

# Retrogaming Times Monthly

Issue #20 - January 2006

## Table of Contents

- |     |   |
|-----|---|
| 01. | <a href="#">Press Fire to Start</a>           |
| 02. | <a href="#">100/20 Issues</a>                 |
| 03. | <a href="#">ColecoNation</a>                  |
| 04. | <a href="#">Forgetting To Save</a>            |
| 05. | <a href="#">Tha Many Faces of ... Frogger</a> |
| 06. | <a href="#">Retrogaming Commercial Vault</a>  |
| 07. | <a href="#">The Titles of Tengen</a>          |
| 08. | <a href="#">Alan Hewston on G4TV</a>          |
| 09. | <a href="#">Nintendo Realm</a>                |
| 09. | <a href="#">The Thrill of Defeat</a>          |
| 11. | <a href="#">Retrogaming Times 81</a>          |
| 12. | <a href="#">Game Over</a>                     |

## Press Fire to Start

by Adam King

Greetings, gamers, and welcome to another edition of RTM. I hope everyone had a great holiday season, including some special moments with friends and family.

This month is kind of a special month for us as this is our 20th issue of RTM, and we have quite a few features for you. We have cartoon spaceships taking over vehicles, a forgettable Mattel computer, old Nintendo launch titles including an education title *other* than Donkey Kong Jr. Math, and so much more. Plus I hope you like Frogger, because there's a whole lot of Frogger games covered here.

Sp let's get this issue started. But first, a quick word from my partner, Alan Hewston.

## 100 issues in 100 months - the RT & RTM

by Alan Hewston

While this is not our 100th issue, it does represent 100 consecutive months/issues in a row of retrogaming news, 20 issues from the Retrogaming Times Monthly (RTM) and 80 from our parent magazine the Retrogaming Times (RT). Tom Zjaba at [www.tomheros.com](http://www.tomheros.com) not only began the Retrogaming Times, but he then allowed folks like myself and Adam to contribute regularly to his magazine, and when his schedule did not permit, he passed the torch on to us. Tom graciously allowed us to continue on with much the same format, and nearly the same name, and to even advertise our site on his. We thank Tom as well as our number one sponsor, AtariAge.com, who generously posts our press releases every month on their highly visible and well frequented web site. We also want to say thanks and keep up the great work to Nathan Kozlowski, and his Coleco Nation, which is sort of a cousin to the RTM. [www.coleconation.com](http://www.coleconation.com)

Yes, this is RTM issue #20, and we're proud of making it this far. Adam and I had 20 issues in mind as a goal. We were determined to make it this far (making 100 months in a row), even if it were just the two of us writing. Fortunately, we have both expanded our coverage to more systems and to have

added a few more writers and columns along the way. Not everyone contributes every month, but we still have a lot of fresh ideas and a fair number of readers, so we'll keep pressing on in the future months to come. I know that I'll be slacking off some in my contributions in a month or two, as my family life continues to eat up more of my time. I expect to have shorter reviews and fewer articles, but will keep helping as much as I can, and host the site.

To help you the readers find some of our past efforts more quickly, I have started a page for some of our more popular articles, where you can track down the review or game by name and click on the link to that issue. Tom did a nice job of this for the Retrogaming Times, so it is only fitting that we follow suit.

The Retrogaming Times Monthly - Index can be found at:

[http://my.stratos.net/~hewston95/RTM/RTM\\_index.htm](http://my.stratos.net/~hewston95/RTM/RTM_index.htm)

## ColecoNation

by [Nathan Kozlowski](#)

### ColecoVision Game Pack #2 review

ColecoVision Game Pack #2 made its debut at the Classic Gaming Expo in August 2004. As with #1, Game Pack #2 was created by Daniel Bienvenu, published by Good Deal Games, and features a collection of twelve games for your ColecoVision. The majority of challenges found on the cartridge are puzzle and brain games, but a few simple arcade games are also hidden within.

After playing a few of the games, you'll start to notice that many are variations of the classics. Memory Match and Treasure are two games that will test your memory skills and are related to the classic memory card game that we've all played at some point in our lives. Gomoku and Tetrad are similar to the game Connect Four, with Gomoku having fewer restrictions to where you can place your pieces. Tiouk Tiouk seems to be a distant cousin of Checkers, with Minesweeper and Reversi being easily recognizable games. The final two, Explosion and Isola, don't appear to be related to any commonly known games.



Game Pack #2 makes the claim to be the first ColecoVision game with advanced artificial intelligence. Technically, I really don't know if that's true, but I do know that the computer is tough to beat in any of the nine brain games. All allow you to choose between two computer skill levels and, for many, the easiest level possesses a big enough challenge. If you get tired of playing the computer, you can also take on a fellow human since all but Minesweeper allow for two players.

Initially hidden on the cartridge are three arcade games that were originally programmed for the Commodore Vic-20. Tank vs UFO, Rocket Command, and Killer Comet can all be accessed by first playing a game of Treasure and/or Memory Match, Isola, and Reversi (respectively) and then pushing "0" to play one of the three. Tank vs UFO is your basic air and land combat game, but the other two are pretty unique. Both Rocket Command and Killer Comet require the use of only one action button, but still pose unique challenges. In Rocket Command you have a row of missiles that you consecutively launch from the ground at passing planes. With every wave, the planes and missiles increase in speed and make the end goal, of hitting as many planes as possible, difficult to accomplish. Killer Comet is the best game of the twelve, even though it's really only a minor game. The pace starts off slow enough, but soon the speed and your blood pressure increases to intense levels. Essentially it's a stationary version of Asteroids, where the comet



slowly approaches you by traveling across the screen. The comet takes a good amount of hits to completely destroy and every successive comet comes towards you at a more frantic pace. I always admire games that have very limited and simple gameplay, but are exciting and fun to play. The hidden games on this cartridge share these characteristics.

While the games themselves are quality programs, the sound and graphics of Game Pack #2 are fairly simple and plain. One of four tunes repeatedly plays during a challenge and the constant music often gets annoying. With brain and puzzle games, the player requires a certain level of concentration that is sometimes difficult to achieve when the included music is playing. It would have been better to have limited sounds to only those that denote moves and actions. If specific players want to play along to music, they could always listen to the radio. Purple and pink are the dominant colors used in most of the games and this proves to be an odd combination. A rotating set of colors would have helped break up the monotony of the visuals and create more dynamic graphics. While these issues exist with Game Pack #2, they are very minor considering that these type of games rarely require outstanding graphics and sounds.

If you enjoy the mental battles from time to time, then you would definitely want to pick up Game Pack #2. The diversity of games and gameplay options will ensure you many hours of challenging diversions. Obviously, if you like more action in your games, then this probably isn't for you. However, the games found within this cartridge are from a genre that many people (and not just video gamers) enjoy to play. If you've got a special someone that you'd really like to play more ColecoVision with, then Game Pack #2 might be the successful choice to get them interested in your favorite console.

Be sure to check out the latest issue of ColecoNation at <http://www.coleconation.com/> for all your ColecoVision news and articles.

## ***Forgetting To Save***

***by Tonks***

Back in the good old days you could get free games for your computer. I don't mean piracy when you copied your friend's games (although that went on very regularly). I mean the free games that came as listings in the back of most computer magazines. My high school regularly got about three or four computer magazines in each month, and they nearly always had game listings for the Vic 20. My fellow Vic 20 owners and I would photocopy the listing (sometimes we would just tear it straight out of the magazine) and take it home to type into our Vic. Often we would type it in together. One person would read out the listing while the other typed and we would swap jobs after every 10 lines or so. If the listing was correct (there were often mistakes that required quite a lot of searching to find and rectify) it often meant another simple but fun game to add to our collection.

But every now and again we would make the biggest of mistakes. We would forget to save!!! We tried to ensure that we would save the listing as often as possible. But sometimes you would be so busy typing and you just couldn't wait for the game to be finished so you could play it.

I remember one day a friend and I spent just over an hour typing in a game. When we finished typing it in, we typed "run" and started the game. It was a really good game called "Vic Quest". It had some of the best graphics of any type in game we had played. We must have played the game for about 2 hours before we decided to play another game. I turned my Vic 20 off and was choosing the next game to play when my friend asked, "Did we save that Vic Quest game?" Realising our mistake we both nearly cried.

At Christmas time you might hear the comment "Jesus saves". Unfortunately Tonks forgot to.

Here are a few reviews of some games I have been playing recently.

### CLOUD BURST

Cloud Burst is a fun shoot-em-up. Like many of the classic shooters, you control a ship that moves back and forth across the bottom of the screen and you must shoot the aliens that swoop down from above. But what makes Cloud Burst a little different is the two types of aliens. One type is a simple bomb that explodes once it hits the ground. The second type of alien is a type of "lander". Once this type hits the ground it scurries along the ground toward your ship in an attempt to blow you up. Luckily your ship can fire in three directions, up, left and right, depending on the direction you push the joystick as you press the fire button. This all adds an interesting gameplay element that makes Cloud Burst a little different to most classic shoot-em-ups. The reason that game is called Cloud Burst is because the aliens actually launch out of the clouds that scroll along at the top of the screen. Destroying the clouds prevents the onslaught from the aliens and takes you to the next level where things start to get faster and more difficult. Graphics are multi-coloured but quite blocky. Sound is pretty good with excellent firing and explosion sound effects as well as a short but good ditty when it is Game Over. All up, this is a very fun but slightly repetitive shoot-em-up with enough unique elements to make it a worthy addition to your collection.

**MY SCORE - 7/10**

### SATELLITE PATROL

Here is a very good shoot-em-up that is also quite a technical achievement for the humble Vic 20. At first glance nothing looks all that impressive, with large blocky sprites and simple sound effects. But dig a little deeper and you start to be quite impressed with the smooth 8-way scrolling and trippy animation on the borders. I think they forgot to tell the programmer that the Vic 20 isn't meant to be able to do that sort of stuff. The game itself is a variant on Asteroids and it also reminds me of one of my favourite arcade games, Bosconian. Your task is to locate and destroy a number of Satellites. This is made more difficult by a large number of asteroids that are floating about. The satellites themselves also launch a barrage of mines that will destroy you with one touch. So it is a non-stop shooting-fest as you hunt down and destroy the enemy satellites. However the game is let down by the large blocky sprites. The screen is very cramped and you have very limited visibility (if that is right word). When an asteroid or satellite appears, you have very little reaction time to either destroy or dodge the enemy. This leads to a loss of life that often feels unfair. If the sprites were smaller and you could see a wider view of the action it would make this game far more playable and would certainly add a few extra points.

**MY SCORE - 6/10** (*9/10 for technical achievement*)



### SNAKE BITE

Just about every classic system has at least one variation of this game. Snake Bite is a game where you steer your snake around the screen, trying to eat the apples that randomly appear. The quicker you get to the apple and eat it, the more points you receive. At first it is quite easy to move your snake around. But the more you eat, the longer your snake becomes. Before too long your snake is very long and it becomes difficult to move about and if you make your snake run into his tail you lose a life. One added element that adds some variation and extra challenge is that at the start of the game you can select how many plums you want, 0, 1 or 2. Plums move quickly and erratically around the screen. If they hit the head of your snake you lose a life. All up, this is a simple but very addictive game. Graphics are as simple as they come, just blocks and lines, but they are quite colourful and do the job just fine.

**MY SCORE - 6/10**





## DEADLY SKIES

Now here is a really great game featuring some very nicely defined graphics. You control a helicopter and must destroy the enemy city to proceed to the next level. The city obviously is trying to defend itself and it launches rockets and homing missiles at you while a bomber flies across the top of the screen and drops bombs down on you. This enemy fire ensures you are constantly on the move. This is one of those great, frantic shoot-em-ups that really test your reflexes. As already stated, the graphics are very good, however they are slightly let down by some jerky scrolling. Sound is quite average.



But these negative aspects do not detract from this being a really fun game. The game could be described as an update on the game Carnival. At least that is how Ward Shrake describes this game in his brilliant Cartzilla document. Have a play and see if you agree.

**MY SCORE - 8/10**

## *The Many Faces of . . . Frogger*

*by Alan Hewston*

This game has almost as many "Faces" as Benny Hill, and is the one I've been saving for our anticipated by 100th issue. I hope that those who have asked for it and waited are still active readers. Now that we are here, well actually this is issue #20, but it could have been #100 if the Retrogaming Times were still ongoing. I was going to split this into two articles, but Adam gave me a couple more days to complete reviewing all versions and cram it all in now. With so many versions and multiples on some systems, these details and scores may have some problems. The Gameplay was especially hard to review and draw the line in a fair way. It ultimately came down to those with the Otter and second snake getting the nod, as well as those with full, non-stop music making the stand.

You know the story. Go Froggy Go! Can the Frog cross the busy highway and dangerous river and make it to his home bay. You gotta keep on hopping 'til you get to the top. Make it to the top 5 times to complete a round (level). Ribbit! You have only so much time (timer bar) for each frog - so Go Froggy Go! You score points for each step forward, for reaching a home bay and bonus points for any time left. Avoid the cars, busses, vans and trucks while crossing the freeway. Hop on turtles and logs to cross the river, but be careful to get off before any turtle submerges or the Otter gets you. Rescue the Lady frog or eat a Fly to earn bonus points. Avoid the Crocodile's mouth and the deadly Snakes that slither along the sidewalks. Don't float off-screen or miss your home bay and hit the hedges or your froggie goes splat. Some home versions allow the wraparound or as an option. So . . . Why does the Frog drown in Frogger?



At the arcade, there were several little glitches in the game that can "bug" you - visit the Killer List Of Videogames ([klov.com](http://klov.com)) to read all of them. KLOV also notes that the full title track for Frogger plays longer than the one minute you have to reach home. The highway traffic will speed up if you take too long. Frogger ranks the 14th most popular arcade game of all time out of 4300+ games at KLOV.com.

Frogger came to the home systems in an unusual way. Sega licensed the home versions to two different companies; Parker Brothers received the cartridge rights, while Sierra OnLine received the magnetic media rights, covering floppy disks and cassette tapes. Thus, you have some systems with

two or more official versions - but our policy is to only allow the best one to count for the system's scores and the medal stand. Original disk and cassette versions are somewhat hard to find for most systems.

**Arcade:** Sega/Gremlin 1981 but actually developed by Konami.

Home versions on cartridge, all licensed and released by Parker Brothers

- Atari 2600 (1982 by Ed English)
- Atari 5200 (1983 by Steve Kranish & Dawn Stockbridge)
- Atari 8-bit (1983 by Steve Kranish & Dawn Stockbridge)
- Colecovision (1983)
- Commodore 64 (1983)
- Intellivision (1983 by Peter Kaminiski & Tom Soulenille)
- Odyssey 2 (1983 by Peter Inser)
- TI-99 (1983 by Todd Marshall)
- Vic-20 (1983)



Now here's a LOT of faces!

Home versions on diskette or cassette, released by Sega/Star Path & Sierra On-Line

- Apple II (1983 Sierra - by Olaf Lubeck)
- Atari 2600 (1984 Starpath - by Stephen H. Landrum)
- Atari 8-bit (1982 Sierra - by John Harris [release via disk and a lesser version on cassette])
- Atari 8-bit (1981 Sierra prototype - by Chuck Benton)
- Commodore 64 (1981 Sierra - by Chuck Benton)
- Vic-20 (Sierra - unknown if released)

The following versions are not covered here in my review, but worth mentioning.

Apple Macintosh by Kevin Hunt - next generation system - the Bit Age or Joypad era

MSX 1983 Konami - Not a US system - I do not have this system

PC Booter 1983 Sierra On-Line Olaf Lubeck - next generation systems - the Bit Age or Joypad era

TI-99 - unknown if a Sierra version was started - not officially released.

TRS-80 CoCo 1983 by Consoft Group on disk (maybe cassette?)

Many screenshots for Frogger can be found at:

<http://www.mobygames.com/game/frogger/screenshots>

Also several more can be found at: <http://www.atarimania.com/>

**Home Version Similarities:** Except those in <> all home versions have: a slow/fast speed option (which in some cases can be toggled any time) or the game automatically speeds up if you delay <2600PB, INTY, Vic, O2? & AP2>; there's lots of action on screen with 20+ items moving at the same time <O2>; the familiar Frogger music is played at both the start up and the end of the game <AP2 & C64Sierra>; there is a pause on some systems <2600, TI, Atari 8 bit PB, CV & O2>; one screen contains all the action <O2>; the screen is about 20 Frogger jumps wide <both 2600, all Atari 8 bit, 5200, TI, CV & O2> by 14 high <both 2600>, the freeway is 5 lanes wide <only 4 on 5200, all Atari 8 bit, both C64, TI, INTY>; a riverbank or sidewalk which eventually has a Snake crawling on it <O2?>; 5 rows in the river, with Turtles and Logs; a larger log will be replaced by an Alligator (was called a Crocodile at the arcade), but they are only deadly at their teeth; the Turtles can dive and take you with them; a Snake can also ride along on a log moving back and forth <both 2600, TI, C64PB, O2?, CV & INTY>; eventually the Otter <O2, 2600PB, Atari 8 bit PB, Vic & C64PB> swims in the river and any contact will knock you in; the scrolling action is pretty smooth <Vic>, and the action wraps around from edge to edge; there is more than a noticeable delay on these versions <2600 PB, AP2, 5200, Atari 8

bit PB, Vic, both C64 ports & O2?>; as rounds increase, both the frequency and velocity of the motor vehicles can increase while the frequency and velocity of the logs and turtles may decrease - all slowing you down; there is also more variety in the speed of moving objects as well; you earn points for each step forward, each frog who makes it home and bonus points for each tick of the countdown timer remaining; the bonus points per frog are either shown as a text message, or the timer bar scrolls down while the points add up <both 2600 ports, 5200, all Atari 8 bit ports, C64Sierra & O2?>; there's a log-riding lady frog - worth bonus points when you make it home with her; a fly frequents your home bays and if you catch it, you earn more bonus points; both of these bonus points are displayed on-screen at the home bay <2600PB, Vic, O2? & INTY>; finally, there's even more bonus points for getting all 5 frogs home, which completes that round; the first 4 rounds each increase by one level of difficulty, up to level 4 at which point all subsequent rounds play at difficulty level 4; as time runs out, you get a final audio warning when time is almost up <INTY>; a bonus life can be earned when you reach a certain score 10K or 20K <Atari 8 bit Sierra?, AP2, Vic & O2?>; some of the action is repetitive, but there is enough randomness <Vic, INTY & O2?> to keep you on the ball; there are distinct death sounds by getting squished or by taking a dive <both 2600, AP2, TI, CV & Vic>; finally, when the game is over, you will hear the music change <AP2 & C64 Sierra> and see a text message <2600, C64PB & O2> to let you know.

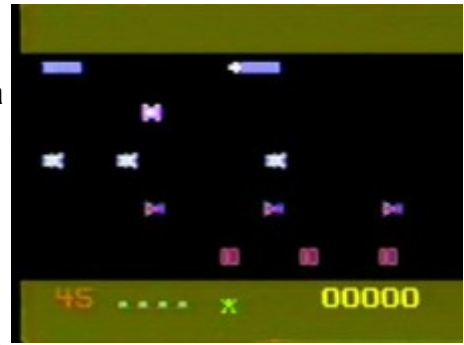
There are several minor additions or differences found only on a few versions: The choice of a starting round <Inty & 2600 PB>. The Frogger music plays all the time <2600SP, 8 bit Sierra, TI, CV & C64 Sierra>, which can be toggled off/on for the <8 bit Sierra, CV & C64 Sierra>. You can exit the edge of the screen as wraparound is allowed, or is an option <Vic, both 2600 & Inty>. There's not a full demo mode, but the (attract mode) screen actions continues and shows either level 1 action, the last round played, or level 4 action at the fast speed for <all PB & Sierra for both the Atari & C64, and also the CV>. The music keeps on playing - even during the attract mode only on the <Atari 8 bit Sierra>. The speed of "fast" or "slow" is shown on screen for the <Atari 8 bit PB, 5200 & both C64 ports>. The round number is also displayed on screen for the <2600SP, C64PB, TI, CV & Vic>. Of course all versions have an Alligator showing up at the home bays, but on most versions (I did not keep track) it'll gradually show up - meaning it is safe to land there until it's fully there. Most display the high score, but the <Atari 8 bit Sierra prototype> allow you to save a high score to disk. I awarded some versions more graphic points for having more animation but I did not itemize them for you. All told, there was animation via the two snakes wiggling, the otter moving, the treads on tires turning, the turtle fins flipping/swimming, turtle bodies submerging, lady frog moving about, Frogger changing colors when mating, fly flapping wings, the croc moving into position, the croc afloat opening and snapping shut, Frogger getting squished, then becoming a skull & crossbones, and finally taking a dive (like E.L.O.)

The only versions that seem to be picky with collision detection problems - which you can get used to, are the <2600PB & O2>. The <TI & CV> versions are annoying as you fall off the edge - even if the Lady Frog is right next to you, you can jump right over her and miss her yet enter the drink. I made sure to confirm this does not occur on any other versions. Some versions let you move up and down and up again and collect more points than you are entitled to - which I scored as a minor penalty on the <AP2, Vic, all Atari 8 bit ports, 5200, CV, TI & both C64 ports>. But, are you really scoring more points - since you are losing out on bonus time. IMHO, those versions are better. Instead of counting this as a poor programming, I consider this a software feature that allows enhanced strategy. That is, when you know you will have to wait for a log or turtle anyhow, a smart and aggressive player can plan his route to allow back and forth scoring multiple times - every little bit will increase your score - otherwise not a factor in gameplay on those faithful to the arcade. Note also that the arcade playfield's dimensions, i.e. how many Frogger sizes wide and tall, differ from arcade to home. As usual, the arcade is more vertical and home is more horizontal. Finally, since the arcade and manual artwork shows an 18 wheeler about to run over poor Frogger, I probably could have penalized those not actually having one on the road, but that would be too picky - or not - let me know. I'm sure it wouldn't have made a difference.

**Have Nots: Odyssey 2 (33)**



My first reaction was the multi-cart has this title and it may work on a few NTSC machines, but did not work properly on mine. So this is a partial review, with me hearing and playing a screwed up version, and checking out the rest of the action via screen shots. Much is missing when I play, including nothing but home bays and water on the second screen. I assumed that the Otter and second snake are missing but nothing much else. I also assumed that nothing special or unique was added. The Gameplay is good (6) but has been split into two screens, highway & river. The countdown timer is replaced with a digit counter, not quite as fun. The playfield size (width) is significantly smaller than all other versions.



Frogger on Odyssey2  
(Screenshot taken from Phosphorus Dot Fossils)

Addictiveness is decent (6). My Frogger is not lined up with the lanes and there are big gaps between the lanes - making me assume there will be collision detection problems. Also, even worse, but possibly due to my NTSC machine, after your final score is shown, in about 10 seconds the next game automatically starts up whether you are ready or not. Graphics are fair (5), which is to say good for the O2, with actual multi-color and some graphics variety. But there is no detail, it's all blocky and the scrolling is unlikely to be smooth. There is an actual title screen and some start up music that is not too bad. Due to this music, the Sound is good enough (6) to keep you from being bored. The Controls may take some getting use to, but I generously scored them a (10). Overall these assumptions would make it my highest rated O2 game - so clearly worth playing if you live in PAL land.

#### Have Nots: Vic 20 cart by PB (38)

My first reaction matched that of Tonks - the screen is squished and no effort was put into making it look good. The scrolling is choppy and everything is one color and all too repetitive. They only used about half of the memory they set out to use - gee . . . could it have been rushed out the door? The Gameplay is very good (7), but only exceeds the O2. The Otter is missing and nothing seems to be random. It does have the greatest width playfield at 22 spaces. But then this makes it look even more different (standing out) from the vertical arcade screen. Just too claustrophobic-like. The wraparound delay is too long and frustrating. Addictiveness is enjoyable (8) with a pause via the <Run/Stop> and then <Space Bar> to resume action. No other penalties that would prevent you from playing it over and over. Graphics are not bad (6), but second worst to the O2, having ALL mono colored action. There is not too much detail, not much color variety, not much graphic variety either. All of the turtle sprite pixels are filled in with some color and this does not match the background. So instead of invisible non-pixelated portions of the sprite, there is a black box surrounding the turtles on the blue water. Can we say RUSHED! Oh wait, does that make them multi-colored - not. Sound is very good (7) with intro music and most of the effects. But most of the effects seem cheap and not much better than the O2 & maybe the 2600 PB. Controls are perfect (10).



Frogger on Commodore Vic-20 (PB cart)

#### Have Nots: Vic 20 cassette or disk by Sierra (N/A)

Rumor Mill: This version may have seen limited cassette or disk release, got scrapped completely, or perhaps was sold off to become the above Parker Brothers release. The RTM Vic 20 research staff could not find it either, and obviously I do not have it - if it does exist. Sierra On-line covers it in their multiple version manual - so we can assume that a prototype version existed at some time. See also the Sierra On-Line screw ups below for Atari. The manual notes that an 8K expansion is required & to insert the cassette and load "\*", 1, 1 . . . then type "SYS8192" to execute. By Sega. Anybody have this one? I'm guessing it would beat the PB version, but clearly not be a medal contender.

#### Have Nots: Intellivision (38)



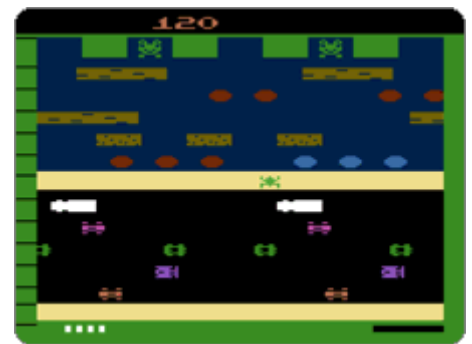
My first reaction was expecting another controller struggle, but Frogger only needs to move L/R/U/D with no need for buttons when you are playing - other than to pause, so the "stickler" did a fine job for me, scoring a (9) in Controls. Gameplay is very good (7), with the biggest problems are a lack of randomness and not having the second snake. Addictiveness is enjoyable (8) with the standard pause <diagonals> - hurrah as it was not removed by the evil Parker Brothers. But then on a bad note the turtles submerge much too quickly to land on them, unless you know they just came back up. There is a minor collision detection problem that you can probably get used to. This is one of only 2 versions (why didn't the other ports do this?) to select the starting round, up to 4 - good show! Graphics are pretty effective (7), but are much more capable on the INTY. A lack of programming effort here lead to no multi-colored action. There is a tiny bit of color variety, with some graphics variety present and the animation is OK - the only port with an animated fly. The text messages are the best here. Sound is worth while (7), but the music is limited and a bit tinny sounding. Most effects are in place. My wife LOVES Frogger and picked this cart out as the coolest looking of the 9 carts.



Frogger on Intellivision

### Have Nots: Atari 2600 Parker Brothers cart (DQ/38)

My first reaction was this is the one that really sold well and my first home version. But, this one is disqualified as a better (more complete) version takes the medal stand. The Gameplay is pretty much all there, very good (7). It just missed scoring an 8, but I had to draw the line here as the Otter and second snake were both missing. There is no pause but the Addictiveness is effective (7) with a choice of starting rounds and the individual player choice of wrap around on or off via the A/B difficulty switches. There are some collision detection problems to get used to and this version gets too hard too quickly. Graphics are very good (7) with some color and graphics variety, and some animation. There is no multi-color and not much detail. There's a visual flicker problem and a color fade to whatever item Frogger floats on. Sound is only better than the O2 (7) with limited music but most of the effects are there - only somewhat weak. The Controls are perfect (10).



Frogger on Atari 2600 (PB cart)

### Have Nots: Atari 5200 (40)

My first reaction was this game, aside from the controls interface appears to be identical to its 8 bit cousin. So all the Atari 8 bit Parker Brothers cart information and scores will match here, save for the Controls for the 5200, which I scored a (9). Controls are very unique as you need to point the stick in the direction you want to move and then press the fire button to actually jump. This makes back and forth jumping very hard to do quickly - which is bad. There is the keypad option which is not too bad, but I don't think I'll ever score a finger method higher than a 9 - especially when a good joystick method should be possible. The Gameplay is pretty good (7), but scoring second to last to the O2. There is no Otter and the playfield width is the smallest (besides the O2). The Addictiveness is fun to play (7), but the evil Parker Bros have removed the built-in pause on the 5200, and of course did not add it for the Atari 8 bit cart. The change in the sidewalk colors from round to round is great and makes you want to play more and see if anything more will happen. Why add such a neat feature, but then take away the pause? Graphics are wonderful (9) with nice multi-colors, color and graphic variety, good details and most of the animation. The Sound is very nice (8) with some music and all the effects sounding good.



Frogger on Atari 5200 & Atari 8-Bit (PB cart)

### Have Nots: Atari 8 bit Parker Brothers cart (DQ/41)

My first reaction was of course that this port is disqualified as a better version takes the medal stand. As noted above, all information and scores from the 5200 apply here, save for the Controls, which in this case are perfect (10).

### Have Nots: Atari 8 bit Sierra On-Line cassette (DQ/41)

The Atari 8-bit computers had two Frogger ports from Sierra: 1) the 1982 disk version by John Harris that's covered below, and 2) this cassette version that is watered down from that 1982 disk. My first reaction was of course that the cassette port is disqualified as the better (more complete) disk version takes the medal stand - see below. The same information and scores for that "disk" version will apply here as well - save for a couple changes. The musical score does not play throughout, just the intro etc. So the Sound score is lower (8), but is still very nice. There is no Otter and a few lesser elements are missing lowering the Gameplay score to (7), but still very good. I do not have the cassette version to play (actually I have an original - cannot find it) - I guess that they cut out the music and some other gameplay elements to reduce memory and save on loading time. Sierra really did some funny things here as there was also an earlier disk version by Chuck Benton (around 1981) that never got released - see way below. Then, the manuals (and I have 2 different versions) both list Chuck Benton as the programmer and tell how to play his version - which they did not release. Doh!

### Have Nots: Apple II (41)

My first reaction was the title screen is really cool - the best of course! To top that, the Gameplay is the best (8), with the largest and best sized playfield, and fewest (2) deductions. The Addictiveness rolls right on and gets the top score (8) and is nearly the best as well - with the pause being <ESC>. The Graphics are great (9), just about the best as well. Everything is multi-colored, with great details and the animation is among the best. The color variety and graphic variety could be better - as too many objects are similar. There is a unique element here, where once you escort the Lady Frog, a heart appears at the top of the screen - which lasts only for the duration of that Frogger life. Almost everything you could ask for is there and done at least pretty well. Unfortunately, this gold-medal wanna-be is cut down by the usual AP ][ setback of the Sound and Controls. Sound is exciting (7), but that internal audio hurts here. There is only a limited amount of music and no audio indication that the game is over. Most of the sound effects are in place, including the adding up of bonus timer points - only found here and the C64. The Controls are ugly using the analog joystick and I gave up even thinking about them when I found the programming of your own keyboard set to work well and the execution quite effective (9). As usual, only found on disk.



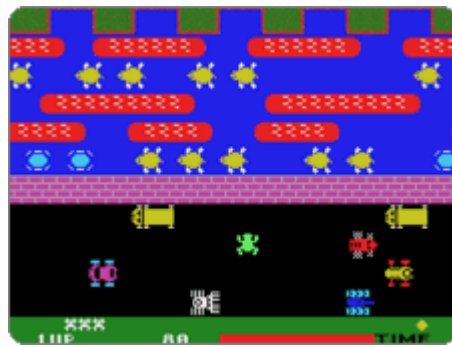
Frogger on Apple II

### Have Nots: TI-99 (42)

My first reaction was the PB carts really look cool for the TI & Vic 20. This is another one of those games where (due to the internal architecture) it is almost identical to the CV in every way. Gameplay is nearly the best (8) - impressive. The playfield width is a little small and unless I did not make it far enough along, there appears to only be the one snake. Addictiveness is cool (7), but only beats out the O2. This is mostly due to there being no pause, and the really annoying feature (as mentioned above) where you fall off the edge. It looks like there is room to jump one more time, but you drown. There is a fast/slow choice. Graphics are outstanding (9) with full multi-colors, some color and graphic variety, average details and good animation, plus added text bonus point info. The on-screen round indicator displays up to 8 dots. Sound is crisp (8) with almost all the effects in place and a lot more music than most versions, but somehow they forgot to sound off when the game is over. Controls are perfect (10) but there is some delay that will take some getting used to. The cart is fairly hard to find, but well worth it as it just misses a medal.



Frogger on TI 99/4



Frogger on Colecovision

### Have Nots: Colecovision (42)

My first reaction was that this pretty much looks like and plays just like the TI above and was probably programmed by the same person, or ported over from the TI code. The scores and notes are identical to the TI except for: There is an attract mode before and after the action starts, whereas the TI is only after. The CV also allows you to toggle off/on the sound, and the game action does speed up like the arcade if you waste time. That's it, other than slightly different pixelations and the controls interface.

### Have Nots: Commodore 64 Parker Brothers cart (DQ/42)

My first reaction was once again that this port is disqualified as a better version takes the medal stand. Gameplay is very good (7), scoring a full point lower, but in reality, just a wee bit less than the medal winner. It's missing the second snake and the Otter - so I drew the line there. Both 64 ports have only 4 rows of traffic and more than just a slit second delay in the wraparound. The Addictiveness is actually the best score of any official release (8) with a fantastic pause <fire button>! Looks like they had programmed even more, with a choice to begin at round 4, but this is not listed in the manual and then when you start the game always plays round 1 - oh well. But at least you can hit and watch the attract mode for round 04.

Fast/Slow is a choice of 1 or 2 player is. The Graphics are superb (9), possibly the best with good multi-colors, graphic variety, color variety, nice details and most of the animation. The round number, speed, and text messages all appear. Missing only the time warning change in color or flashing, and the "game over" text message. Sound is beautiful (8) with nice music, but limited only to the intros, round completed and game over. All of the necessary effects are included and well done. Controls are perfect (10).



Frogger on Commodore 64 (PB cart)

### Silver Medal : Atari 8 bit disk by Sierra & Atari 2600 cassette for the Supercharger by Starpath (43)

A tie - with every category scoring close - but the 8 bit PC scored slightly higher in most categories.



Frogger on Atari 2600 (Supercharger)



Frogger on Atari 8-Bit (Sierra disk)

### Atari 2600 cassette for the Supercharger by Starpath (43)

My first reaction was many people have heard of it, but how many have played it? Those who have not must give it a try - RIGHT NOW. OK, well actually that may be hard to do, other than via emulation, or if you actually have a multi-cart, the Supercharger and its cassette or the .wav files or a Cuttle Cart I or II etc. The Gameplay is right on target (8) and probably better than the arcade. The second snake seems to be missing, but maybe I'm not good enough to see him yet. The playfield is also narrower than other home versions. One of only 2 versions that automatically speeds up during gameplay. Addictiveness is fun to play (7), but there is no pause and the game seems to rush you along with almost no break between rounds or lives. The same A/B switch option allows each player to select wraparound or not. Graphics are brilliant (9) - you'd swear it was a newer system or computer. Everything is multi-colored, with nice color and graphical variety, most of the animation, and sufficient details. There's the text displayed bonus points, color change for the timer, and an on-screen round number. Despite no flicker, there is still the 2600 dulling or fading of the color to whatever item Frogger floats on. Sound is outstanding (9) with multiple songs but I think this is the only one where there is no end-of-round change to the music. Most of the effects are included and pretty good - missing are a distinct drowning sound and other minor elements. Controls are perfect (10). Fairly hard to find the original cassette and even rarer the inlay and box.

#### Atari 8 bit disk by Sierra (43)

My first reaction was confused as to which version it was, and not figuring out all the Atari 8 bit versions until after my deadline passed. This version makes the medal stand, and is most likely the one you'll find on a copied disk. Gameplay is all there (8) with a smaller playfield size than some versions, but the most complete version. The Addictiveness is exciting (7) with a demo and fast/slow option, but darn it - no pause. Graphics are remarkable (9) with a full slate of colors, multi-color, color variety, details and possibly the best animation. Note also that none of the 15 versions has all of the graphic elements found in all the others. A nice added touch is that the rows of logs and turtles are different colors. The PB Cart also gave the logs 2 color schemes. Sound is the best on this version (9), with multiple songs, playing throughout, and all effects and changes in music when required done well. The landing in the home bay is not quite as good here, and the adding up of bonus timer points was not added (AP2 & C64Sierra). Controls are perfect (10).

#### Gold Medal: Commodore 64 disk by Sierra Online (44)

My first reaction was the white Frog is annoying and so I did deduct for it. Gameplay is just about all there (8) save for a fifth row of traffic, some wraparound delay, but no wraparound options. The Addictiveness is enjoyable (8), the best of any official versions save for the PB C64 cart. Pause is <F7>, speed fast/slow is <F3>, start <F1>. Missing on this version only is a two player game - a minor penalty. Graphics are outstanding (9) and would have been the best if not for the albino Frog. The same comments apply as mentioned earlier for the PB version, but there is more animation here, plus the game over text. Not included were the time-remaining bonus text messages and on screen round number. Sound is remarkable (9) with a full music score and multiple songs. The time remaining warning and "game over" music are missing. Just like the Atari sierra disk, the "making it home" effect is not as good as some versions, but the adding up of bonus points is cool. Toggle music <F5>. Controls are perfect (10). It barely wins the gold but no doubt is a medal winner.



Frogger on Commodore 64 (Sierra disk)

#### Woulda Coulda Shoulda: Atari 8 bit Sierra 1981 Prototype (DQ/45)

Wait . . . I'm not done yet . . . My first reaction, and most other Atari fans was why did they not tidy up the graphics and release this version. The game is completely different than the disk version that was released, but I had to tell you about this one too. The scores and all info is the same as the other version except for these differences. Addictiveness (+2) as there is both a pause <Option>, and a choice to play 2 players individually or simultaneously (Wohoo!!!). Oh yes and the rarely seen option to save a high score to disk. This makes it the most addictive and best of all versions - but it was



unreleased!!!! Graphics are a little bit shabbier, with more plain colors, but still fine. Heck, why didn't they just release both versions on the same disk and let the players enjoy both.

Now all I want for Christmas is a Sierra online prototype of Frogger II (even though there isn't one) with multiple songs and non-stop music, two players simultaneous action and more. Reviewing these 15 versions in the busiest month of the year was quite a task and I really needed more time. But I think that I did a decent job of drawing the lines on scoring at just the right places so that even though some versions may be close in one category and one minor difference makes them score a full point apart, I think that my adjustments were just right so that the final overall scores are fine. Shifting all scores in a category a couple tenths of a point here and there so that the final rankings using a 50 point scale are the same as what they would be for my 500 point scale (using tenths of a point - not included here).

### **Acknowledgements, Updates and Errata from last month.**

This issue typed with lots of lyrics from Froggy's Lament, Camptown Races, Livin' Thing (ie taking a dive), and other Frogger related songs popping into my head - the diving Turtles have fooled him again.

Thanks to the Atari Frog and Atarimania.com for again helping me sort out all the Atari 8 bit ports. Thanks to Harry Hoffman from the TI-CHiPS for selling his only TI-99 CIB Frogger just for this review. Thanks to Tom Zjaba for holding a couple boxed versions from me - several years ago. Thanks to Thomas McClaren for the Apple II version & Steve Knox for the official Atari disk version. Note in the "Tron, the Ultimate Video-Radio Special", Ron Howard says he can identify with the Frog and "Frogger" was one of his fave raves.

Thanks again to our editor Adam, who agreed it would be best to get all of these Frogger faces in one issues so that we can all cover Winter Games next month.

**Next Month:** Come back next month as the RTM covers the games of the Winter. Specifically, we'll cover the Many Faces of "Winter Games" for the C64, Apple 2, Atari 2600 and 7800. One of the few, Many Faces games that never made it to the Atari 8 bit computer. Contact Alan 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***

For this month's helping of the Commercial Vault, I have for you the ad for US Games' *Space Jockey*. The first part of this ad is animated with cartoon spaceships flying over the landscape, spreading a wave of red light. We then switch to live action and watch as the silhouette of the hero(?) fights the aliens with a UFO and his 2600.

"Aliens have taken over the Earth. Every moving vehicle is theres, and so's the land. You and you alone have captured one of their flying saucers. Can you beat the aliens with their own machine? You Can! If you're fast! If you're accurate! If you don't lose your nerve! You are the Space Jockey. The fate of the Earth is in your hands. Yours and this new cartridge from U.S. Games. Space Jockey! Fly if you can! Space Jockey! Win if you can! Space Jockey! Sweaty palms are guaranteed with U.S. Games! "



These ships are spreading red light all over the land



Aliens taking over? This shadow figure won't have it!



Isn't this the ship from *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*?



A look of confidence or worry?



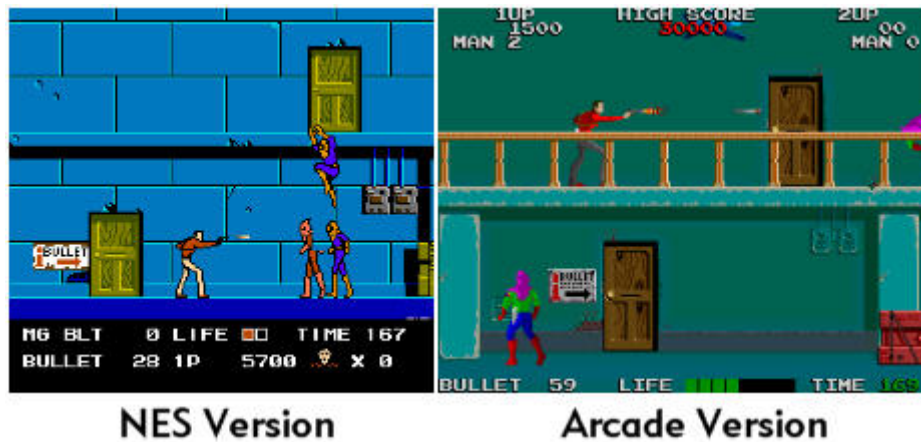
"No one's a match for my Atari Joystick!"

I wish I could single-handedly get me a UFO like that.

## The Titles of Tengen - Rolling Thunder

by David Lundin, Jr.

Agent Lelia Blitz, the femme fatal of the Rolling Thunder team, has been captured by the evil criminal organization known as Geldra and her time is running out. As agent codename Albatross you must infiltrate the Geldra syndicate, rescue Lelia, and eliminate Geldra's leader Maboo. You alone are Lelia's only hope of rescue and the last chance Rolling Thunder has to end Geldra's evil plans to rule the world. Released in 1986 Rolling Thunder didn't do a whole lot that hadn't already been done but it offered enough unique quirks to allow it to stand out. Unmistakably set in the 1960's, the visual style and animation lead to Albatross feeling like a cross between James Bond and Maxwell Smart. The basics of the game are a little bit like Shinobi with a tiny bit of Elevator Action thrown in. For the most part each stage has an upper and lower level which are moved between by either jumping up to the upper level or hopping down to the lower level. Doors along each stage play a huge part in the game as they add an element that keeps the player on their toes. Most of the doors will have enemy henchmen behind them. Some of the doors will have a "bullet" sign and going inside will add a supply of ammunition for your pistol. Even fewer doors will have an "arms" sign outside of them, entering one of these doors will outfit you with a machine gun, however your machine gun ammunition cannot be replenished at "bullet" doors and once exhausted you're back to the pistol alone. Any door can be entered to hide from enemy henchmen or arms fire but stay hidden too long and the henchmen are bound to stake out the doorway and pin you down.



In my review of Shinobi (RTM issue #14) I was quite vocal that it was a game I simply did not like and while Rolling Thunder shares some gameplay elements with Shinobi, Rolling Thunder is a game I love. Although they are somewhat alike the whole corny 60's spy thriller angle is what has always sold me on this game. Along with the constantly changing strategy element of using the doors and having to conserve your ammunition Rolling Thunder provides an intense and ever-changing experience. Three years after it was released in the arcade Tengen released their home version on the NES and for the most part they succeeded in bringing the experience home. Visually Rolling Thunder was one of the slickest looking arcade games in its genre at the time of its release. Enemies moved fluently, when Albatross would hop over railings he would do so with typical 60's spy style and would lean forward when firing, tuck his legs up beneath him when falling from long distances, and kneel and fire similar to James Bond in the famous 007 gun barrel opening sequences. Nearly all these visual flares make their way over to the NES perfectly. Of course things are a little stiffer and less detailed however pretty much every animation is in place. Enemy henchmen look around for your position when they are hiding behind crates, the little comedic cutscenes have been ported over, and scrolling is smooth and fluent. Think of it as Rolling Thunder Jr. but it's all still there.

Audio is perfect with the Rolling Thunder spy riff playing at the beginning of each level and stereotypical secret agent music throughout each stage, nearly exact to the arcade original. Mirroring the audio, play control is perfect as well. One button to shoot, one button to jump, and the directional pad for movement - a very intuitive control scheme that keeps things simple so the gameplay can remain fluid. Something else that wasn't lost in the transition to the NES was the challenge. In the arcade you had a life bar made up of eight units however light damage (being touched by an enemy) took four units and heavy damage (being shot, falling off screen, falling into lava) took eight, so in all actuality there were really only two total parts to the life bar. The Tengen port goes ahead and changes the life bar to two units which makes a lot more sense. Things can get pretty harry but with some quick thought and planning an experienced player can work their way out of almost any situation.

I've always felt that Rolling Thunder on the NES was an overlooked game, possibly because of the awful box art that made the game look more like a cheesy adaptation of The Running Man rather than a pseudo 1960's spy adventure. Nearly every time I stop into a store that deals in used retrogames I come across a copy of Rolling Thunder for next to nothing so the game is easy to find and can be picked up on the cheap. If you're looking to check out the original, recently the arcade version of Rolling Thunder was included on Namco Museum 50th Anniversary for all the major console platforms.

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

***RTM's Alan "Pitfall Harry" Hewston on G4 Videogame TV***

***by Alan Hewston***

Pitfall Harry was interviewed by G4's Laura Foy, back in November as I once again donned that costume at this Fall's VGXPO near Philadelphia. The interview along with lots of other VGXPO action aired in a mid December episode on G4TV - "Philadelphia Freedom Episode #5043". A local VG dealer snagged it on DVR for me and will make me a copy onto DVD. Woo Hoo! I was so busy there at the show that I missed the costume contest (I had no chance to win, but my old costume started all these contests - or so I keep tell people). I went and donned my costume (what is left of it), and arrived just as they finished up the contest. Laura and her camera crew spotted me and asked to tell her the story behind my costume. My daughter was so jealous saying that daddy was on TV, but I told her - they'll not show more than a couple seconds of the interview, if any of it. I was wrong. As usual, I did parade around in it, got photos at the Atari Age booth, and then decided to have Ralph Baer (Grand Father of video games) and Bill Kunkel (Electronic Games Magazine co-founder) to sign the inside of it. I also was happy to have our Video Game historian and author Leonard Herman sign it as well. Len or Bill told me that David Crane is still waiting for me to show up in costume at the Classic Gaming Expo.



A picture of Alan Hewston with the videogame legend himself, Ralph Baer

[www.g4tv.com/g4tv/index.html](http://www.g4tv.com/g4tv/index.html)

Alan Hewston, husband of understanding wife Kathy, and father of 8 yr old dancer Samantha, and 5 yr old "Super Smash Bros." fan Timmy, can be reached at **Hewston95@NOSPAMstratos.net**

## ***Nintendo Realm - Early September 1983 to Late April 1984***

***by Scott Jacobi***

The response to Ninteno Realm has been great, so I'm raising the number of reviews per month to 8. Someone asked me why I don't flat out grade or score the games. While it's impossible for me to avoid injecting my opinion in to the reviews, I'd like to think that Nintendo Realm helps you determine which games you'd like to try for yourself from an incredibly vast library of games.

This month we will finish out the Famicom's launch year of 1983, and look at the beginning of 84. It's a mixed bag of sports titles, educational titles, and the first Zapper light gun titles. But it starts off with another classic.

### **Mario Bros., published by Nintendo and released on September 9, 1983**

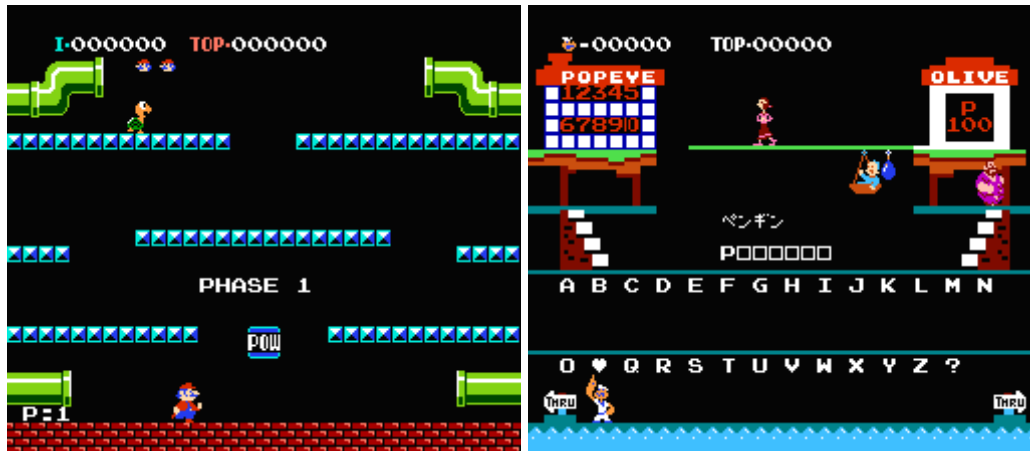
While this title was released in the United States under the Arcade Classics category, when Mario Bros. was published for the Famicom, the arcade game was not even a year old. The console port of the game manages to faithfully capture nearly every aspect of game play from the arcade version. Only the game play demonstration movies and the icicles that appear in very advanced rounds didn't make it in to the game. However, unlike the Donkey Kong conversions, Mario Bros. isn't nearly as pixel accurate. As a first generation Famicom game, Mario Bros. had the minimum amount of memory. Less memory means fewer sprites. Some sprites were reduced like the turtles, the fireballs, and Slipice, and other sprites were fully rendered over two frames like the crabs and the flies. To make up for this, in 1988 Nintendo released "Kaettekita Mario Bros." (or Return of Mario Bros.) for the Famicom Disk System. This version was much more faithful to the arcade. Despite the navigation of Japanese menus, this is the version to try while the original is simply collectors' memorabilia.

### **Popeye no Eigo Asobi, published by Nintendo and released on November 22, 1983**

This was the first of two educational titles that Nintendo released, perhaps in order to appear more



wholesome. While the second one (covered below) came to America, this one did not despite the fact that the title that roughly translates to "Popeye's English Spelling." The player chooses one of six categories, and a series of Japanese words are presented for the player to translate and correctly spell in English. So it really is an introduction to English for Japanese speakers. Perhaps the Japanese could have been removed (as is the case in game B anyway), but it would broken down to a not so fun game of Hangman. The Popeye connection is loose at best, using the Famicom sprites to show Olive Oyl watching from above, while Bluto hits a punching bag that knocks Sweat Pea along a wire every time you direct Popeye to punch an incorrect letter. You can make 10 mistakes before Brutus pushes Sweat Pea too far and Olive gets mad at you.



Mario Bros.

Popeye's English Spelling

### **Baseball**, published by Nintendo and released on December 7, 1983

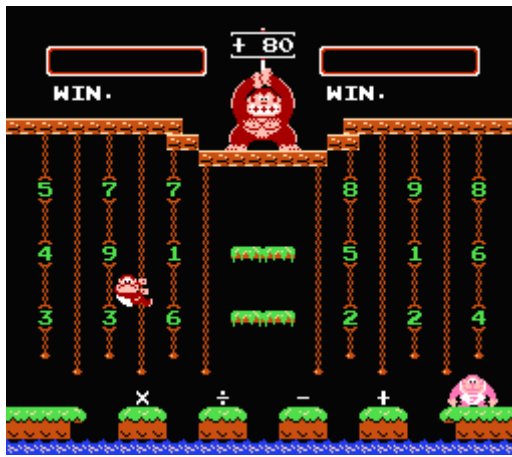
For being the first baseball game on the Famicom, and a very rudimentary one at that, this game's simplicity captures the spirit of baseball quite well. The view alternates between a close up of the diamond, and a zoomed out view of the whole park. Your team selection is pretty much limited to a set of letters and their corresponding team colors, since, as far as many FAQ writers can determine, there isn't much difference between the teams, even though they each seem to have players at a variety of skill levels. Being the basic entry, there aren't a lot of bells and whistles to Nintendo's Baseball, but if you're the type of player who likes their sport games simple, you can't beat this version. It was later adapted for play in the arcades using Nintendo's Vs. system cabinets.

### **Donkey Kong Jr. no Sansuu Asobi**, published by Nintendo and released on December 12, 1983

You probably know this game as Donkey Kong Jr. Math, the second of the two educational games that Nintendo developed for the Famicom. Many of the Nintendo fans that I've run across have a morbid curiosity about this "game" since it happens to feature some of Nintendo's earliest popular icons. But in truth, it is simply an educational game dressed up in arcade clothing. There are two basic games in this cartridge. In the Calculate games, two player face off by alternating between choosing a number, and an arithmetic operation until one of them reaches the goal answer that Donkey Kong is holding over his head. The first Jr. (yes, there are two of them, the normal colored ape and a lighter shaded cousin) to reach the goal answer five times wins. The Exercise mode lets the player choose the type of arithmetic problem they want to solve, and then the player must climb up and down chains to set the correct digit for each part of the problem.



Baseball



Donkey Kong Jr. Math

**Tennis**, published by Nintendo and released on January 12, 1984

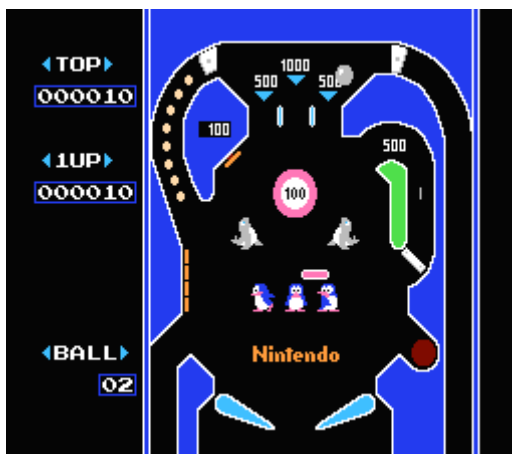
Like Baseball, this is a straight forward simple take on Tennis. It is rather fun to play if you can overlook one point. As the player, you face the direction that you most recently ran in. So whether you hit the ball regularly or with a backhand swing depends on how much time you have to reach the ball and correct your direction before you swing. This was a problem that Nintendo eliminated when they made the Gameboy version of Tennis. You can select from 5 skill levels, each one increasing the speed of the game. You have two choices, you can either return the ball regularly or lob the ball. If you're close to the net and can hit the ball in time, you can smash it. You always play from the bottom half of the tennis court. While the referee only slightly resembles Mario, he official presides over the tennis matches on the Gameboy. This game was also adapted to the Nintendo Vs. arcade system, where the player has been changed from a man to a woman.

**Pinball**, published by Nintendo and released on February 2, 1984

Even after arcade games outshined pinball machines, there have been a few video game offerings that attempt to capture the magic of pinball, and this one does so quite admirably, considering the technology available at the time of its development. With two levels to the table, and numerous targets to go after between them, Pinball can be surprisingly addictive. Even after you've managed to make three penguins appear on the top level, or turn over all of the cards at the bottom, the one thing that may keep you playing long afterwards is a chance at that elusive bonus round featuring Mario and Pauline from Donkey Kong. In the bonus round, Mario holds a plank over his head and has to keep the ball in play Breakout style, long enough to free Pauline from the top of the screen. When she falls down, Mario must catch her and return her to safety, and then the scene repeats itself until the ball is lost. This game was converted for play on the Vs. arcade system as well, and given minor graphical enhancements, but overall adjusted to be much more difficult.



Tennis



Pinball

**Wild Gunman**, published by Nintendo and released on February 18, 1984

The first Zapper title ever developed for the Famicom, Wild Gunman, is actually a throw back to one of Nintendo's earlier pre-Famicom arcade games from 1974 that projected cowboys on to a screen. The player had to shoot his gun when the cowboy's eyes flashed before the cowboy could get the drop on the player. The same spirit was programmed in to the Famicom version of the game. In addition to the eyes flashing, the gunslinger would shout Fire, at which point you had only a few moments to draw and fire before your opponent did. As your level increased, your opponents draw time decreased. There was also a shooting gallery where you took place in a shoot out with varmints through the windows of a saloon. In the Vs. arcade version of the game, two players could face off against one another for the fast draw title.

**Duck Hunt**, published by Nintendo and released on April 21, 1984

We've reached what is arguably the most recognized Zapper title. Venerable Nintendo fans are still haunted in their dreams by the hound dog that laughs at you whenever a duck escapes from your crosshairs. In game A, one duck flies out from the thrush at a time, while two ducks appear in game B. In both cases you only get three shots to take out the one or two ducks before they fly on. Your faithful companion holds up your kills if you manage to get any, or laughs at your misfortune if you hit none. While you couldn't shoot the dog on the console, you can shoot him in Duck Hunt's Vs. arcade counterpart, during a Bonus Round unique to the arcade version. The lesser known alternate mode in Duck Hunt is a skeet shooting competition where two discs shoot out for the player to destroy before they disappear in the horizon. An obscure fact about this game is that a second player can pick up a joystick and direct one of the ducks on the screen while the first player takes his shots.



Wild Gunman

Duck Hunt

## *The Thrill Of Defeat: Mattel Aquarius (Part 2)*

by [Mark Sabbatini](#)

As a football junkie I read stories every year about unknown athletes with amazing talents trying to make an NFL team against all odds. Maybe it's a kicker nailing 70-yard field goals or a receiver running a 4.18 40-yard dash.

They're usually among the first cuts in training camp.

The one or two things they do well can't overcome a lack of fundamentals. The kicker nails line drives that get blocked and the receiver drops pro-velocity throws. But players and coaches tend to remember the guy's talents fondly and they often are fan favorites, at least until the next "hidden wonder" comes along.

So as the playoffs near (hence the football metaphor), this month's look at the world's worst retrogaming machines focuses on some positive impressions of the Mattel Aquarius, one of the

ultimate "camp bodies" among computers of the 1980s. It also concludes a list of game reviews and summaries from my previous column - and as luck has it most of the better titles are among these listings.

Given the inability of the Aquarius to shoulder serious tasks or play games on par with the Ataris and Commodores of the era (or even Mattel's own Intellivision), the things users like about the machine can be a bit obscure.

"Back in 'the day,' the Aquarius's really nifty feature was that you could set the foreground/background color independently for each character cell on the screen," writes James "The Animal Tamer," author of Virtual Aquarius ([www.geocities.com/emucompboy](http://www.geocities.com/emucompboy)), in a Yahoo user group forum. "The Commodore 64 couldn't do that in text mode!"

Another Yahoo group member, Davey B., states "for me the best feature of the Aquarius is the actual physical design. The wedge shape, the use of white, black and blue colors, all that works together to make a computer that is pleasing to look at...Radofin was also smart enough to give Aquarius more than the 32 columns so common in those days. 38 columns of text (note: 40 is the official spec) by 24 lines gives much more information than the 32 columns by 16 lines of the Coco series. And the character set is very readable...All in all a pretty but quirky computer. I love it."

A lot of relatively decent cassette software came from third-party programmers in Britain after Mattel abandoned the machine, wrote Jason Leinen, who describes himself as a "hopeless Aquarius addict," in an e-mail. He also notes many games at least looked better than their Intellivision cousins, although playability suffered since graphics were based on pre-programmed characters rather than pixels.

"It amazes me what they were able to do with only 256 symbols (and their negatives)," he wrote.

The best games are generally strategy and other non-arcade titles where smooth animation and fast action aren't as critical, as hardware like the keyboard (lousy as it is) gives the Aquarius a natural advantage over most gaming consoles. Advanced Dungeons And Dragons was an example of one such game last month; perhaps the best game for the machine - at least in terms of potential and as a preview of future hits - happens to be the last in the list below.

Grades are mine, purely subjective and generally on a curve in relation to other titles for the machine. "Not graded" refers to games I have limited or no playing time with, and are summaries of other users' opinions or overviews. Windows users interested in playing these games on an emulator can find Virtual Aquarius at [www.geocities.com/emucompboy](http://www.geocities.com/emucompboy), with many of the titles below easily obtained through a Google search. Full instructions for using the emulator are last month's column.

### **Macho Man (C)**

Not a bad homebrew/cassette maze game, but totally misnamed. The man you try to guide to the top of the screen is a total wimp. He jumps up through moving gaps on each platform, and is disabled for several seconds if he hits his head or falls even one level (usually long enough to fall through more gaps as they appear under him). Gaps narrow as you get near the top of the screen, making perfect timing necessary. Playability is aided by simple left-right-jump movement and timer-based games rather than a set number of men. The graphics are as simple as can be, but speed is good and it's a challenge without being frustrating.



Shark Shark

### **Mad Mould (B-)**

A simple shooter that I enjoy more than the grade given here because it manages to capture some of the addiction of Robotron, maybe my all-time favorite arcade game. Four clusters of single-character-size squares (the mould) appear at the corners of the screen and immediately start moving toward the



player at the center of the screen, sort of like the grunts in the Williams Electronics classic. The player shoots them using four keys that control both firing and moving. That's it, yet there's enough squares and everything moves fast enough to make it a fun challenge. One of those homebrew efforts you'd think would be more common on computers of the era, but I don't recall seeing it often or done this well.

### **Mazantics (not graded)**

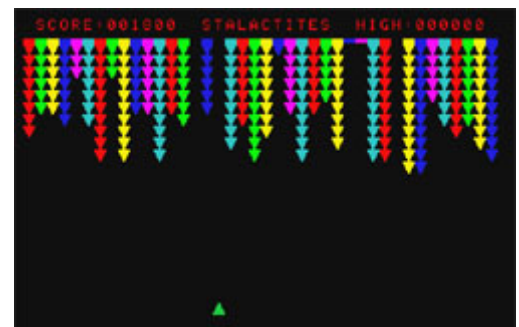
An Aquarius fan site calls this the "shoot-'em out game of 1985," although it's unclear if this is opinion or part of the marketing hype - especially since it appears to be a clone of Berserk. You control spaceman Luke Lazer, shooting your way through single-room mazes filled with increasingly aggressive Tobors. Graphics look solid, although the apparent use of character graphics makes it likely the choppy movement problem of other games exists here. Not having played it, criticism is probably unfair, but given how well Berserk translates to most other platforms, including the humble Atari 2600, a tepid translation here wouldn't cut it.

### **Melody Chase (not graded)**

Straight from promotional copy: "Melody Chase is an exciting adventure into the realm of music for one to eight players. The action takes place on a bar of music with twenty moving notes and endless number of firemen armed with waterballs. You control three fireballs. Dodge the firemen and your fireball at the silent notes. But hurry! You have a limited time for each shot. You will lose your fireball if you wait too long to shoot, if you miss a tone, or if you touch a man. If you touch a waterball the firemen will gain speed and quickly change directions to trap you. If you hit a note, you gain points and hear the note play. Shoot again with the same fireball. Hit all twenty notes and hear the song play. Then begin the bonus bars. See how far you can go!"

### **Milypede (B-)**

A playable clone of Centipede, although with numerous quirks almost certainly due to a need to simplify the game for the Aquarius hardware. Centipedes are the only enemy - no spiders, fleas, etc. - but they speed up over time and more than one appears during later waves to increase the challenge. Graphics are pretty lame - the centipede segments are heart symbols. The player has four-directional movement, rotation and shooting controls, plus the ability to move anywhere on the screen, making it a little like Asteroids. The mushroom field is generated anew after each wave, so those used to shaping it to their liking won't be able to use that strategy here. Speed is good and it's OK for a few games, but versions for other computers are generally better than this (Atari's is the ultimate example a game can look horrid and still be a blast to play). The grade would be lower, except it still represents an above-average large-program effort for this machine.



Stalacties

### **Night Stalker (C-)**

I really want to like this maze shooter, which bears some resemblance to Berserk, but between the lousy controls and choppy movement I just can't muster the enthusiasm. The premise is solid, with progressively more aggressive robots to shoot as the player seeks out the key needed to escape each maze. Extras such as spiders and a "safe" bunker in the center of the screen add variety and it's a faster-paced game than Berserk. But I couldn't make any meaningful progress as all, constantly getting killed because I couldn't get anything targeted and shot quickly enough. Given a choice between faulting the program or my competence, this is one of those cases where I'll pass the buck.

### **Pack Mr. (not graded)**

Obviously the Pac-Man by default, although there's mention of having the player "climb columns, scale slopes (and) lance lanes" while zipping around mazes eating dots and monsters. I haven't seen a screenshot of the game, so there's no way of telling if this hype or unique content. Another game

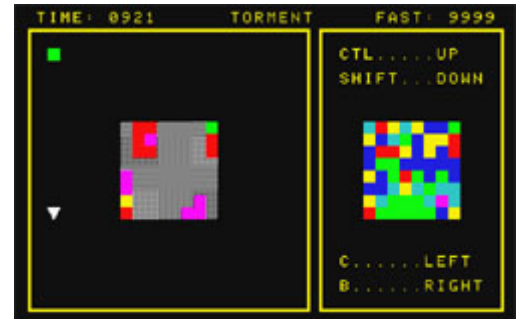
that requires the mythical 16K RAM pack, which may or may not have been readily available to customers.

### **Phrogger (not graded)**

A Frogger-type game by Add-On Electronics that apparently came on cassette and ran on the base 4K machine. As such it's hard to imagine it rivaling the generally solid official versions on even simple machines like the Atari 2600, but there's no other details or screenshots available.

### **PostMan Pot (B)**

Simple bits of Frogger and Pac-Man (actually the obscure spin-offs Ladybug and Turtles are more accurate) make this an enjoyable game that plays well given the Aquarius' limits. The player (a simple circle) turns a certain color by touching the post office (a block) at the right edge of a maze, then must navigate past cars and angry dogs to the house (more blocks) of the same color. The two lanes of cars make for tricky navigating since they move faster than you, and the gates allowing the player to get to the houses open and shut rapidly. Additionally, the cars can wrap around the screen and the dogs can pass through the houses, but the postman can't. Deliver a set number of packages and the player moves to more advanced levels with faster and more numerous enemies. Control is simple with only four directional keys and the learning curve is reasonable. Too bad most Aquarius owners never got to play it since it requires the 16K RAM expansion pack, especially since the game doesn't have the kind of depth that seems to require anything beyond the base memory in the hands of a skilled programmer.



Torment

### **Shark! Shark! (B)**

This is apparently an unreleased prototype recently posted on the Internet by a users' group. It's a solid concept that needs something more to really make it a complete game. The player uses four directional keys to control a shark that starts as a baby and grows as it eats other fish smaller than it swimming mostly horizontally in the ocean, sort of like the Williams arcade game Bubbles or computer classic Serpentine. Coming into contact with a bigger fish is fatal. As the player grows, so do the size of the enemies, making maneuvering more of a chore. But it never gets hard enough to be a significant challenge and there needs to be some variety to make it more interesting. A two-player option exists, making it potentially vastly more interesting, assuming the computer can recognize that many keystrokes at once. Given how poorly it handles one, that's not a given.

### **Snafu (C+)**

No doubt there's plenty of jokes this Tron/Surround-like game ought to be a pack-in cart for the Aquarius, given the military meaning for the title's acronym. But this is at least an average version of the genre, even if it's slow, choppy and not up to the quality of its Intellivision brethren. Variations such as four on-screen paths and random obstacles help, although figuring out the controls is a real pain.

### **Stalacties (D+)**

Sigh. Such potential wasted. This vertical shooter is another simple concept that would make a great homebrew game, except it's missing one key thing - it starts easy and never gets harder. You control a spaceship along the bottom the screen that shoots ever-increasing lines of characters that descend from the top of the screen. It's a little bit Missile Command, a little bit like the spikes in Tempest, a little bit Tetris. There's a bit of challenge in that the rows of characters don't descend evenly, with some dropping relatively quickly for brief spurts. The problem here is the world relatively. It's easy to keep up simply by holding down the fire key and moving back and forth across the screen. If the action gradually sped up or somehow got more difficult this would be a winner. But instead it may not maintain interest for more than one game - because that game never ends until you walk away.

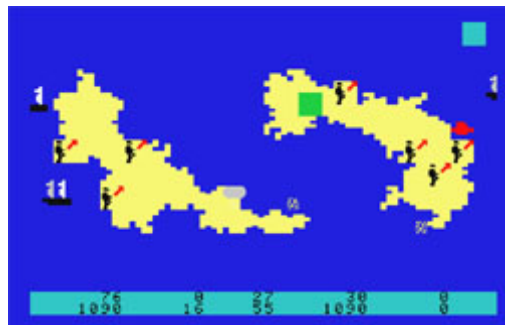
### **Torment (C)**

A puzzle game that might appeal to those once willing to spend hours on a Rubik's Cube, as this is

definitely not a quick diversion despite the presence of a timer that acts as scorekeeper. The player pushes blocks one at a time into a pattern in the center of the screen that matches one on display. The colors appear to come in cycles, so while you may only need one purple to complete a pattern, dozens may appear and you'll have to place them and then push them out of the way when more useful colors appear. It definitely takes time to work out strategies for completing a pattern, but once you have the challenge is largely lost and it simply becomes a major time-consumer. But by then those who enjoy this will have logged enough time to justify having this program in their collection.

### **Tron Deadly Discs (C-)**

Some all-time classic videogaming moments were somehow wrung of that futuristic wreck of a movie known as "Tron," but this isn't one of them. It's not the concept at fault - this arena disc-hurling combat game is a joy to play on the Intellivision and Atari 2600. There's some promise in this version, including a decent pseudo 3D background and ideal use of the built-in graphics characters. But choppy movement is nuisance and terrible collision detection is a killer - the flicker is so bad half of the hits and collisions with enemies and discs don't seem to register. Worse still are the extremely complex multi-directional controls, with the <RETURN> key forcing either left-hand movement or a cross-handed playing style for righties. It was all but unworkable on a regular keyboard with an emulator - I can't imagine what using the original Aquarius might be like.



Utopia

### **Utopia (A-)**

When fans refer to something as the 0.5 version of Civilization, Simcity or Warcraft, that can only be a good thing. This Intellivision port is one of the first, if not the first, real-time strategy games and it loses less in the transition to the Aquarius better a lot of arcade games. One or two players start by selecting the overall length of a campaign and the length of "rounds" which determine how often new credits are issued for deploying resources. The main screen features two islands - the computer controls one in single-player mode - upon which things such as crops, housing, factories, hospitals, schools, soldiers and boats can be deployed. Weather, rebels and pirates are among the extra hazards to deal with as players try to build wealth and population in their quest for a governor's award. Two-player games can be competitive or cooperative against the computer-generated elements. The major drawback of the game is a lack of on-screen intuitiveness - you really need to have the instructions and read them since there's almost no chance of figuring out what's happening otherwise. Overall, though, it's an example of a genre even the humblest of computers can excel at.

***Retrogaming Times Issue #81 is online***

***by Alan Hewston***

Please check out the latest issue of the Retrogaming Times, issue #81, by Tom Zjaba. After taking a break at issue #80, about 18 months ago, Tom is back with a new issue. It's good to see Tom back again, and he may also have a Bit Age Times issue soon as well.

[http://www.tomheroes.com/Video%20Games%20FS/Retrotimes/retrogaming\\_times\\_81.htm](http://www.tomheroes.com/Video%20Games%20FS/Retrotimes/retrogaming_times_81.htm)

### ***Game Over***

Time to bring the curtain down on another issue. Before we go we'd like to congratulate RTM writer Alan Hewston for reaching 50 consecutive issues where he has contributed a "Many Faces of" article. That's a lot of dedicated work to the retrogaming community, and of course includes his efforts date back to issue #33 of the Retrogaming Times. Alan has now covered about 73 games in his reviews and totaled 400 unique versions in detail. Waytogo, Alan!

Next month is going to be our special Winter Games issue, just in time for the 2006 Winter Olympics, which will feature more than a few special articles. Hope to see you there!

- [Adam King](#), Chief Editor

*Copyright © 2006 Adam King & Alan Hewston. All related copyrights and trademarks are acknowledged.*