

Retrogaming Times Monthly

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Table of Contents

- | | |
|-----|-----------------------------------------------------|
| 01. | Press Fire to Start |
| 02. | ColecoNation |
| 03. | The Many Faces of . . . Moon Patrol |
| 05. | Sinclair Spectrum Reviews |
| 06. | The Titles of Tengen |
| 07. | Syntax Era |
| 08. | The Thrill of Defeat |
| 09. | Game Over |

Press Fire to Start

by Adam King

It's time for another issue of the long-running gaming newsletter, Retrogaming Times Monthly.

ColecoNation

by [Nathan Kozlowski](#)

This month we've got an exclusive interview with Eduardo Mello, the madman behind Opcode Games. He's already given the ColecoNation amazing games like Space Invaders Collection, Sky Jaguar, and Yie Ar Kung-Fu and he's far from calling it quits. Find out about this ground-breaking Brazilian programmer and discover the methods to his madness. You can check out the full version of ColecoNation #4 available on 10.07.05 at <http://www.coleconation.com/>.

Nathan Kozlowski What's your background as a video game programmer?

Eduardo Mello_ I started programming computers back in 1984, mostly BASIC stuff. Then I started to learn Z-80 assembly language when I got my first MSX in 1986. I made several experimental projects back then, but no full game. In 1990 I started high school and graduated as a computer engineer, mainly due to my videogame passion. My first full game was Space Invaders Collection for the ColecoVision which I started in 1997, but put on hold several times until I finally finished it in 2003.

NK_ What's your background as a video game player?

EM_ Well, this all started around 1982, I believe. I was introduced a little late to videogames. Before that I was into movies, but once I had my first contact with arcade games I fell in love. So back in 1982, I was a little Brazilian kid living in a very small city. I had never heard about Atari or anything else until that year, except for playing a Pong-like device a few years back. Then suddenly the first arcade machines started to show up in my town. Games like Pac-Man, Donkey Kong and Kangaroo. I spent many hours watching people play, as my approach to videogames was strangely platonic. Then in the following year I played a home videogame for the first time, a ColecoVision. I had a friend in school and his parents had a lot of money, so the little guy was flooded with all sort of cool, expensive stuff like state-of-art videogames and toys. Of course he had a VCS too, but I played it only after playing the ColecoVision. He was trying to impress me, but surely I would have been impressed with the VCS since I had never seen such toys before!

NK_ When did you first get a ColecoVision system?

EM_ The first videogame I got was an Atari 2600, since my parents could not afford to import a ColecoVision. In 1986 I got my first computer as it was common sense since videogames were dead. It was a MSX and I stayed with it until its death in the early 1990's. Then I moved to Nintendo stuff. I just got my first ColecoVision in the late 1990's, when I started to program for it. It was one of my childhood dreams that I had not fulfilled yet, so I didn't think twice when I had the chance to get one. Today I have several consoles, including one sealed in box!

NK_ What are some of your favorite ColecoVision games?

EM_ I like the early games the most. Zaxxon, Venture, LadyBug, and Turbo are all favorites. I also love the Atarisoft titles (I really think the people who programmed them were the best ColecoVision programmers ever, which is a bit ironic) and some newer titles like Tapper and Spy Hunter. Some games from Parker are nice too. And of course Konami stuff is a must. It's too bad that so few ColecoVision users had the chance to play them (Antarctic Adventure and Cabbage Path Kids).

NK_ You seem to have a strong affinity towards Konami. The majority of your publicly released ColecoVision games are from Konami. Is there a reason why you're such a fan?

EM_ Probably it has something to do with my MSX inheritance. MSX and Konami were almost synonymous and in fact once Konami left, the MSX died a quick death. In my opinion no other company understood the TMS9918 video IC so well and, most important, no other company had such a high quality and consistent library of games for the MSX like Konami.

NK_ What game systems do you currently play on and/or collect for?

EM_ I have some modern Nintendo stuff, but to be honest they are currently collecting dust. My current main interests are classic, pre-crash systems, though I don't have the time to play them every day. My collection of classic systems is fairly large, with a lot of stuff for the 2600, 5200, ColecoVision, Intellivision and Odyssey2. I am very proud of my Atari 2600 collection, with over 300 games (which were all bought sealed in box) and lots of hardware, including a sealed VCS.

NK_ How does the classic gaming community in Brazil compare with the American version? Can you find a lot of pre-crash consoles and games there or is most of your collection imports?

EM_ Brazil was a strange place in the early 1980s. We were under a military dictatorship and importing electronic goodies was illegal. Brazilian companies were also forbidden from licensing foreign technology or forming joint-ventures. However, simply pirating foreign technology was okay, because the government was too stupid to check for similarities. One was just required to fill a few forms stating that he/she had created the device and that was all. No further questions were asked. However, as ironic as it sounds, trademarked names were still protected. So one could copy a VCS, but not use the Atari name. And that was the way that a few companies found to release officially licensed videogames here. The 2600, Intellivision and Odyssey2 all got official releases, though the consoles and cartridges were assembled here in Brazil using mostly imported parts. The Odyssey2 was released first and got a lot more attention then it got in the US. But once the 2600 was released (both the original and the many pirated versions), it became the dominant platform and stayed in production for almost 10 years! The ColecoVision never saw an official release, but got a clone named SpliceVision which is very hard to find today. Since it was never well represented here the ColecoVision fan base is small, though the few individuals who collect for it are very proud of their collections. My collection is limited to imports only, though I've still kept my first Brazilian Atari and carts.

NK_ What inspired you to create new ColecoVision games?

EM_ Well, I had been dreaming about programming a videogame since I first played one. My career choice was influenced by them. But when I was high school, videogames were already too sophisticated to be created by a single individual. So I took my interest back to old machines, mainly the ColecoVision. I could have gone back to the MSX, but it was clear to me at that point that videogames, not computers, were my home and the place where I wanted to be.

NK_ What inspired you to bring Space Invaders Collection to the CV? How about Sky Jaguar and Yie Ar Kung-Fu?

EM_ The decision to program Space Invaders hit me during the time the first arcade emulators were coming out. I had dreamed about porting arcade games for many years, but wondered how one could create a faithful port if those classic arcade games couldn't be found anymore? Emulators were even better than the real machines from my point of view, because I could not only watch and play the game but check the actual game code. So since the ColecoVision was "the arcade quality" system, I decided to start with Space Invaders because I thought it would be a nice simple arcade game to start with. Boy was I wrong! But once Space Invaders was working, I decided to add Space Invaders Part II, since I realized that if Space Invaders had been released back in 1983, it would have been too small of a game. The idea to port Sky Jaguar and other MSX games came from a friend of mine. He was trying to port Road Fighter for the ColecoVision, but was having all sorts of problems. Then he requested my help and after checking the code for about 10 minutes I could already tell what the problem was: Road Fighter was using more than 1KB of RAM, which is the total RAM memory inside the ColecoVision. My first question to him was: how didn't you see that in the first place? The answer was quite simple and helped me realize what was wrong with his approach: he built a C program to port the literal code of MSX games to the ColecoVision. To show him that it wasn't the right way to do things I ported Sky Jaguar, one of my favorites MSX shooters. With Yie Ar Kung-Fu, I decided to go a step further, adding stuff which wasn't present in the original version like the two-player mode and the revamped Lang. Coincidentally, I managed to port Road Fighter.

NK_ It seems that there's a deliberate effort by you to create games that will help diversify the ColecoVision library. You've already added a fighting game and top-down scrolling shooter. Soon you'll be releasing a driving game and a vertical climber.

EM_ When choosing which MSX games I would port, it only seemed natural that I would pick the best of each genre. But it is inevitable that a few overlaps will take place down the road.

NK_ How have the lesser known games (Sky Jaguar and Yie Ar Kung-Fu) been received by the classic gaming community? How have their sales compared to Space Invader Collection?

EM_ So far the sales have been okay, though nowhere the level of SIC. There are almost 200 copies of SIC out there so far, while Sky Jaguar has sold almost half of that and Yie Ar Kung-Fu almost a fourth. In Yie Ar Kung-Fu's case, that is the minimum amount that I need to sell in order to break even, though I still hope it will sell twice as many copies in the medium to long term.

NK_ Many of the MSX games that you've published or are working on are based on arcade games. Have you ever played the arcade version of these games or are your games true MSX translations?

EM_ Well, many of these games are just rumored to exist in arcade form (Sky Jaguar and Nightmare). Others are well known arcade classics (Yie Ar Kung-Fu, Road Fighter or Gradius), but Konami took many liberties when porting them. Probably they were more concerned with producing the most playable possible games for the MSX platform, instead of the most faithful arcade port possible (which is my approach when porting games like SIC or Pac-Man Collection). It can sound a bit paradoxical at first, but these games are so well executed that I can't help but admit that Konami made the right decision when porting them.

NK Please describe the process that you go through in programming games for the CV. Is it fairly consistent or does your approach change depending on the game?

EM_ It depends on the game. Arcade games require a specific approach, while MSX games use another. Of course arcade games are harder to port, since they were targeted to a completely different hardware, while the MSX hardware is fairly similar to the ColecoVision. Arcade ports require detailed study of the original code, and then I need to port each individual routine in order to keep the gameplay intact. I think I partially reached this goal with Space Invaders, but with Pac-Man Collection I feel I have perfected things. From a gameplay point-of-view, one can't see the difference between it and MAME. I have learned a lot here and hope to use it with my future arcade ports. But coding is just part of the job. Planning is also very important and also time consuming. A well planned port will reduce the chances of unpleasant surprises during the coding process and save me from the threat of a major rework. Sometimes, if you make a mistake early on and don't realize it until late in the process, the required time to change things would be so considerable that you would rather give up before having to rework everything.

NK What are the main factors that prevent a MSX game from being directly ported to the ColecoVision? What adjustments must the programmer make to overcome these factors?

EM_ Memory management is probably the biggest challenge. The MSX standard dictated 8KB minimum RAM while the ColecoVision has just 1KB of RAM. Sound and interrupt handling are other major issues. There isn't one universal rule on how to port games. You need to disassemble them, understand the program logic, and then make any necessary changes.

NK With Space Invaders and Pac-Man, it seems that you've created games for the ColecoVision that look and play exactly like their arcade originals. How do you explain your success with this, when so many of the Coleco arcade translations from the 80's have failed?

EM_ Easy. I am not under time and budget constraints. Still, I believe there was a cultural thing with arcade ports during the pre-crash era that made companies believe that people would be happy with ports created by simple observation of the original game. This sometimes led to terrible gameplay. The biggest shift in paradigm introduced by the NES was that many of its arcade ports were based on actual arcade code and this way they were more faithful to the originals. Even if one doesn't have access to the original code it is still possible to produce a killer port, but in this case he/she is going to need extra time (which means the total development costs will increase) and then we are back to our original problem. So not being under constraints here is very important.

NK Do you receive any help/guidance as you program or is it usually a solo venture?

EM_ So far it has been solo, since there aren't many ColecoVision programmers working with assembly language. I believe most CV programmers use C, because there are many graphic and sound libraries already available. I think that is a nice way to work, since you can produce a lot of stuff quickly. But unfortunately it wouldn't work for what I am currently doing. I need a level of control which C isn't able to offer.

NK Are there any hidden easter eggs or bugs in Sky Jaguar and Yie Ar Kung-Fu that you want to reveal to the readers?

EM_ I believe the bugs which existed in the original MSX games were all removed, though there could be a few which I didn't notice. No kidding, I removed lots of small bugs from each game, from small graphic glitches to major programming errors. Maybe they are too subtle to be perceived, but you can spot most of them if you look carefully. Easter eggs? Well, the original MSX version of Yie Ar Kung-Fu is hidden inside the ColecoVision version. I am not going to tell you how to enable it, but it is fairly easy to find.

NK Yie Ar Kung-Fu was originally planned to have Billiards included on it. What happened?

EM_ I changed my mind in the last minute. Two things bothered me: Billiards had nothing to do with Yie Ar Kung-Fu so why attach both games together? The second one was, since we are trying to pay homage to both the ColecoVision system and Konami it wouldn't make a lot of sense to me if we simply stuff a cartridge with as many games as possible. It would mean that we are trying to make it a selling point. It wouldn't be homage anymore. It would be more like a marketing ploy. I am not against the idea of creating a multicart, but I believe it would be more interesting if at least the games are somewhat related in theme.

Next month we'll be talking with Eduardo Mello about the business of homebrews, the new and exciting games that he's been working on, and the already infamous Super Expansion Module projects. Don't miss next month and don't forget to check out www.ColecoNation.com for the full version of ColecoNation #4.

The Many Faces of . . . Moon Patrol

by Alan Hewston

As we continue to close in on issue #100 (counting our previous existence as the Retrogaming Times), this is yet another of those MANY faces that I should have reviewed earlier, but did not have all the versions. 2002 would have been the year for a 20th anniversary reflection, but I did not yet have the Vic 20 cart, nor Apple II disk. We'll also not cover the ColecoVision unreleased version - see below.

I'm sure that you are all familiar with this popular 1982 Irem / Williams side scroller. Your Moon Buggy patrols along a scrolling, bumpy, lunar surface harboring a wide variety of obstacles and enemies, while even more enemies harass you from above, dropping down bombs. The game does a great job of introducing hazards, 1 or 2 new ones per segment, and then after most have been introduced, mixing them together (simultaneously), making for numerous combinations of on screen challenges to overcome. There are 26 segments, points "A" to point "Z", broken into 5 sections of 5/6 segments each. The faster you keep moving to the right, the more likely you'll receive some bonus points at the end of the section. A section is 5 or 6 segments long. I hope my review and scores are not too critical I don't enjoy games that rely upon memorization and not so much on skill or strategy. There is not much of a view of what is coming up along the surface - so planning ahead is limited. Then there are stretches where you must make up to 7 jumps in sequence, that once begun too fast, or too slow you may never adjust and make it through. That is, there is insufficient space between hazards to adjust speed for the next jump. I'm also frustrated that I cannot easily tell where the craters begin - bad collision detection, or bad design? Overall, I love the concept and theme and creativity of obstacles and combinations and especially the mixture of a side scrolling jumping game with that of a death-from-above shooter.



Segue: I highly recommend a C64 clone, "Battle Through Time" by Ken Grant. Each stage represents a time span in history, with "era appropriate" theme (enemies, music, background scenery and even Bosses). You'll get addicted and keep on playing until you can make it past the Armageddon - only to start back over in the Stone Age. Yes, there is some frustration there as well, but "Moon Patrol" fans should give it a look - as it would probably have scored a 47 or higher using the Many Faces of scoring system.

Arcade: 1982 by Irem, released by Williams Electronics.

Home versions - unless noted, all released by Atarisoft

1983

- Apple II
- Atari 2600
- Vic 20
- Commodore 64
- Atari 8 bit (Scott D. Smith & Courtney Granner)
- Atari 5200 (Eric Knopp)
- TI-99 (Douglas Brian Craig)
- Colecovision (prototype, unreleased 1983 by Matt Householder)
- Sinclair Spectrum (1984 prototype Atarisoft)
- MSX (1985 by Prosoft / Dempa)



Many Faces collage with non-scrolling background -
1969 National Geographic Map of the Moon.

Rumor Mill: Atari 7800 version rumored to be complete in 1984 & ready for marketing, but no ROM has surfaced to date AFAIK.

Home Version Similarities: Except those in <> all home versions have: a scrolling moon surface, with craters and texture <2600>; a choice of 2 courses, Beginner and Champion; upon completing the Beginner course, you move onto the Champion course; a different colored Moon Buggy - Blue/Purple for Beginner, Red for Champion <Vic>; a pause <2600>; the standard choice of 1 or 2 players; distinct Moon segments, "A" through "Z" in sequence, each introducing different or harder enemies & obstacles, or ultimately mixing them together in different combinations; the layout/pattern of surface obstacles in each segment is pretty much fixed, but enemies and their weapons have some randomness; your patrol mission is urgent, so move along quickly (keep to the right) - your time is displayed on screen; after completing each section you are given a break and shown <2600> how long you took and your bonus points (if any) earned for every second your time was under some threshold of excellence; the timer then starts over at zero for the next section; when you lose a Moon Buggy, your next one begins at the start of the segment (letter) you have yet to complete; your time spent will continue to accumulate with each subsequent vehicle; when the game ends, you are given a choice (sometimes limited to 10 seconds) to continue on and begin your next game from that same segment (letter) <2600 & TI>; when continuing in the next game, your starting timer remains as it was and continues to increase; not only does the foreground scroll as you move, but 1 or 2 backgrounds (mountains) will also scroll along at a different pace <2600 & Vic> behind you, giving you the feeling of depth; besides the side view of your patrol vehicle, a portion of the screen displays the status, lives remaining, score, time spent, a progress bar showing all segments "A" through "Z" or sections 1 to 5; three colored signal lights and the word "Caution" <C64 & 2600> to tell you what enemy type is next; a current score and high score <2600>; the letter of the segment that you are currently on <2600>; there are two types of regular UFO enemies that drop bombs; and one enhanced enemy type that spins about <Vic> and they drop bombs which can make craters on the surface; all bombs and enemy missiles can be destroyed if you are in range of them - but your relative position may preclude this; you can fire 3 or 4 missiles upwards at a time; you can maneuver left/right fast enough <Atari 8 bit, 5200 & AP2> to easily attack and/or avoid the bombs and enemies; your missile fired forward is large enough, fast enough, or goes far enough to easily hit all enemies in front of you <Atari 8 bit, 5200, AP2 & TI>; an enemy car (rocket on 2600) races up from behind you (left edge) which must be jumped, and then can be shot after it passes you; tanks will arrive in front of your path and they and their missiles must be jumped or shot; there are small and large craters that must be jumped; small boulders that can be jumped or shot; large boulders which are harder to jump some require multiple hits; some versions have what amounts to a third boulder type (WARNING) and you'll know it as you'll have to jump it - this may be by design, but may be due to the timing of when and where your missile explodes, or the boulder is sitting slightly lower and the shot simply goes over it; there are also "rolling" boulders <2600? & AP2?> coming down a sloped moon surface <Vic?, 2600?, Apple2? & TI?>; there are small mines, often in formation or pairs <TI?>, or in sequence, which must be jumped as they cannot be shot; and finally, space plants inside the craters that can be shot or jumped <2600?>;

the "Moon Patrol" soundtrack plays during all the action <2600>; with some jingles and effects to tell you when you've fired a shot, jumped <AP2>, hit the boulders, enemy, or their bombs or missiles, completed a segment (passed a letter) <2600>; you'll hear when the enemies above are coming or present <AP2, C64, TI>; no sounds is made when any home version's enemies drop bombs, but there is an explosion heard when they hit <Vic, 2600, AP2>; congratulations when your mission is complete; and a tallying of any bonus points is heard <Vic>; bonus points are also earned when eliminating all flying enemies <2600, 8 bit, 5200, TI>. Note that "?" were added above where I am not positive if these elements show up in later levels. Why is it that when jumping objects you earn equal or fewer points than when shooting them? Jumping is much riskier. Also note that a bonus life is earned at around 10k, 30k and 50k on most versions. Finally, something that I did not like, and did not penalize was that every non-analog version the controls constantly revert back to the center speed for the buggy. That is, if you slowed down (or speeded up) and then let go, it will speed up (or slow down) to the default, average speed. Oh and one more unobvious thing, you earn NO points for shooting bombs - so don't hunting them for points. All carts run about \$6US, but the Vic & XE carts seem harder to find. The Apple][original diskette, box & manual are also harder to find than most of the AP] [Atarisoft titles.

Disqualified: Colecovision (??)

My first reaction was despite being licensed, and possibly complete, it was never officially released - so it gets disqualified. I expected to review and score the modified version, "Matt Patrol" (where the graphics have ladies undergarments for the UFO's) via the Sega Dreamcast CV collection, until I discovered that I do not actually have the original or modified version on my DC CD. What a disappointment, somehow I thought that I had it. Maybe it's on the no-longer produced (thanks a lot Telegames!) CV multi-cart. If not, then there are very few if any of us who can play it on actual hardware - what a shame. Until then, we dream of a day when we can play this.

Missing in Action: MSX (??)

I do not have this system to review, but if you have this system and games and are interested in reviewing any of the MSX Lost Faces, please let us know. We'd love to add coverage of MSX games.

Missing in Action: Sinclair Spectrum (??)

I do not have this system to review, but fear not! We hope it is not too long before our newest staff writer, Andrew Masters, puts together a detailed review and score of this lost face and compares it to one or more of these versions.

Have Nots: Atari 2600 (35) My first reaction is it's playable and challenging, but there is no pause, no continuation and what was your final score? The Gameplay is fine (6) with all the enemies or obstacles, save for rolling boulders and space plants. There is no uphill segment, and the information on screen is sparse. Adding the current segment letter, and an improved progress bar would be nice. This version (or the C64) has the longest range of horizontal shot - adding playability. The Addictiveness is good enough (6) but you'll easily be frustrated as several jumps and sequences are far too difficult. There's no choice to continue that next game at that letter and practice. There's no pause, and no high score, not to mention your current score is gone in a flash, so you'd better have the VCR rolling to see what it was. The two start levels are changed in name to "M Medium" and "H Hard", but equivalent to Beginner & Champion. A third choice "E Easy" (with the Atari bear displayed), uses the same course as Medium, but with fewer challenges. The demo is more of a short snippet of action. Changing your speed, and/or moving Left/Right to dodge or attack is somewhat slow. Despite a limited number of (pattern following) enemies, they do drop a lot of bombs, making the Graphics lively and decent (6). There is NO detail on this Moon's surface but its craters, background and pretty much everything is very clear, with plenty of colors and smooth scrolling action. The animations are good on the buggy and



Moon Patrol on Atari 2600

explosions adequate. The title screen is active and better than average, but the main screen, as mentioned before, is sparse and lacking details such as the warning and caution signals. The end of a segment is always boring, marked by the letter "x", and no other letters. There is no end-of-section scoring bonus screen nor any visual congratulations. Sound is very good (7) with nearly all the effects in place except for passing a letter and the end of the game. There's no music during the game, and just a few chimes such as completing a section and its bonus. Controls are perfect (10), but close to deducting a point on this and most versions as the game is programmed (poorly IMHO) to slowly self center the speed (L/R position) unless you move L/R off center.

Have Nots: Apple II (37)

My first reaction was the sound is among the best yet for the Apple II, the Hi-Resolution title screen is great and a full menu of choices is available, but overall there are a few too many problems. The Gameplay is effective (7), with all the obstacles and enemies save for rolling boulders and sloped hills (unless they come much later). Moving L/R has a limited range and is too slow to effectively avoid and/or attack anything above you. Not to mention your horizontal shot does not go very far in front of you. Addictiveness is fun to play (7), with a brief demo, a pause <Esc>, and continue option. With a lot of patience (& practice or memorizing, especially the tedious 7+ jumps in a row mine segment), you might make it all the way through both courses and see and hear the congratulations. It appears that there is no time to maneuver after landing so you'll need to nail that first jump using the dreaded analog controller at just the right (er uh lucky) spot to make it all the way. Maybe this is the time to switch over to the keyboard mode. Other drawbacks are the collision detection is awfully frustrating and the action gets slowed too often - and not just when there are too many objects in motion. Bizarre. Finally, who's cruel idea was it to deceive us with black bombs falling from a black sky? Graphics are very nice (8) with lots of color, multi-colored objects, variety, good animation of the buggy, explosions and enemies. The number of objects, bombs, enemies and hazards in motion is among the best - albeit slowed at times. The status area is well done, missing only the 3 warning lights. The background is too simple, with a single raster mountain top outline, but it as well as the Moon surface does scroll nicely. The Sound is terrific (8) and despite the internal speakers, the music and effects make it among the best AP II sound I've scored to date. Missing are effects when enemies are attacking, when you jump and the explosion of the enemy's shots. There is the usual sound toggle <S>. Controls were quite a struggle (7) using the analog joystick. Trying to hold the stick at just the right spot, while jumping and not jumping by accident is too much for me. If you are good with your fingers, score another point or two higher using the keyboard option. As usual, this game is only on disk.



Moon Patrol on Apple II

Have Nots: TI-99 (39)

My first reaction was this version plays too slowly and there is no continue option, so you may n e v e r make it all the way to the end of the Champion course. The Gameplay is fairly good (7) with nearly all the enemies and obstacles. None of the gameplay elements are poor but nothing is great either. A keyboard option for controls is included. The only significant element missing is the uphill climbing segment. Addictiveness is good enough (6) to enjoy with the pause being the <space bar> and more than one scrolling background. What hurts is the really slow (slowest) game speed, the worst collision detection, really hard sequences of obstacles and almost no speed in L/R mobility. The enemies are sometimes shot in half and there is a delay or they do not get eliminated at all. Figuring out where the craters begin is very frustrating here. As mentioned before, there is no option to continue the next game at the current segment, but there is a short demo. The Graphics are impressive (8) with lots of nice color, two scrolling backgrounds, the best information area / progress bar, and decent animation. There is good detail, but not much use of



Moon Patrol on TI 99/4

multi-color. There are fewer enemies present here than most versions and their bombs are hard to see. The Sound is crisp (8) with all the effects except for the enemies being present. The startup music and jingles are all included and well done, but the main score is somewhat lacking compared to the medal winners. There were also some sound effects dropping out when too much was going on at once. Controls are perfect (10).

Have Nots: Atari 5200 (39)

My first reaction was this is pretty much the same game as the Atari 8 bit. Without knowing for sure, this was probably planned or coded first. Nearly all comments and scores are the same (see below) - except for the Controls - scoring an (8). The analog stick is difficult to use - to keep adjusting or getting the stick in just the optimal L/R spot for any one jump, yet alone sequential jumps. To make things a bit different, the 5200 is programmed to use one fire button to fire weapons and the other to perform a jump. Although this setup is great when all you are doing is jumping, but it doesn't seem to work for me when I need to fire rapidly and jump at just the right time . . . and not jump by accident. Using a Wico controller - I still struggled. With the Masterplay Interface (MI), even though it defeats the analog aspect, you now have no means to jump. You need a second fire button. So, add a point or 2 to the score (and let me know) if there is a compatible two-fire-button controller that works here. The pause is of course toggled by <pause>.



Moon Patrol on Atari 5200 & Atari 8-bit

Silver Medal: Vic 20 & Atari 8 bit (41)

Atari 8 bit

My first reaction was this must be the 5200 version ported to the 8 bit computer. The title screen shows "*" = 1 (2) Player" and "# = Beginner (Champion)" matches the 5200. Sure enough the "*" and "#" keys and also the Option and Select keys get the <pause> and <course selection> made. The "2" key will continue the next game at the current segment. I've found different credits for both Atari machines, so who knows which is the chicken or the egg. BTW, if you don't have the cart, you may need to use Translator B to get this booted via disk - I had troubles. Gameplay is effective (7) with all medal winners having all enemies and obstacles, including the uphill segments. The only real drawbacks here are unfortunately, pretty significant and clearly the worst on any version. The default position of the Moon Buggy is too far to the right and so you have even less time/room to see what is coming and plan/react. Then, the change in L/R position is s o o s l o w . . . all but eliminating any defensive or offensive strategy. No planning - just reacting. The screen layout has wasted space below the action making for less height for the enemy to maneuver - thus less playability. To top it off, your horizontal shot travels only about 1.5 lengths in front of you which coupled with some slight delay between rounds and/or some collision detection problems and you cannot fire fast enough to survive. All these problems reduce the Addictiveness to pretty effective (7), but could be so much better. This is also a pretty difficult version to play but the pause and continue options, along with different backgrounds (like the TI) certainly help to overcome some of the frustration. The Graphics are very nice (8) the best, with colorful details and great scrolling (multiple) backgrounds. But then the enemy bombs are hard to see and who gave us those really crappy sprites - yecch! There is good multi-color, nice animation and lots of activity. The Sound is outstanding, also the best (9) with a great musical score and all the effects in place. Controls are perfect (10). If there are any improvements or changes in the XE cart release that I am not aware of, please let me know.

Vic 20

My first reaction was that I finally have this cart, but not when I started this review - so once again staff writer and Vic 20 guru, Tonks came to my rescue answering all of my 50+ questions. He did a great job as the Vic 20 review could have been missing in

action otherwise. See also Andrew's brief review in RT # 71. The Gameplay is pretty much all there and very good (7) - second only to the 64. Like the Atari, there is a poor screen layout and too much wasted vertical space. There is no uphill segment, but the boulders do come out to play, and DO they ever - in large, sequential family units no less, in full multi-colored, animated splendor. The Addictiveness is very fun (8) nearly as good as the 64, with a demo, continuation, a pause <space bar> and has the least or perhaps no collision detection problems (I did not play it enough to tell). The game plays a bit too easy for too long, being the slowest to ramp in difficulty, but this is just fine and you can always just start on the Champion course. Ultimately, there's as many or more simultaneous enemies here as on any version. The only big drawback is the usual Vic slowing of action when too many objects are on-screen in motion. The playability and quick maneuverability L/R is second best to the 64. The Graphics are pretty good (7), with everything in multi-color, superb animation and explosions. The color variety is a bit sparse, and then the details are somewhat lacking as is the scrolling background is simply a vector outline of the horizon. There are some minor graphical glitches that make enemy bombs, especially crater bombs a bit hard to see. But unlike most versions, the on-screen bonus points are shown for eliminating an entire formation of UFOs. Sounds are extremely well done (9) for the Vic, with a great musical score and all the bells and whistles - including the enemy alert! Controls are perfect (10). Overall one of the best Vic 20 arcade ports, clearly pushing the Vic's limits here, whereas the powerful Atari falls short of its potential.



Moon Patrol on Commodore Vic-20

Gold Medal: Commodore 64 (43)

My first reaction was - least frustration, but there's plenty of room for improvement. The Gameplay is impressive (8), the best - includes all the enemies and obstacles, allows the largest L/R range of motion (maneuverability), adding the element of strategy (playability) with the ease of dodging & attacking the enemy, and your horizontal shot goes far enough to preclude an unfair death. The status area is small and unimpressive, but this allows so much more of the screen to be used for the enemy formations and their highly varied attacks. The action never slows down and both an uphill and downhill segment is included. The Addictiveness is enjoyable (8) with a pause <space bar>, continuation, 2 courses to choose, the most randomness and variety of attacks and/or combinations. There's no demo, and there are still some tedious segments that require precise jumps or memorization. Although collision detection problems occur, they are the second (to the Vic) least frustrating here. A big drawback (but one that you can get over) is either the timer is faulty or useless, or they made the segments too long - so that getting a bonus is impossible, or nearly so in most sections. Some UFO's have a Kamikaze mode (really cool added creativity - if not already found in the arcade version) where, if left alone, one or more descend downward to your level. I noticed this late in my efforts on at least one other version on the Champion course - so I did not go searching all versions for the details. One version (Vic?) a UFO landed inside a crater - cool!!!



Moon Patrol on Commodore 64

Graphics are beautiful (8), not quite as detailed as the Atari, but having more clarity in the sprites, animations and shots/bombs fired. There's good color variety, nice scrolling from the foreground and two backgrounds, everything is multi-colored, the animations are OK, and this has the best screen layout. The small status area is missing the 3 (useless IMHO) warning lights, and "Caution", but could have been a little more detailed without sacrificing screen space. Sound is wonderful (9) with no effects missing and pretty nice music and jingles throughout. Controls are perfect (10).

Updates and Errata from last month. Once again I was a day late getting this done (word-smithing it too much), so thanks again to Adam for letting me keep my streak alive. Thanks for your continued emails of support, encouragement, questions and answers - I appreciate them. Just got another reminder this week to try find and review the XE cart version of "Mario Bros". If I ever find the time, I'll

try to figure out where the ROM is and get it to disk via the SIOto1050 cable (still have yet to try this).

A handful of loyal readers let me know that last month I forgot to mention the Coleco Adam version of "Buck Rogers: Planet of Zoom". I do not have the Adam to review it, and although it is a bit obscure of a system, I'd be happy to have a review here, and count it for the medals. Same goes for all Adam games - I simply forgot to mention the Adam version and really never did do my homework on researching any of the Many Faces of the Adam. Maybe there is now a good Adam web site out there with a game list and details to help me get started - let me know. I've asked ColecoNation editor Nathan Kozlowski if he can write a review or try to cover the Adam in his column, but he too is without an Adam. I expect that Coleco Adam upgrades (from the CV) have more and/or better music, effects, graphics, details, color, multi-color and options than the CV. One of our readers already confirmed that the Electron Posts from Buck Rogers are included in the Adam port, and more - so it is likely the Adam port may eventually stand alone atop the Gold Medal platform. OK, so can anyone help take on this challenge and write some Adam reviews and spread the word to our readers. Heck maybe I'll get lucky and find an Adam at the CCAG2005 show or the PhillyClassic6 - oops now called the VGXPO.

Next Month: Come back as I plan to review a Moon Patrol clone, in the Many Faces of "James Bond" for the Atari 2600, 5200, 8 bit, C64 & CV. Contact Alan Hewston at:

Hewston95@NOSPAMstratos.net or visit the Many Faces of site:

<http://my.stratos.net/~hewston95/RT/ManyFacesHome.htm>.

Spectrum Reviews

by [Andrew Masters](#)

Atic Atac, published by Ultimate (one player, 1983)

This is a very nice game, and one of my 'golden oldie' favourites from the '80s. You must take the part of the knight, the 'serf' (servant) or the wizard, and then try and escape from a haunted mansion. The action is viewed top-down (see screenshot). It is basically a maze game at heart, but it does not seem like that when you are playing, because the mansion has four floors to roam about on. As you move from room to room, you discover which doors are locked, and where items can usually be found. The layout of the mansion is the same each time you play, which adds to the element of exploration involved.

The idea of the game is to get all three parts of the master key to the front door, assemble the key, and escape through the lobby of the house. This is made difficult by the fact that you can carry a maximum of three items at once. However, you must find and use the valuable coloured keys in the house, which open doors to inaccessible rooms. Only by doing this can you find all three parts of the master key (which are always in a different place) and escape. Also, there are holes in the floor (to fall down a level), and there are ghosts. Find and use the crucifix to kill Dracula in the cellar. Find food to survive, and shoot ghosts constantly. If you play as the knight, you can walk through some walls where there is a grandfather clock. If you play the serf, you can get use the barrels as a short-cut. If you play as the wizard, your short cuts are the bookshelves. This adds another element to the play, as you find a 'favourite character' that you then always play as.

This, in its time (1983), was a great game, and is still one I enjoy playing now. Fans of Ultimate games have had their brains re-wired (as have I) through constant playing -- this is a result of having to learn the very awkward control keys of Q=left, W=right, E=down, R=up and T=fire. Oddly, this only increases its quirkiness.

SCORE: 9.5 OUT OF 10

Manic Miner, published by Software Projects Ltd (one player, 1983)

Matthew Smith famously wrote this game at night when he was a teenager, because he could not afford to keep the electricity running all day, in the house he lived in with his mom. It is a very

straightforward platform game, with just left and right and jump controls. The controls suit left-handed or right handed people, and are very easy to get used to (even my own mom has played this game and likes it, so it MUST be easy!). You play Miner Willy, who must get through the 20 caverns (levels), and also get home in time for tea (see screenshot).

The game itself is very pure, as on each level you must collect the white keys, and then get to the elevator. This then takes you to the next level. However, you must also avoid the walking monsters and animals, and time your jumps correctly. Also, you must not let the air in the current cavern run out, or you'll lose a life. That's basically it, as there are no other items to collect, or sub-games.

At the time, in 1983, this game was very good because some later tricky levels require pixel-perfect walking and positioning. So the later levels really were an unknown realm where no-one had been. This was until English game magazine 'Your Sinclair' printed the codes (cheats) for the game -- the Manic Miner one was 6031769. Type this in, and you can go to any level easily. Years later, I read that '6031769' was just the telephone number for Software Projects Ltd!

This game is really showing its age now, but is still worth playing every now and then.

SCORE: 7 OUT OF 10



Atic Atac

Maniac Miner

Commando, published by Elite (one player, 1986)

This is a very good game for the Spectrum, and one that I would literally spend hours playing, trying to beat my last score. I would play this game over and over, pushing my best performance, until the heat sink area at the top of the Spectrum keyboard became hot to the touch.

It is a conversion of the Capcom coin-op game of the same name. You play Super Joe, the crack combat soldier of the 80s (!). You have just your machine gun (with infinite bullets) and six hand grenades to start off with, although you collect more grenades as you go. It's a scrolling shoot-em-up, viewed from slightly behind the player (see screenshot). So you get a psuedo 3D effect, as your man advances forward into enemy territory. The aim is to get to the end of each round, where you will have to shoot it out against a platoon of soldiers who come rushing out at you from iron gates. Along the way, you must shoot soldiers in gun emplacements, destroy tanks and trucks, pick up extra grenades and rescue POWs. You tend to keep walking forward up the screen all the time, as staying in one place too long gets you shot in the back. There are extra dangers, like having to walk under bridges, and enemy soldiers will even try and fire bazookas at you.

This is a brilliant game, and has good shooting/explosion effects, even if they are a bit clicky and beepy. When you are on a long game, the best aspect is you never lose a life unfairly. If you are shot by a stray bullet at the end of a round, after all enemy soldiers have been killed, the computer realises you won, and lets you carry on without losing a life. There are in reality only 32 different levels, and then they start to repeat. However, the enemy bullets soon start travelling faster than you, so you

cannot run away from them as easily.

SCORE: 9 OUT OF 10

Pi-Balled, published by Automata (one player, 1984)

This is a standard game of Atari's Q*Bert, without Automata having to apply for the home computer licence. For some reason Automata made all their games involve the Greek 'pi' symbol, so we have games like Pi-Balled, Pi There, Pi in the Sky, PiMania and many others. Automata certainly seem to have been a quirky software house (see screenshot).

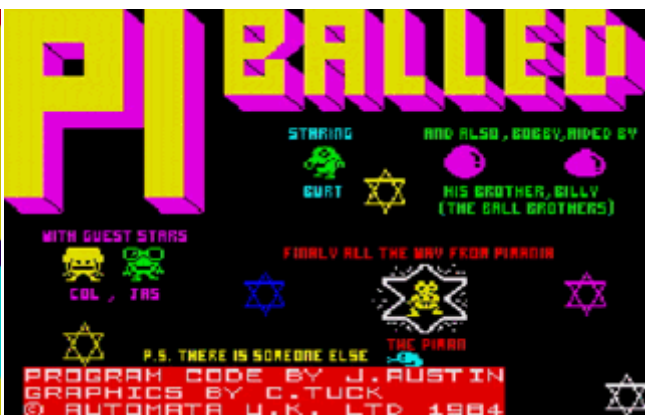
I haven't bothered including the play screen, because anyone familiar with Q*Bert will know it now anyway -- a 3D isometric pyramid that you must colour in. As with all Q*Bert games, you must get used to moving horizontally -- thus the keys seem pretty weird to start off with. As you move about the pyramid, you can make the snake (Coily from the original) fall off, by luring him to the edge of the playfield, and then taking the elevator disk to the top of the pyramid. You collect the usual power ball to kill some enemies temporarily (like in Pac-Man). On later levels you must jump on a square twice to colour it in correctly. Apart from the increasing difficulty, that's it.

This is a reasonable game for it's time, but Q*Bert has been done to death elsewhere, and has been done better. As with many retro games, it's somehow only still 'good' if there is nothing else like it (think of it as the 'uniqueness factor'). Here, there are better versions of Q*Bert out there -- look at my web site at <http://www.geocities.com/SiliconValley/Horizon/5384/games.htm>. I have a version of Q*Bert on there that plays in Java, and plays better than this (with sound as well). I once even saw some Spectrum games that play on web pages in Java, so you don't need to download anything. If you want the connoisseur's choice for Q*Bert, the best I have seen is the Atari-published Q*Bert for Playstation One. This has multi-coloured graphics, yet retains all the original fundamentals of the game. This Spectrum version is for purists and hard-core Q*Bert fans only.

SCORE: 4 OUT OF 10.



Commando



Pi-Balled

Travel with Trashman, published by New Generation Software (one player, 1984)

This may not seem like a fantastic game to look at, but there is great gameplay and inventiveness here. You travel the world picking up trash. You start in London and travel to European destinations, and see how far round the world you can get. In Munich, Germany you must pick up empty beer glasses in a beer garden (see screenshot). In Hong Kong, China you must collect up litter from the ground in a busy street market, while a lion dance waggles its way down the screen towards you (see second screenshot).



In each location, you must clear up the scene and also make enough money (in good old UK £ pounds sterling). This is so you can afford the next 'plane trip to your next destination. If you touch the locals you will generally lose money. Some animals (like the bull in Madrid or the lion dance in Hong Kong) will also kill you instantly.

It's quite a difficult game to play, as you must clear each round reasonably quickly, and not touch any local people like waiters - doing so loses you money. You must also avoid the animals like the bull. If you do not have enough money to continue, then it's game over. This game also has a hall of fame, so you can see your all-time best scores. There's a kind of inane buzzing music that plays as you jet from place to place, and as you start the game. This really helps to break up the game, but fortunately the tune does not drone on through the whole game, that would be a bit much I think.

It doesn't sound like much, but as you play you always want to see what it is like in far away places (I have not been to Samoa yet in the game). Each place involves you picking up things, such as roses in Spain (in the bull ring), and discarded shoes in India (at Benares on the River Ganges). Maybe one of these days I will find a POKE (cheat) for Travels with Trashman, and then see what each screen is like, and what happens when you complete the game.

This is a truly inventive and original game of a type that doesn't seem to get made any more these days. The graphics are poor, but that never seems to really matter here. Travel with Trashman is the second game in the series (Trashman is the original, and it is even better). I shall review Trashman next time.

SCORE: 9.5 OUT OF 10.

You can download Spectrum games, and the Spectrum emulator programs at the World of Spectrum site -- <http://www.worldofspectrum.org/>. You can also download POKes for Spectrum games from the Tipshop web site -- there is a link from the WOS site. POKes are software cheats that allow infinite lives, so you can get further than ever before!

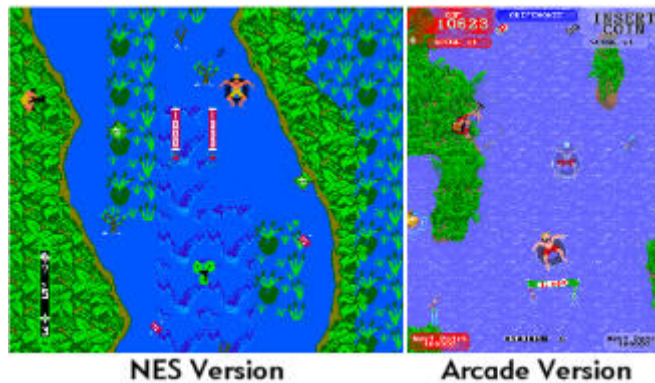
The WOS site is well worth a visit, as you can download many Spectrum games - 5,600 games alone, as well as Spectrum utilities and even Spectrum programming languages. The best PC emulator to download is 'ZX32 for Windows' (also on the WOS site).

Andrew Masters runs a web site at <http://www.geocities.com/cs0ama>. Play Java games, see pictures of the world and read movie reviews.

The Titles of Tengen - Toobin'

by David Lundin, Jr.

With summer winding away as a distant memory I thought it fitting to hit the water and take a look at one of the less popular Tengen NES ports, Toobin'. Released in 1988 Toobin' lets one or two players race down a raging river in inner-tubes as either Bif or Jet avoiding obstacles, throwing cans, and navigating through gates for bonus points. In a one player game the unused player becomes computer controlled and undergoes a name change to Flotsam, so in the arcade there's always someone to race against. There are three classes, each with five rivers that change as you progress downstream displaying some very detailed and comedic graphics. Toobin' never seemed to be all that popular in any arcades I visited, then again I was about seven years old at the time. Just the same Toobin' became a game that I love to play, especially head to head in the arcade. So one would think a home version on the uber popular NES would be great fun as well right? Well, not exactly.



The NES version of Toobin' is one of the least polished games to come out of Tengen which, if they were one of the handful of other unlicensed NES developers, wouldn't be a big deal. However compared to all their other games something just seems to be missing in Toobin'. Graphically the game comes across as pretty good, although the graphics are nowhere near as detailed as in the arcade, that isn't to be expected. The one thing that pulls the graphics down is the lack of detail in the character and enemy sprites. Compared to Super Sprint and Road Runner the object sprites are especially dull. Over all things look fine but when you start paying close attention to the details you see where the flaws are. Control is another big issue on the NES. The arcade version of Toobin' used no joystick, there were instead five buttons: two to paddle forward, two to paddle backward, and one to throw cans. This made for some heated gameplay moments on par with other button tapping games such as Track And Field. However on the NES the control pad controls all movement, B throws to the left and A throws to the right. While the controls function fine the reworked can throwing mechanic takes some time to get used to since instead of rotating your 'tube and firing forward, you have to position yourself at a diagonal above whatever you're trying to hit. Yet the biggest abomination to the original is the lack of a simultaneous two player mode. Instead of racing head to head downstream you are asked to take turns one at a time in a two player game. To add insult to injury the instruction booklet lists both controllers working in a single player mode as a "Special One-Player Mode" citing that one player could move Bif with one controller while the other throws the cans with the other. Seriously, it says that. Give me a break, if there's not going to be a simultaneous two player mode then don't try to cover it up with a gimmick like that.

In the end I can't recommend the NES version of Toobin' since much of what made the game fun to play in the arcade is missing in the home port. The game isn't so broken you can't play it and there is some fun to be had but when a game is designed to be a two player race, removing one of the players is like slicing the game in half. With a little more work I'm sure the home version could have been just as entertaining as the arcade original, the NES should have more than enough power to allow a true two player mode. It's a shame that this game came so close to being every bit as fun as the original just to come up short, but even Tengen had their misses.

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

Syntax Era: CGE 2K5

by [Scott Jacobi](#)

Syntax Era was MIA last month because I had the unexpected pleasure of attending the Classic Gaming Expo in Burlingame, California. OK, I had expected to take a vacation that week to visit friends and family in California, but the fact that CGE coincided with that trip in both location and time was unexpected. So I stole a day from my fiancé and headed over to Hyatt Regency next to the San Francisco Airport to check it out. Ordinarily, she would have attended with me, but she only had so many days to visit with friends, so I had to go solo.

Now, before I relate my impressions, I will try my best not to turn this in to a run of the mill rundown of

the expo itself, but rather to share my experience as a rather new attendee to the show. The only other show of its kind that I ever attended was the Philly Classic 2004, which was a nice show in its own right, but poor preparation for the CGE. Also, hindsight being 20/20, it would have been nice if I could have included photos with my presentation, but alas, I didn't think to take any at the time, and it would have been nice too because the museum was full of rare goodies. (And no, my phone does not have a camera on it. I simply haven't felt the need to be able to snap photos of something whenever the moment strikes me.)

I arrived on Sunday around 11 am, which was a rather late arrival for the second day of the show. I realize that I've missed a great deal by showing up in the expo's twilight, but it was all I could manage. Due to my experience at the Philly Classic, I honestly had not expected to stay very long. I mean no disrespect to Philly, but when a show is one convention sized room large, there's only so many times that you can go around the room before you've seen it all.

CGE, however, was 3 rooms, and I had not anticipated how much more there would be to see and do. I paid for my entry, which got me a neon wrist band that hotel guards posted at each door only half monitored attendees for. I proceed the way that I was going and wound up in a hallway between two of the rooms, the swap meet and the museum. Being somewhat naïve, I wandered in to the swap meet thinking it was the primary location to buy retro gaming related goods. I've already admitted that showing up in the second half of the second day was not the way to get the full experience, so by the time I found the swap meet, it was little more than five or six people hawking unbelievably common (and not so retro) games for bargain bin prices, none of which I had any interest in. The haphazard fashion in which sellers were barking out prices and berating fellow sellers' goods did not incline me to stay very long. After three minutes, I moved on.

I headed across the hallway to a room that was so quiet, I wasn't sure if it was part of the expo. It turned out to be the museum, and it had a noiseless reverence that I found very fitting and appropriate, if somewhat accidental. There were hardly any people checking it out at the time, so there wasn't much noise being generated. The only noise that filled the air was a working Vectrex playing Mine Storm over and over again in demo mode. The museum was laid out in three sections. The middle section contained many video game related oddities; magazines, shirts, books, etc from the mid eighties, as well as some not so common sights such as old Atari arcade schematics manuals, and boxed Colecovision modules and components. The section on the left was more of an homage to everything rare and Atari, including rarely seen items like the Atari 1450XL that had a 5.25 inch disk drive mounted in to it, one of only two known Atari 7800 keyboard expansions, and an extremely oddly (and ugly, in my humble opinion) colored Atari 2600 that was intended to be Kee Game's fake competition to Atari's own 2600 module. It was shaped exactly the same as a standard 6 switch, but it was predominantly yellow and red, with some rainbow action going on across the deck. Not a pretty sight, but interesting none the less. And the last section on the right was dedicated more or less to Intellivision, American handhelds and not commonly seen Japanese handhelds from the same era, the evolution of the gameboy, and finally the afore mentioned a Vectrex shrine. Everything was right there in front of your fingertips, and if you were inclined, you could pick things up, read the books, and press any buttons, but at the same time, it didn't feel very appropriate to do so.

Having thoroughly absorbed what I could from the museum, sadly I was stumped, as it was not obvious to me where I should be heading next, if anywhere. It took some wandering around, and staring at different signs, before I realized that the gigantic room just before where I got my wrist band was the main hall where all of the "real" action was. I was grateful to find that I hadn't seen everything yet, so I flashed my wrist band to a guard who obviously could have cared less and walked in.

I don't know about you, but when I first enter a massive room, I try to figure out how to wander through it so that I hit every area without missing a single table, with the least amount of walking. I don't know, maybe it's a habit I developed after playing so many RPGs. I was astounded by the sheer number of retailers that had shown up to sell goods. Everything from Atari, Coleco, and Intellivision games

(including the plug and play toy controllers), to NES, Genesis, and SNES games, to used arcade board vendors, and even to video game related paraphernalia including some of the magazines that I have reviewed for RGTM.

Along the right and back walls, arcade cabs were set up on free play. When I started to wander through the room, I often thought about walking up to one and playing a game, but I realized the affect that building a MAME cab has had on me. If I didn't have MAME to play many of those games, I would have gravitated to them immediately and wasted who knows how much time playing with them. Instead, I might see a Joust cab and think, "yeah, but I could play that at home, I came here to see the exhibits," and I realized that those arcade games were part of the reason I came to the expo in the first place. Nevertheless, I decided to focus my attention on things that I didn't have regular access to.

I moved on to check out some of the classic game vendors. I noticed one thing that amazed me as my eyes poured over the boxes of Atari and Colecovision games (some still shrink-wrapped) and that was the amazing feeling you get when you see those games on a shelf. Its one part nostalgia, one part déjà vu. I realized how long those cartridges had been sitting in some of those boxes, completely unplayed. No electricity ever passed through their ROMs. It's like they were frozen in time, never to be used to their full potential. After I got over the mystifying stuff, something else occurred to me. If you're trying to sell to all of the hardcore collectors who coming to the show in order to fill wholes in their collection, is it really worth bringing in boxed copies of Pac-Man and Defender? If nobody seemed to have anything rare or valuable, I assume it must be because I arrived so late. But some vendors had HUGE amounts of common stock that simply wasn't moving. I imagine the only way they could get lucky is if a school bus full of children showed up, all of whom decided that day to begin their Atari collections. At five dollars a box, they would have cleaned up. But at the end of the day, all of that stock would have to be boxed up and shuttled back to where it came from, so I wonder how much it's really worth it.

Moving on, I began to notice that the vendor who was attracting a lot of excitement was the Messiah table and their wireless Nintendo clone. It was my understanding that all of the boxed sets of clone sold out in the first day, but they had plenty of wireless controllers for sale, and they were moving quite well. Some other tables featured new homebrew Atari games in cartridge form, and it was ironic for me to see one table attach an Atari to a high definition projector display. If there's one thing Atari does not need, it's high definition. This was the one thing that I felt the Philly Classic did better, but probably only due to the presence of AtariAge.com, who organized all of the homebrew games that they sell from the site on one table. At CGE, homebrew games seemed more scattered throughout the show.

Now, I had decided not to spend a lot of money at the show, but the one table that got all of my dollars was Billy Galaxy's table which specialized in video game memorabilia, particularly from Japan. I managed to pick up a Pac-Man figurine, Street Fighter II battle cards, and Super Mario Bros. 3 stickers. I resisted the temptation I always feel to buy a Game & Watch game whenever I see them, and Billy Galaxy had many of them. They even had the rarely seen early Nintendo dedicated game console that pre-dates the Famicom.

Once I had thoroughly explored the main hall, the only things left of interest were the guest speakers. I wasn't sure what to expect, so I figured I'd pop in and take a listen. When I arrived, the one and only Al Alcorn was up on stage, along with Steven Bristow and (I believe) Steve Mayer. (Please forgive me as I may not be remembering the speakers' names correctly.) I caught the later half of their discussion, but it was a very interesting theme of how, back when the video game industry was just beginning, there was no sense of "right" and "wrong," but simply "try it out and if it doesn't work, try again." It is definitely a theme from a more innocent time when marketing was absent from the industry. I was so entertained that I figured I'd stay for the final panel discussion which contained numerous (six) Atari 2600 programming veterans including Richard Maurer, Jim Huether, and my personal favorite, Howard Scott Warshaw. I had the pleasure of working indirectly with Howard when I was employed at the now defunct 3DO, and ironically, I also happened to catch him at the Philly

Classic last year. So it was great to see him again, he's always incredibly funny. The panel discussion itself primarily focused on fun pre-Warner Atari, and considerably less fun post-Warner Atari.

And that was about it. After taking the show in, I got the feeling that for someone like me, whose taste straddles the whole range of games from retro to current, it's the kind of show that you really should see once, but not on a yearly basis. Let some time go between shows so that the magic stays fresh. After visiting E3 three years in a row, I was grateful not to go that fourth year, and I imagine CGE could very well have the same effect. Know what you're shopping for and know how much you plan on spending, and stick to that budget. It's very tempting to buy a lot of stuff that you know is going to stay in the bag you purchased it in long after you get back home from the trip. But most of all, go for the memories you had as a kid when you saw those consoles for the very first time. It can have a powerful effect on you.

The Thrill Of Defeat: Radio Shack MC10 (Part 2)

by [Mark Sabbatini](#)

"I like the MC-10 'cause there's not much to it - I was learning how to write an emulator in 1999 and I wanted to start with something that wouldn't be too complicated."

That less than unqualified praise from "Emucompboy," author of James The Animal Tamer's emulators, captures one of the main attractions to outdated consoles and home computers. For some users the more primitive and quirky the better and, as noted last month, Radio Shack's MC-10 Micro Color Computer is a historic all-star at both.

After hosing the machine with the scorn 95 percent of the computer world heaped on it - and reviewing a number of mostly pitiful games - this month's look at the lovable losers of retrogaming machines offers more optimistic views from current users and some software with some redeeming value. In many ways it's a snapshot of all such machines and a chance to see why certain unique features appeal to different hackers.

"It's one thing to create some whiz-bang game that needs a gigabyte of RAM and 3GHz of processor, not to mention a special video card and sound board," wrote Neil Morrison, a member of Yahoo's MC-10 user's group. "But how much more skill does it take to come up with an interesting game that runs on a 1Mhz, 8-bit processor in less than 4K of RAM? That's the mark of a real programmer - someone who can wring the last byte out of a very limited machine."

The MC-10's simple chip-level language appeals to many programmers in a same-but-different way Atari 2600 hackers thrive on making a chip designed to move three objects appear to handle many more (those flickering ghosts in the abysmal 2600 Pac-Man occur because only one is shown at a time; sequels are considerably better at working around this limit).

On a more common user level, features many consider negatives are a selling point for loyalists. In the MC-10's case two perceived drawbacks - it's toy-like size and miniature chicklet keyboard - appealed to Charlie Pelosi, an MC-10 user group member and author of a number of current-day games.

"The size of the machine I just thought was the coolest thing and the keyboard is actually great once you use it a long time," he wrote. The placement of <SHIFT> and <FUNCTION> keys to generate alternate characters might be widely deplored, but for him the ability to use them to quickly generate BASIC commands is another positive.

Pelosi, kind enough to offer his thoughts despite some less-than-kind reviews from me - argues there's little point in trashing the little-known machine since "we know what the MC-10 is and despite its shortcomings we enjoy the little P.O.S."

"I remember paying \$80 for my MC-10 and I worked my butt off doing a paper route on a corny bicycle to do it," he wrote. "The MC-10 cost less than the (regular Color Computer) when I got it. The BASIC language in the MC-10 is more powerful and way faster than the (Texas Instruments 994/a)."

The following are the remaining capsule reviews of the games I'm aware of for the machine, excluding widely available universal translations of BASIC games available on all platforms. Grading is on a curve, since even the best MC-10 titles pale next to almost anything from the Atari 2600 generation on. An excellent MC-10 emulator for Windows is at <http://www.geocities.com/emucompboy>; programs can be found at users.bigpond.net.au/jagf/mc10.html, www.geocities.com/chazbeenhad and mymc10.tripod.com; the Yahoo users group is at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/trs80mc10club>.

Hangman (D)

Look at the screen after a guess or two and something becomes rather obvious - there's no hangman! Just a word to guess and no clue as to when you're about to run out of guesses until the message "last letter" appears. Even a numerical countdown would help. In its favor, the interface is clean and it's easy enough to play.

Horse Race (D)

Another title in Radio Shack's five-game "Micro Games" pack, this is one of the lamest versions of an all-too-common BASIC programming exercises you'll find. Five horses move toward the finish line a step at a time, depending on which one is selected at random. End of description. No betting, no odds, no skill or user interaction other than pressing the spacebar to start the race. Avoids a failing grade for competent flicker-free graphics, but that just makes it a candidate for the glue factory instead of being shot.

Kutenkamen (B-)

This explore-the-temple text adventure, converted from a magazine listing for the TRS-80 Model III, is part of the shareware collection at mymc10.tripod.com. It's not original, deep or challenging, but not a terrible short-term diversion. You gather all the treasures and bring them to the Pharaoh's chamber. The big problems are common of homemade BASIC adventures: limited vocabulary (but at least the words are provided in the documentation), one-and-done play value since everything is always in the same place and - worst of all - rooms that kill the player simply for entering them with no advance warning about the danger of doing so. So basically you go until you die, start over and avoid that fatal room, and eventually you do everything in the right order. The page also has an adventure called Haunted House that's supposedly harder.

Lander (D-)

If I were sponsoring a "worst lunar lander" contest, this would get some sort of honorable mention for lack of design intelligence. Especially since it's part of Radio Shack's five-game "Micro Games" package, meaning you're paying for this torture. There's a couple of decent concepts, including variable rates of thrust and having your ship burn up if your rate of descent gets too fast. Here's the problem - that's the entire game! All you do is keep the ship from exceeding burn-up speed by pressing numbers from one to nine to slow your descent until the altitude counter nears zero, upon which you'll need to slow to landing speed. And you need to do so without running out of fuel. No direction controls or anything else. To make this worse, you start at an absurdly high altitude and it takes an eternity to descend. So all you do is just pick a key that provides an acceptable decent rate and hit it every now until finally nearing the ground. Unbelievably dull.

Lost World Pinball (A)

The near-universal choice for best MC-10 game despite being slow, quirky and probably rating no better than a below-average Atari 2600 title. Still, it's the only commercial program sold by Radio Shack actually resembling a commercial title, written in machine language and featuring high-resolution graphics (and requiring the 16K memory expansion pack). The table is sparse, but there's actually some bonuses and goals such as making the volcano shown to the right of the table erupt. For this to happen, according to the instructions, "the dinosaur Vally has to catch the prehistoric fly

with his tongue. To get the tongue to the right length, you must hit the orange marks set up by the top four plungers twelve times." Considering player's flipper control isn't great and there's no nudge options, this isn't exactly a simple task. Also, animation is jumpy and the ball physics aren't all that great.

Pong (C-)

Barely competent two-player version of the classic. This is part of Radio Shack's five-game "Micro Games" package and is marred by 1) slow gameplay and 2) poor ball angle physics where it's possible to have things like "zero angle" hits, meaning two paddles positioned dead center on a ball can just keep knocking it back and forth without moving. Yawn. Grade would be lower, except there's nothing horrible about it and on the MC-10 curve that actually counts for something.

Sea Battle (B-)

An OK, if somewhat limited, one-player Battleship game. The player puts their five ships on the screen (horizontally only, one of the limits) and then exchanges turns firing with the computer by entering coordinates. The board is well done given the limited screen display and the single-level of difficulty is reasonably intelligent. Hardly a reason to own the machine, but for killing time it beats suffering through some of the lousy and frustrating titles.

SG6 Bomber (B+)

A first-rate MC-10 program, even though the object of the game remains something of a mystery to me. Using a somewhat higher than normal graphics resolution mode and machine language to produce a horizontally scrolling landscape, the player uses the spacebar to drop bombs on various objects below. They're all chunky, but it's nonetheless impressive they can be identified as trees, cars, people and the like. The main problem I had was figuring out what I'm supposed to bomb. Do nothing and the plane flies forever, but things seems to end quickly whenever I started bombing things. Assuming some objects are targets and some aren't, I haven't figured out which ones you're supposed to hit. But if more problems like this had been written, it might have gone a long way in convincing more people the machine was at least a competent starter machine.

Game Over

Once again it's time to sign off for another month. We're very close to our 20th issue, but we couldn't have made it this far without the support of all you retrogamers out there. Until next month remember: don't shoot the food.

- [Adam King](#), Chief Editor

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