nearly the best.

Atari 8 bit

My first reaction was the game is superior when compared to the 2600, but still not enough in any category to score it any differently.

Gold Medal: Commodore 64 (44)

My first reaction was brilliant, the best of combining the 2600 and Intellivision. But the more I played it, I discovered some reasons to bring it back to Earth. The Gameplay is fantastic (9), with all the best elements in place from both the 2600 & INTY, missing only tracer enemies and/or some heat seeking

bombs (unless they come much later). I'd prefer playing the Demon wave 3 to 6 times before facing Pandemonium. The Addictiveness is enjoyable (8) with a pause feature and never a chance of a double death. Drawbacks are no 2 player co-op game, and increased difficulty due to the hi-res graphics making it hard to see the bombs. The Graphics are superb (9), hands down the best with the best detail, color, multi-color, hi-res graphics, many enemies, bombs, patrollers, animation, dancing and warping in. Sound is pleasant (8) and no different than any other medal winner. Controls are perfect (10). Only bad news is that this baby is hard to find for sure and only on disk.

Once again sorry for the change this month. Please come back next time in the simplified console-only battle between the Intellivision, Colecovision and Atari 2600 for the Many Faces of Venture. Contact Alan "Many Faces of" Hewston at: Hewston95@NOSPAMstratos.net or visit the Many Faces of site: <http://my.stratos.net/~hewston95/RT/ManyFacesHome.htm>.

Retrogaming Commercial Vault

by Adam King

After a one-month hiatus, the Commercial Vault is back for more TV goodness. This month I have an ad for a famous computer, the Commodore Vic-20. When Commodore started advertising the Vic-20, they needed a spokesman. Since Atari got Alan Alda to hawk their computer line, Commodore decided to have William Shatner as their spokesman. That's right, Captain Kirk himself endorsed the Vic-20, believe it or not. In this ad he's standing in space as he shows us why the Vic is "The wonder computer of the 1980s". Let's see what he has to say about the good ol' Vic.

"Why buy just a video game from Atari or Intellivision? Invest in the wonder computer of the 1980s for under \$300, the Commodore Vic-20. Unlike games, it has a real computer keyboard. With a Commodore Vic-20, the whole family can learn computing at home. Plays great games, too. Under \$300! The wonder computer of the 1980s, the Commodore Vic-20!"

PICTURES:



"I don't need the Enterprise to be in space."



Scotty beams up a Vic



Take a close look at the "wonder computer of the 80s".



Wow. This kid's playing a game in space.



"Wouldn't you rather have this instead of an Apple?"

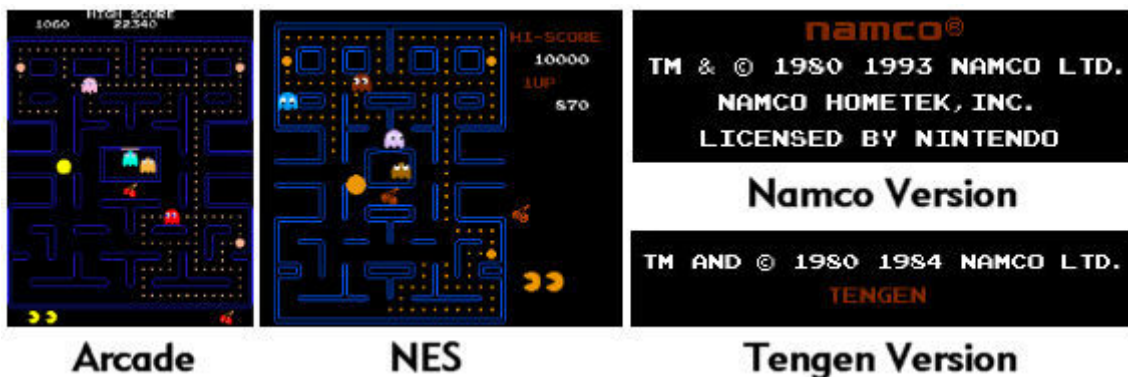
Now I wish to address something. I've been doing this column for the better part of three years, and I'm beginning to feel that the Vault has run its course. I am considering retiring the column. But I know

there are many readers who enjoy getting their commercials fix. So if you want me to continue the Vault, let me know. Also offer any suggestions you have to freshen up this column a little.

The Titles of Tengen - Pac-Man

by [David Lundin, Jr.](#)

Can't believe we've gone this long covering Tengen NES games without mentioning Pac-Man. It's hard to think of a game that has stronger roots in popular culture or that has had more impact on the industry as a whole. Developed by in Japan by Namco, Pac-Man was really the game that made the world stand up and notice video gaming across the board in terms of age groups and mass media. Pac-Man was truly America's first video game merchandising powerhouse leading to endless amounts of shirts, stuffed toys, lunchboxes, phones, a short-lived cartoon series, a cult favorite song, and pretty much anything else one could imagine. I in fact carried a Pac-Man lunchbox to work with me for many years just not too long ago, it was always a good conversation starter. The world certainly did have "Pac-Man fever." Namco even adapted Pac-Man as their unofficial mascot. As the years rolled on Pac-Man never lost its luster and continued to be ported to nearly every gaming system on the planet, including countless reworks, sequels and spin-offs. It made perfect sense for an NES version of this classic among classics, and Tengen was up to the challenge. After the legal sue-fest between Nintendo and Tengen a licensed version by Namco was released. While the cartridge exteriors are different, the games are exactly the same except for the title screen copyright information.



Where the Tengen port of Ms. Pac-Man threw in extra features and play modes, Pac-Man is a straight port of the arcade classic. This may seem disappointing at first but a well-done straight port is always better than a lackluster reproduction with extra features. The maze layout is exactly as it was in the arcade and all the colors are spot on, given the limitations of the NES color palette. On the NES Pac-Man plays exactly as it did in the arcade with responsive controls. The action does move a bit slower than it did originally but the speeds are consistent and unless you're going back and forth between the NES and arcade you won't notice the slight pacing difference. Blinky, Pinky, Inky, and Clyde all move about the maze with their characteristic speeds and movement and movement techniques to lead them transfer over well from the arcade. I'm not sure as to if their patterns are the same as they were in the arcade since I missed that part of the arcade culture by a few years. However I figure if you're proficient enough to remember the patterns in Pac-Man after all these years then you'll probably not be playing this on the NES but on a dedicated machine in your game room or basement. The audio is again spot on given the limitations of the NES with nicely reproduced sound effects and music in the intermission sequences, which are exact to the arcade original.

There's really not a whole lot to say here since it's a solid 8-bit port of Pac-Man, a game where there really isn't anything that hasn't been said about it. If you're looking for some classic retro gaming on your NES you really can't go wrong with Pac-Man and no matter which release you pick up you'll have a good time. At the time of writing this Pac-Man seems to be selling at most used game stores for \$10 to \$15 less than Ms. Pac-Man so it's a nice alternative if you're not into tossing down \$25 for a loose used NES cartridge.

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

Old School is New Again

by [Jayson Ensign](#)

I got into classic gaming a few years ago and have noticed that there are many more gamers getting into the movement. Even the big companies have now seen that there is money in it and they are releasing compilations, plug and play, and other classic gaming items. That's why I am here, I am going to concentrate on this wave of devices and games and try to give some insight and information before you spend your hard earned dollars.

This month I want to talk about the enormous collection from Atari for the Playstation 2 entitled Atari Anthology. This compilation is also available for the Xbox (and PlayStarion 2) and contains many games from the 2600 era. This DVD is packed with 85 games, more than enough to satisfy your classic gaming sweet tooth. Below is a list of games included.

Arcade Titles: *Asteroids, Asteroids Deluxe, Battlezone, Black Widow, Centipede, Crystal Castles, Gravitar, Liberator, Lunar Lander, Major Havoc, Millipede, Missile Command, Pong, Red Baron, Super Breakout, Space Duel, Tempest, Warlords*

2600 Titles: *3D Tic-Tac-Toe, Adventure, Air Sea Battle, Asteroids, Atari Video Cube, Backgammon, Battlezone, Blackjack, Bowling, Breakout, Canyon Bomber, Casino, Centipede, Circus Atari, Combat, Crystal Castles, Demons to Diamonds, Desert Falcon, Dodge 'Em, Double Dunk, Flag Capture, Football, Fun With Numbers, Golf, Gravitar, Hangman, Haunted House, Home Run, Human Cannonball, Math Gran Prix, Maze Craze, Millipede, Miniature Golf, Missile Command, Night Driver, Off the Wall, Outlaw, Quadrun, Radar Lock, Realsports Baseball, Realsports Football, Realsports Tennis, Realsports Volleyball, Sky Diver, Slot Machine, Slot Racers, Space War, Sprintmaster, Star Raiders, Star Ship, Steeplechase, Stellar Track, Street Racer, Submarine Commander, Super Baseball, Super Breakout, Super Football, Surround, Swordquest: Earthworld, Swordquest: Fireworld, Swordquest: Waterworld, Video Checkers, Video Chess, Video Olympics, Video Pinball, Yars' Revenge*

As you can see, there are arcade titles from Atari and many 2600 titles, some of them never before released. Some of the games are just filler (I am sure you have been dying to play Fun With Numbers) and some are wonderful recreations of our beloved arcade classics.

After inserting the game you are started off with a Galaxy screen. There are different constellations that represent game categories. Choose from action, adventure, arcade at home, arcade originals, mind games, casino, racing, space and sports. Once you choose your group, then you get to choose the particular game. After choosing your game you then are directed to the Solar System screen. This screen gives you more options and how to play your game. There is Time Challenge (score as many points you can before time is up), Trippy Mode (the screen changes colors and other weird things), Time Warp (the game will go fast and slow), Hot Seat (the game will switch between the other versions of the game) and Double Speed (double the fun). Not all modes are available, you may need to unlock them. This type of interface is neat but can become cumbersome because of all the back and forth between the menus.

After all the choosing you are able to start the game. You will have on screen menus for the reset and game selections when playing a 2600 game. And you can also modify the controls, this will come in handy when playing paddle games. Also, when playing arcade games you have the option of seeing the cabinet art, a very nice touch.

The game play is good, even with the Playstation controller. It's not the same feel you would get on the original 2600 joystick, but nothing real is. Some games play better than others. It is still difficult to

play games designed for a roller ball, like Missile Command or Crystal Castles, but I was able to get pretty far in both for it to be fun. I enjoyed playing the 2600 games and the graphics look the same with the blocky characters and smaller resolution. The audio is good also, the sounds are very similar to the original. Without doing a side by side listening test, I would say they are right on.

Another nice touch is the bonus material. You get every instruction manual for each game and some of them have extras like patches and pins that go with the game. There is even video of the Father of Atari, Nolan Bushnell. It is the same video as the last Atari compilations of various consoles, but still a great addition.

This compilation is great if you are an Atari fan. And if you don't want to pull out the old wood grain 2600 then this is the replacement. It won't keep you interested for hours but it is a good pickup for the price. About \$20 new and \$15 used.

HIGH SCORES

by [Tonks](#)

One of the great things about classic games is that the vast majority of them had a score. The score was an instant way of knowing how good you were at a particular game. And getting the "High Score" was better than a knighthood.

My local Fish and Chip take away shop had 2 arcade machines that I played all the time, Gyruss and Bomb Jack. Quite regularly I would get the new "High Score" and be able to put my "initials" at the very top of the high score chart. It was always a proud moment and you knew that your other friends who would come and play the game would see your initials and know that you were the current champion. My biggest boast was when I scored my highest ever score on Gyruss and I had the "High Score" for over three weeks.

Getting a high score on your home consoles was a slightly different matter. Like many people I kept a notebook on which I would record the games and the high scores. Many of my friends had a similar way of recording their high scores.

But we soon discovered that keeping a notebook was very open to abuse. This came to light when one guy in our class kept claiming he was getting these huge high scores that were more than double of anyone else. His ridiculous scores were questionable enough, but when he failed to ever outscore anyone else when we played together, we knew something was up. So we decided that any "official" high scores had to be witnessed by one other person. The witness would then have to sign the score when it was put into the notebook.

This did produce some problems. It was very annoying to rack up a huge score on your own only to have no witness to make that an "official" score. However, there was one time when I got an official score that no one ever beat.

Whenever we went to a person's house for an afternoon of gaming, we would always play that person's system of choice - or at least play the only system that person owned. Whenever people came to my house it was always the mighty Vic 20 that was brought out to play. Gridrunner quickly became the hot game and we regularly spent entire afternoons trying to out play each other. It was during one of these huge Gridrunner marathons that I scored my unbeatable score. The sweat was dripping down my face, blisters were forming on my hands and the Commodore power supply was ready to overheat and explode. When my last man died I had racked up the score of 144,000. I was absolutely blown away at my gaming brilliance. The score was written down on my notebook, signed by a witness, and never beaten by any of my friends. I was officially the Gridrunner champion.

Well that is my story, what about yours? Do you have fond memories of getting the new "High Score"

on your favourite arcade machine? Did you ever hold the high score record on any particular game? Did you ever score more than 144,000 on Gridrunner? Why not email me with your "High Score Memories".

The Thrill Of Defeat: Recycling the 'Trash-80' Model 1

by [Mark Sabbatini](#)

Maybe if they'd called it the iTandy things would be different.

The first mass-market home computer might be associated with positive marketable words like dandy, handy, candy, randy (OK, skip that one) in an all-in-one unit costing a mere \$599. At a time when most machines were being built by hobbyists from kits, often dealing with headaches such as missing parts, it might have been seen as the one that convinced people computers could be user-friendly.

But n-o-o-o-o. Corporate bigwigs had other ideas.

The suits in Texas at Tandy Corp., which acquired Radio Shack in 1963, decided the corporate initials were ideal for its first home machine, releasing it as the TRS-80 in 1977. It takes little imagination, especially for geek-minded hackers, to stretch that into the infamous "Trash-80" label the machines are forever stuck with. The executives were also a bit tentative about its potential appeal.

"Company management was unsure of the computer's market appeal, and intentionally kept the initial production run to 3,000 units so that, if the computer failed to sell, it could at least be used for accounting purposes within the chain's 3,000 stores," a Wikipedia article notes.

Meanwhile, a couple of fruity-minded folks in California became insanely rich by releasing that year the Apple II, considered the first true revolution in home computing. In the chronicles of pre-PC cyber history, the TRS-80 is permanently doomed to second-tier status behind Apple, Atari and Commodore.

The Model I, as it became known in 1979 when Tandy released the business-oriented Model II, had a lot going for it. Users could load and play a few included games within minutes of taking it out of the box. They could get help and buy stuff at stores easily found in cities nationwide. It was a huge hit initially, selling 10,000 its first month and more than 250,000 before it was discontinued in 1981.

But the black-and-white machine, especially early models, were plagued with quirks and problems, in part because Tandy built them with cheap parts and partially because strongly discouraged third-party development.

On the hardware front, the display flickered when given certain commands. Displaying too much white could throw the horizontal alignment out of sync. A keyboard "bounce" problem caused multiple characters to appear with a single stroke. The cassette tape interface used to read files and an expansion board were unreliable. And it was discontinued because it violated the FCC's radio frequency interference regulations - some game programmers used the interference to provide sound through AM radios users put next to their computer.

Tandy's failure to offer support to third-party developers (a practice that doomed a number of computer companies) drove them to Apple, who during their early years strongly welcomed them with open arms. Given all those factors, there's no way the TRS-80 should have this many games that are this good.

Programmers didn't have a lot to work with: a text display of 64 or 32 horizontal characters and 16 vertical lines; a graphics display of 128 by 48 pixels; monotone bleep-and-blip sound that had to be channeled through a cassette port or external speaker. The initial machine came with a mere 4K of RAM and a stripped-down BASIC in 4K of ROM, although upgrades to 48K RAM and a 12K Level II

BASIC became available. It did have a powerful-for-the-time Z80 processor running at 1.8 mhz and could support up to four floppy disk drives, which greatly aided those programming in-depth titles.

Ultimately hundreds of commercial titles, and thousands of magazine and user games, were written for the machine, with obviously only a small percentage of them reviewed here. The reviews are based on playing them on several emulators to ensure a fair assessment of speed, playability and other factors are made. Probably the best emulation option for most users is the free multi-platform MESS, available at www.mess.org. Easier-to-use emulators - some of which cost a nominal amount - along with many software and document resources can be found at the TRS-80 Webring at www.ringsurf.com/netring?ring=trs80:action=list. An outstanding way of getting a quick hand-on feel for the machine, albeit with only a handful of very simple games, is Jeff Vavasour's browser-based emulator at www.vavasour.ca/jeff/trs80.html.

The most reliable method for running programs is placing a NEWDOS DSK file in the first virtual drive and a DSK file with the game file(s) in the second. A listing of the programs can be obtained by typing DIR :1 (the colon may be generated with the unshifted semicolon key on some emulators). Any file with a CMD after it can be run by typing its name without the CMD extension. Programs with a BAS extension can be run by typing BASIC, RUN "FILENAME/BAS" (the quote is often SHIFT-2 on emulators). If an error message results try retyping the RUN "FILENAME" portion a second time.

Acorn Invaders From Space (C-)

A cheesy Space Invaders, due to primitive graphics and clumsy programming such as having invaders drop a level after a set number of moves even if they don't reach the edge of the screen. The pluses are fast gameplay and lots of customizable options such as enemy shot accuracy and number of player ships, but it's not enough to sustain interest.

Alien Cresta (B-)

A simple port of Moon Cresta, a Phoenix-type shooter where the player can beef up firepower by docking and merging with other ships (becoming larger and more vulnerable, similar to Galaga) every few waves. The aliens here are limited to a single type with Phoenix-like movements, unlike the variety of the original, and the graphics and sound are somewhat clunky and sparse. Still, it's fun enough carry over the spirit of its predecessor.

Alien Defense (B)

This Defender port is considered a classic by many TRS-80 fans and deserves much of that reputation where gameplay is concerned. Landers, mutants, pods and the rest of the usual cast is here, with the same point values and ability to rescue men while navigating around the horizontally scrolling planet. Speed is excellent, as is sound. The biggest problem is the controls. The number keys 1-3 and 8-9, along with the enter and space keys are used. It's highly awkward, a bad thing for a high-speed game. Those really wanting a punishing experience, however, could buy the book Alien Defense Commentated, a source code listing of the game (I believe it took up more than 100 pages). Typing in the code probably took up a 40-hour week and debugging the inevitable typos another 20. But if you understood machine language you'd be able to modify game parameters such as the controls.

Alien's Eggs (B+)

A very good Moon Cresta spin-off featuring the same three-part piggyback ship from the arcade fighting a nasty if somewhat monotonous set of aliens. Waves of eggs move in patterns at the top of the screen until shot, then turn into one of several aliens that try to ram and shoot the player's ship. The obvious strategy is to shoot one egg at a time and destroy the hatchlings, but don't stall - go too long without hitting an egg and they all hatch at once. Every 2,000 points the player, if on their first or second part of the ship, can try to dock with the next largest piece, gaining more firepower and vulnerability. The docking is actually the one weakness - it occurs far less frequently than the arcade and thus dooms players to spending more time with single-segment ships that can be found in most shooters. The only other hassle is the scrolling star field, which would be a nice touch if the stars

didn't look a lot like the enemies' shots.

Apple Panic (B)

A lot of people scoff at this early platform game, so take the fact I've always liked it with a grain of salt. It originated in the arcade as Space Panic and was translated for many early machines before getting elbowed out by superior titles such as Lode Runner. The goal is to navigate a miner around a basic five-level ladder-connected playfield, digging holes to trap enemies (mutant apples in this version) and using your shovel to bash them to death when they fall in. Levels must be completed within a certain amount of time or your oxygen runs out. Greatly helping the relay value is the random placement of ladders, therefore keeping screens from getting monotonous.

Armored Patrol (B+)

Programming a credible Battlezone clone is quite a challenge for this machine, but this Adventure International title pulls it off with a well-chosen mix of complex and simple elements to simulate the 3D tank shooter. The battlefield graphics are as good as a TRS-80 can handle, with recognizable tanks, obstacles and scrolling landscapes. The radar is simple and effective, relying on a compass-like system of letters and characters to indicate where enemy tanks are. Controls preserve the coin-op's ability to move and turn simultaneously using only four keys, one of the best implementations on any platform. There's only two enemies, tanks and laser-armed robots, and they don't act with the same artificial intelligence as the original, but the game doesn't suffer much because of it.

Asylum (B)

A very good hybrid graphics/text adventure, where movement is controlled by the arrow keys through a 3D setting and commands are typed in traditionally. There are many quality touches here, including a hint system and full vocabulary list, and the simple graphics do a good job of showing the rooms and various objects. The goal is to escape from an asylum filled with traditional hazards such as doctors and inmates, but also bizarre elements like transporters and vending machines with bombs available for purchase. Puzzles are mostly logical, although they're not exactly centered around an in-depth plot and some are pretty strange (at one point you're supposed to kill yourself with a knife). Typing in text commands and a few other parts of the game are a bit slow, but these are minor irritants.

Bable Terror (C-)

Sort of Pac-Man in a giant scrolling maze, but rather dull and lumbering. You maneuver, avoid monsters and gather stuff for points before a timer runs out, but with no ability to energize and eat your foes. The maze is enormous with only a small part visible, but also limited in its number of pathways and therefore you often have to retreat to avoid monsters. The only other defense is making yourself invisible for a few seconds, although with the unpredictable monster movement this is about as useful as hyperspace on Asteroids or Defender. There's nothing awful about this game, it just isn't very fun.

Barricade (C-)

This one-player adaptation of the lightcycle stage from Tron appears to be an early effort by programmer Yves Lempereur, author of a number of quality space shooters for Micro 2000, as this was published in a magazine called RAM. The computer is easy to defeat due to a simple artificial intelligence scheme seen in many BASIC programs of this variety during this era. The large graphics of the TRS-80 keeps waves blissfully quick and the action speeds up as the game progresses, more a blessing than a challenge. One thing that's really miserable is the player gets one life, so a single mistake and they have to go through all the slow waves again. Unlikely to have much staying power beyond the few games it takes to learn the computer's moves.

The Black Hole (C+)

Speaking of early efforts from Lempereur, this vertical space shooter appears to be another one that would score a notch or two higher except, like Barricade, players get one life. The concept is solid: dodge and shoot meteors in an increasingly narrow passage until you reach a two-stage "black hole."

During the first you must shoot through a descending shield and destroy the monster at the top of the screen while avoiding enemy ships, similar to final stage of Gorf. The second black hole stage requires destroying the core of a Phoenix-like mothership that slowly descends on you. Not as polished overall as his better efforts, but entertaining if you can get past the single-life thing.

Bowling (C-)

A simplistic text-based bowling simulation with a graphic depiction of the ball hitting pins to spruce things up a bit. Players select a zone (1-4) to launch the ball and how much hook to give it. The program shows the ball's path, pins knocked over and keeps score. OK for killing a few minutes once or twice, but not something likely to hold interest except for desperate bowlers. It avoids a lower grade due to good presentation and being free of annoyances and bugs.

Caterpillar (C+)

This seems like it's going to be a decent Centipede port, albeit with a rather large and sparse mushroom field, until you notice something funny after the first couple of minutes. There's no spiders or fleas, just the 'pede. At least until it reaches the bottom of the screen, upon which it magically transforms itself into a spider and fleas appear until the mushroom supply is sufficiently replenished. Bad idea by Soft Sector Marketing, because it dilutes an otherwise promising game with good speed and playability. The graphics are terrible, but the Atari 2600 version proves blocks are perfectly serviceable stand-ins for bugs.

Cosmic Fighter (B)

This Big Five Software release is similar to the basic space shooter Astro Blaster, with groups of aliens attacking in various patterns descending from the top of the screen. The player must wipe out a certain number of waves before running out of ships or fuel, after which the ship can dock with the mothership and gain the ability to fire multiple missiles at once (do not, under any circumstances, fire at the mothership). Almost everything works, including aliens that look fine despite the Model I's blocky graphics. But what's up with flagships that pop up occasionally and annihilate players before they have a fair chance to respond?

The Count (B)

This is "classic adventure" number five in a series by Scott Adams, who wrote at least 14 text-based titles with themes ranging from an adoption of the original Colossal Cave to space exploration. They appeared on many machines and have been written about extensively. The Count is reviewed here because it's one of his offbeat efforts, featuring a hero who's overslept in the Transylvania castle and, after getting up, needs to find out mysteries such as why somebody sent him a bottle of blood. Not his best - it's a bit short - but is fun, logical, has useful built-in help and an example of how even ordinary efforts from a quality programmer are worth spending time on.

Crush, Crumble And Chomp (B-)

Imagine the monster-destroys-cities action of Rampage as a turn-based fantasy/strategy game and you'll get a good idea of what this Epyx title is about. Players select one of several monsters and customize it with various abilities such as fire breathing, lashing tails and ultrasonic screams. Next they choose one of four goals - destroy, eat, combat or survive - in one of four cities. The chunky graphics are confusing at first, the game runs slowly and there are a lot of keyboard commands (one for each type of attack, for instance) that aren't necessarily intuitive. But the theme turns a potentially ordinary D&D type game into one with good depth and novelty appeal.

Defense Command (B+)

A single-screen Galaxians-meets-Defender shooter, where aliens try to raid fuel cells at the bottom of the screen. The player must kill them and, if they were carrying a cell, capture it when it reaches the bottom the screen or it is destroyed. Big Five Software delivers its usual polished effort, with animations showing a mother ship bringing the player and cells to the surface, and simple and smooth action. A good effort for those that liked the "familiar feel/different concept" of the company's games.

Demon Seed (B)

This unofficial port of the coin-op shooter Phoenix is mostly a good example of a limited number of parts capturing the overall spirit of the original. Trend Software includes all five arcade stages (three in reality, since two are repeats), and the controls are logical and gameplay smooth. But on the first two stages in particular the game feels more like a cousin than an immediate family member because of large graphics that reduce the number of on-screen foes. Also, this game has a terrible flicker problem. Sometimes it's merely a minor visual nuisance, but it can also lead to some unexpected deaths when missiles and birds appear in unexpected places rather abruptly.

Eliminator (B+)

A surprisingly good Defender clone from Adventure International who, as their name suggests, wasn't focusing much on arcade titles until this one (and a number of subsequent games). All of the coin-op elements are present, although you're protecting energizers instead of humans, and the controls and graphics are superior to the acclaimed Alien Defense mentioned above. Animations such as enemies forming from and exploding into tiny bits are well done. The only negative is the screen is a bit cramped due to large gameplay elements and a long-range scanner that takes up more than the usual space.

Firebird (C+)

For those who lament the slow speed of arcade games on aging machines, this basic cross between Galaxians and Phoenix ought to please. A laser cannon with no special abilities beyond firing tries to take out waves of birds that move in various patterns, bombing and diving at the player frequently. Everything is kept small and simple, which allows things to move along speedily, probably too much so for less than advanced gamers. Nothing else really stands out, so most players will probably be happier with a number of better titles with similar themes such as Demon Seed.

Formula (D-)

Ugh. A bad version of one of those scrolling text-based auto racing games that exist by the dozen for every primitive computer. The only advantage this one has is it came from Radio Shack, so of course captive customers got suckered in by it. Even though you're allowed only one collision there's almost no challenge as the road doesn't vary enough to challenge anyone out of diapers. The only somewhat interesting aspect is the occasional "rough" bit of road where maneuvering speed is reduced. Considering games like this have been written with a single line of BASIC, one can only wonder how stupid Tandy thought their customers were by putting the company's name on this product.

Fortress (C-)

Space Zap is such a simple reflex game - shoot enemies that pop up at the four edges of the screen by hitting a key that points your cannon in that direction and firing - it ought to be an ideal conversion for the TRS-80. But this Soft Sector program blows it by getting little things wrong. The main one is it's much too difficult, caused by placing large graphic elements on a tiny screen. If an enemy shows up at the top or bottom and fires a missile, you're pretty much toast before you can respond. Also, the W-A-S-Z aiming keys are too close together for quick response.

Frogger (B+)

This official port of the arcade hit is a good example of altering games to cope with a machine's limitations while still capturing the essentials. Cornsoft opted to split the arcade's vertical screen in half for the TRS-80, showing the highway portion on one screen and the river on a second. Only hard-core purists will find this a problem, especially since the game retains extras such as lady frogs to escort, flies to eat for extra points, snakes to avoid and alligators to treat with extreme caution. One or two players can opt to start at five levels, allowing experienced gamers to skip easier stages. But the music has got to go - the fact that the tunes on the coin-op are one of the highlights makes the blip-and-bleep stuff here that much more painful.

Galaxy Invasion Plus (B)

Galaxians done well. That's pretty much all that needs to be said for this Big Five Software title, which

will appeal to fans of the original not wanting to put up with various "enhancements" many similar games have. The only differences of note are the screen is more cramped than the arcade's due to the larger graphic elements and gameplay speeds up as enemies are killed and the burden on the CPU is reduced.

The Gobbling Box (C+)

An OK Pac-Man imitator, but turn down that sound. And make it so players can recognize when the monsters are edible. The maze is different than the coin-op, but not as far afield as some other clones. Gameplay is OK. The graphics are a little chunky. But it's the problems with the sound and energizer power indicators that sink this into the class of "pass up for something else that's better."

Game Over

Looks like it's time to call it an issue. Thanks once again for tuning in for more retrogaming goodness. Be sure to drop by next month as we continue the longest-running free retrogaming newsletter ever. Until then, game on!

- [Adam King](#), Chief Editor

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