Retrogaming Times Monthly

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Press Fire to Start

by Adam King

Greetings, gamers, and welcome to another issue of Retrogaming Times Monthly! We got a nice Spring serving of articles coming up so let's get to it.

First I'd like to apologize for the shortness of this month's issue. Unfortunately with everything going on this month in my life I've barely had time to work on it, so my usual articles are on hiatus until next month. But the other writers have some great stuff for you to scope out, so take it away, guys....

The Many Faces of . . . Donkey Kong

by Alan Hewston

Finally!! We're bringing you King Kong, er uh Donkey. We've waited far too long for this block buster, but now we can celebrate it as a quarter of a century old!! How high can you get? Playing Donkey Kong. Although it was not the first platformer, it was among the earliest ones and Donkey Kong is the game most people think of first when they hear the term "platformer". This was also another good game that both genders enjoyed, possibly because our heroine, Pauline, is always on-screen crying for help. Taking place on a building under construction, the Donkey Kong, (in Japanese Donkey means crazy) has captured this nameless damsel in distress. Her boyfriend, the carpenter (initially called "Jumpman" and later becoming known as Mario the Plumber) must chase Kong and rescue her. After each screen Mario gets close and almost saves her - a heart appears - but then Kong grabs her and takes her up the ladder to the next screen, which breaks Mario's heart. In the arcade, after each "Rivet" screen is successfully completed, Kong falls down and hits his head and Mario is temporarily reunited with his girlfriend. This then ends the level and we start it all over again with faster enemies, more enemies, smarter enemies and more randomness. Pauline never made it into any other classic era game, and was essentially replaced by Princess Peach as Mario's love interest. Mario went on to become an icon more well recognized world-wide than Mickey Mouse. OK, so let's do the Donkey Kong - my longest review ever.

Arcade: 1981 Nintendo (by Shigeru Miyamoto)
Home versions mostly by Atarisoft or Coleco

•Coleco Adam Computer - 1984 Coleco

•Apple II - 1983 Atarisoft (by Michael Crawford)
•Atari 2600 - 1982 Coleco (by Garry Kitchen)
[rereleased in 1988 by Atari]
•Atari 7800 - 1988 Atari (by ITDC)
•Atari 8 bit computer - 1983 Atari (by Landon Dyer)
•Commodore 64 US - 1983 Atarisoft (by Douglas D. Dragin)
•Commodore 64 Europe - 1986 Ocean (by Arcana Software Limited)
•Colecovision - 1982 Coleco (by Zachary Smith)
•Colecovision - "Super Donkey Kong" unofficial release via AtariAge.
•Intellivision - 1982 Coleco
•TI-99/4A - 1983 Atarisoft (by Brian Douglas Craig & Howard E. Scheer)
•Commodore Vic 20 - 1983 Atarisoft (by Jim Stozenfield)

Do the Donkey Kong!

And, worth mentioning, but not covered here are these non-US or the next gen systems.
Amiga & Atari ST by ?
Amstrad CPC - 1986 by Arcana Software Limited for Ocean Software Ltd.
MSX - 1986 by Sentient Software for Ocean Software Ltd.
NES - 1983/1986 by Nintendo
PC Booter - 1983 by Atarisoft
Sinclair Spectrum - 1986 by Sentient Software for Ocean Software Ltd.

Sequel: Too many to list, but we'll look at Donkey Kong Jr. in 2 months

Many screenshots for Donkey Kong can be found at: http://www.mobygames.com/game/donkey-kong/screenshots

Short hand abbreviations:
C64A = Atarisoft US version
C64O = Ocean European version
SCV = Super Colecovision (not quite the ADAM)
XE = Atari 8 bit computer version
Consoles = i.e. all versions that are not a computer = 2600, 7800 CV & INTV

Home Version Similarities: Except those in <> all home versions have: a title screen <2600, CV, INTV, SCV & TI> with options for 1 or 2 players and choice of 3 to 5 start levels <2600, C64O & TI> - these start levels correspond to the actual levels <CV & SCV are difficulty only>; the introduction begins with what will become the first screen as Kong caries the damsel up 6 stories of a building under construction <Consoles, AP2, TI & XE> Kong then jumps up and down 6 times - where each jump makes one of the beams shift/fall into place creating the ramps for the first screen of action; there's a brief intro with music <Consoles & XE> before each screen asking "How high can you get?" <Consoles, C64A, SCV & TI>; music then plays during the action <2600, AP2, INTV & TI>; you can pause at any time <2600, C64O, CV & SCV> - the 2600 does have a partial pause, after the first screen - waits until you jump; unfortunately, every version has some degree of collision detection problems (or built-in frustration - makes me NOT a DK fan), or times when an enemy can go right through your hammer; the number of lives remaining and level number <2600, CV INTV, & SCV> are displayed on screen; all 4 arcade screens <Consoles> are present "Girders", "Rivets", "Elevators" & "Conveyors"; most screen's approximate the arcade height/width layout <7800 & Vic> (see also those cheating - below); on each screen Kong has taken the damsel to the top and Mario starts from the bottom; unless jumping, Mario must stay on a ladder or structure at all times, and then his jumps must land on a girder, and not too far away, or he falls to his (saintly) death; you earn 1 extra life at or

before 20k <2600 & INTV>; points are earned for jumping over or smashing enemies with hammer (even more points), collecting rivets and retrieving the damsel's possessions scattered along screens 2, 3 & 4; all points earned, besides the bonus timer, are displayed on-screen where they were collected <2600, CV, INTV & TI> and can be heard when they are collected; the on-screen timer rapidly counts down by 100's from 5,000 and then higher values in later rounds <2600>; the on-screen action may start before you can move, but the timer does not start <CV> until Mario can move; when the timer < 1,000 you get an audio warning <2600, INTV & XE> and the timer's color changes <2600, 7800, AP2, INTV, Vic & XE>; if you reach the top, you earn the points remaining on the timer and move on to the next screen; if you run out of time, Mario loses that life; Mario also dies if he touches any enemies; the hammers are all reachable without dying <AP2>; a hammer used early and often gets a little more duration <found none that did not do this>; the hammer will change colors when it is about to expire <2600, 7800, CV, SCV, Vic & XE>; the game difficulty starts out fairly easy <C64O, TI & XE too hard> and continues to gradually gets harder through the next 10 screens or more <2600 & INTV peak early>; the action is never delayed <AP2 disk access for EVERY screen> and is smooth and flowing <TI & AP2 slowdown from too much on-screen activity>; the pace of the action is not too fast ; Pauline silently calls out H E L P ! <Consoles, AP2, & SCV>; when Mario reaches the top height, a heart appears <Consoles & C64A>, but then is broken as Kong carries her off <Consoles, TI & XE>; Kong lets out his signature three groans as the screen ends <Consoles, SCV & TI>; on the final screen each level, Pauline and Mario are united with a heart in between <2600, CV, INTV, & TI>; typical scores on most versions are 100 points for jumping over any obstacles or collecting a rivet, and 300 to 800 points for prizes and for destroying enemies with the hammers, and 300 for jumping double barrels <2600, 7800>; I saw no version actually match the arcade scoring exactly.

GIRDERS
The "Girders" screen is the only one with barrels. They are animated to appear like they are rolling. Kong will usually roll them out, but he can throw them straight down <2600, CV, SCV & TI?>, throw them down diagonally <Consoles, SCV & TI>. Kong seems to have control over them and they fall down both the full or partial ladders (more frequently as the levels increase), and eventually some that he throws (not rolls) will track you both diagonally and straight downward <2600, AP2, CV, INTV, SCV & TI> [thanks to Tonks for making sure I did not miss this]. Upon reaching the oil can at the bottom, the barrels (probably only the blue ones in the arcade) ignite into roaming fireballs <2600, CV, INTV, SCV & TI> which climb the ladders and partial ladders. Multiple fireballs can be brought to life this way. The fireballs are animated <2600, CV, INTV & TI> and can switch directions almost any time, some even bounce making them nearly an impossible jump. Although Kong may be limited in how many barrels he can put into play (they need to recycle - don't you know), he is smart and his 8-Bit AI tells him to purposefully make some of the barrels roll right off the edge of the screen <too hard to check if all versions do this> to get recycled since you are either hiding, or the barrels are now lower than you are, and thus they are no longer a threat. This gives him fresh barrels to rain down on you. There are 6 girder ramp ways <AP2, INTV, CV, SCV & XE cheated and removed one>.

CONVEYOR BELTS
The "Conveyor Belts" have sand bags to avoid on the moving conveyor belts <did not check, but seems like all versions alternate/randomize the belt direction> and fireballs that gradually appear and roam about anywhere that Mario can go. There are jumps to make and the usual hammers and prizes, plus the top portion of the uppermost ladders move up and down <only the C64 ports have this arcade feature> as a final effort to slow you down. The fireballs will gradually appear on the screen and increase to a maximum, which gets larger as the rounds increase - this behavior is true of all fireballs on every screen.

ELEVATORS
The "Elevators" screen has fireballs and prizes but no hammer. A new obstacle, I-beams that bounce across the top floor and fall downward & must be avoided. Their frequency (speed) continues to increase each level until they become the ultimate enemy/obstacles that you must face, with just

barely enough time to dodge them. They bounce like an elastic ball that is defying the laws of physics. Anyhow, Mario takes one elevator up and then jumps a couple times, takes the next elevator down and then must work his way to the right side. You must pass through the path of the falling I-beams twice and then up to the final floor where you must dodge past the beams 1 or 2 more times to reach Pauline. This screen will drive you nuts with Mario sometimes passing right through girders or bonking into some of them. There are cruel inhuman sufferings that Mario and you must experience first-hand to prevent it from happening during a really good game - so practice this screen early and often.

RIVETS
The "Rivets" screen is the final screen to end each level. There are hammers and prizes to collect and the Fireballs climb up and down the ladders <2600>, with more arriving to replace any that are smashed <2600 & INTV?>. A gap is formed and must be jumped across once each rivet is removed. The fireballs cannot cross the gap and cannot get you from the other side <2600 dooh>. After collecting all 8 rivets <CV & SCV cheated with 6>, the middle section collapses and Kong then falls, but somehow not Pauline. Again, defying physics - those silly Japanese architects.

G = Girders E = Elevators C = Conveyor Belts R = Rivets

Here's the US Arcade version sequence:
```
Level 1] G, R
Level 2] G, E, R
Level 3] G, C, E, R
Level 4 and up] G, C, G, E, R
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In Japan, each level has all 4 screens in sequence, G, C, E, R.AFAIK, only the AP2, C64A and XE versions follow the GCGER US arcade sequence, otherwise the Japanese sequence GCER, is used. I like the GCER myself. Why repeat, other than to use the space which allows for 125 m. Maybe there was a fifth screen that they eliminated? Regardless of system, the focus should be to end the level with Rivets, where Kong falls and Pauline is saved.

```
2600 GR GR GR GR etc.
7800 GER GER GER GER etc.
AP2 GR GER GCER GCGER etc
C64A GR GER GCER GCGER etc.
C64O GCER GCER GCER? GCER? etc.
CV GR GER GER GER etc.
CV Super GR GER GCER GCER etc.
INTV GR GR GR GR etc.
NES GER GER GER GER etc.
TI99 GR GER GCER GCER? etc.
Vic 20 GR GEC GCER ?
XE GR GER GCER GCGER etc.
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Thanks to Tonks, and some RGVC folks who helped or confirmed some of the above. "Android 66" confirmed the NES and "Rob" the CV sequences. Rob also told me about the CoCo's unofficial "Donkey King", later forced to change the name by sore losers Coleco - as "The King" by Tom Mix Software, programmer Chris Latham. It has 4 screens and is way better than the CV. We need Rob to compare the CoCo with either of the C64 ports.

More stuff: Most versions will allow a time of zero (0,000) and you can still complete the level - but only for that brief instant. The collision detection problems and inconsistencies were so complicated - I tried to deduct in proportion to how numerous or frequently they seemed to occur. Of course I did go seeking these glitches as you too must do if you want to improve your game, and not be surprised. Examples are bonking off screen edges or girders <7800, XE, C64O>; passing right through girders ; falling through rivets without changing directions ; not collecting rivets when passing over them ;

standing on a rivet while hammering, then (you've gotta be kidding me) falling once the hammer disappears , regardless if the rivet was collected; grabbing hammer while jumping fireball, saw explosion from hammer but still died ; hammers passing through enemies ; portions of the hammers disappearing at certain locations and thus not counting as hitting enemies; barrels falling off one edge and passing through the girder below it ; objects partially obscuring each other , and then not being counted as 2 objects when smashed . . . and many more.

Not covered Here: Adam Computer (39?)

My first reaction is that I do not have this one, but it should be reviewed. I do have some feedback from readers (Jim Goebel and others). The game is essentially an upgrade from the CV with all 4 screens - as is the case for all computer versions. The game intro and before and after animations, effects and music were added, plus possibly more on-screen enemies in later rounds. Even so, it is not likely to have much more than Super Donkey Kong (see below for the Colecovision), which, if it were an official release was not in the medal hunt. My guess (39 points) is that I'd have scored the ADAM higher by a point in both Gameplay and Addictiveness.

Have Nots: Intellivision (29)

My first reaction is from a customer point of view is this is so bad, why release it. But from Coleco's perspective it made their CV version look better. Gameplay is good enough (6) that you can tell it was supposed to be Donkey Kong but not much more. There are limited enemies, no barrels are thrown down, nor diagonally, nor become fireballs, the fireballs are non-replenish <diagonal buttons> and choice of 4 starting levels. But with a slow paced action and only 2 screens to look forward to you'll lose interest quickly. The variety and randomness of enemy attacks is severely curtailed here. The collision detection problems are quite severe and frustrating. Graphics are mediocre (5) at best. There are few enemies, no multi-color, not much color variety, no background and minimal details. Animation is limited and they even cheated in skipping a ramp on the Girders screen to make it not look squished. Notice there's only a slight color change to the hammer. Sound is (5) adequate to play, but misses so much of the DK charm with no hammer music or smashing, no gameplay music and repetitious and missing effects. Controls (6) may be more frustrating than the collision detection problems as there is no way to consistently control your jumps and move at the same time. Reprogramming a keypad button would make for a better fire button on the Intellivision.

Have Nots: Atari 2600 (32)

My first reaction how many of us were disappointed that there were only two (crummy) screens. Except for the nasty rumors gamers circulated (probably started by Coleco) that after X number of levels there is a third/fourth screen. Gameplay is mediocre (5) and very watered down with the same problems as the INTV, but with fewer enemies, missing a hammer, only 1 prize, and the fireballs do NOT even climb ladders! Addictiveness is OK (6) with only some collision detection problems, but no start level or full pause. The partial pause is fine since not many people will want to marathon this game anyhow. Graphics are fair (5). There is some multi-color, a bit more details, better color variety, some animation, but fewer enemies and I deducted a large penalty for no color change to the hammer. The Sound is good (6), maybe slightly better than the INTV with most effects, some intro music and less repetition. Controls score a perfect (10) with an occasional tough corner, but otherwise OK. Later released in cart format by Atari, but using the same Coleco code.

Have Nots: Colecovision (37)

My first reaction is - it is really this bad. Clearly rushed out the door to make the system pack-in title. It should at least look & sound as good as the TI but is not. Just look at the list of bugs in the Digital Press Guide. Gameplay is very good (7) but no barrels are thrown diagonally or become fireballs. The number of enemies is somewhat limited and one row of rivets is missing. Addictiveness is fun to play (7), but Coleco had yet to add their standardized CV pause. The choice of skill level actually provide greater difficulty, not level number - sucks as it is already hard enough on level one. Each screen ends abruptly and begins the next without any reward (break in the action). There are plenty of frequent collision detection problems and they don't even bother to tell you when your game is over. Graphics

are pretty good (7) with most everything multi-colored and animated OK, with good details, decent color variety and some background. There is no on-screen display of points or level number. The screens were even cheated to make them fit and not look squished (missing girder and missing rivets). The fireballs are not animated but the most obvious missing detail is a color (warning) change to the hammer. Sound is worth while (7) with most of the effects, but some repetition, music is played at the intro, during the action and for the hammer. There's no hammer smashing effects and no music to celebrate reaching the top. Controls score a (9). Turning the corner and getting stuck on ladders is the worst on the TI & CV and thus a point deduction. This is despite using an Atari stick and fortunately the second controller keypad buttons are active - thus you can select the game number from there. The problem is not the joystick (likewise for the TI using an Atari stick) but inside the code.

Disqualified: Super Colecovision (37)
My first reaction was this is not an officially released version, but can be purchased from AtariAge.com. It is a hacked version of the ADAM release, but not a straight copy from the ADAM. See Sean Kelly's full report on it for more details: http://www.digitpress.com/reviews/superdonkeykong.htm. In a nutshell, the Conveyor Belt screen is added, but without any collision detection, so you just walk through and complete it. The "0" button is a fun addition which allows one to skip any screen at any time, to move on to the next one and get all the bonus points for that round. My son kept telling me "push zero Daddy" and so I did and we played through several levels just to show him that no new screens come along. The G, R & E screens work as usual, and they've corrected the CV timer so that it does not start prior to Mario being able to move. The full intro music and effects are in place, but still missing a few things, like the "How High?" screen. The fireballs are now animated and we get to see the heart, and a break in the action to watch Kong carry off Pauline. In every category this one is slightly better than the original CV, but the scores are the same, thus my conjecture that the ADAM version, mentioned above would score no higher than a 39.

Have Nots: Apple II (39)
My first reaction was the music (or minimal use thereof) and poor controls immediately take this one out of medal contention. The Gameplay is outstanding (9), with all 4 screens and only one glitch - you cannot reach the second hammer without falling. There's not quite as many enemies, no moving ladder on the C screen and Mario is significantly slower than fireballs. The Addictiveness (7) is fun to play with a choice of starting at level 1, 3 or 5 and a pause <Esc>. There is terrible jump physics, throws off rhythm of moving and then there are some times no credit for some jumps nor any double jumps counted. This version loses a full point as it has, by far, the worst/most frequent gameplay problems with collision detection. The Graphics are very nice (8), with full multi-color, good background, color variety, graphics variety and sufficient detail to enjoy. The animation is among the best and even the fireballs change colors to look like ghosts when the hammer is active. The Girders are missing a ramp (cheating) to make the screen not look squished. The graphics push the system to the limit resulting in what I can best describe as a terrible color bleed when objects overlap, their colors change. My son, a big Luigi fan laughs and says, "Look Daddy - Luigi", as Mario turns green on the ladders. The hammer color change is so feint that I penalized here as well. Sound is cool (7) with all the effects in place but some are repeats. There's music only for the intro and not throughout, or for the hammer. Kong does beat his chest loudly. Making all these difficult turns on and off ladders and jumping are not very effective using an Analog stick, so the Controls score an (8). Why did they only allow use of the top fire button and not allow any keyboard options. As usual, this was only released via disk.

Have Nots: TI-99 (39)
My first reaction was mentioned earlier that the controls are coded poorly and you get stuck on the ladders regardless if you use an Atari stick. I may have been generous scoring the Controls a (9). Gameplay is impressive (8) with most things done right. There do not appear to be any fireballs on the Girders, Kong does not throw any barrels and there are fewer enemies than on the medal winners. Addictiveness is exciting (7) with all 4 screens and a pause <space bar>. The game has no start level

options and locks up every once in a while. It's also a bit too difficult and then frustrating adding in the poor collision detection and controls problems. The Graphics are sharp (8) second best to the C64, with sufficient animation, good color variety, graphics variety, background and nice details. The multi-color is lacking in the enemies, and there are no bonus points displayed on-screen. Sound is effective (7) with nearly all the effects but limited music and repeated sounds. The bonus life audio cue is only included here and on the C64A.

Have Nots: Atari 7800 (41)

My first reaction was shocked to see such a poor 7800 performance. The Digital Press theory is that since Coleco is mentioned on the copyright, there may have been a limit to 3 screens, and after all the NES only had three screens as well. Gameplay is quality (8) with most everything in place except for missing the diagonally thrown barrels, and the 4th screen. The hammer is way too hyperactive, but some how slow moving objects pass right through it. The double barrel points are only singles. There is a silent demo mode. The Addictiveness is pleasant (8) with a choice of three start levels and the pause <pause>. The difficulty starts off easy and gradually increases - very nice. The Graphics are effective (7), with multi-colors, variety, some details, background, but fall short of the system's capabilities. They were inconsistent between adding things and leaving other things out. Adding a nice demo, having 2 colored fireballs - then a third color (ghost) when you have the hammer, accounting for the physics of a barrel bouncing after the initial fall, then speeding up. Yet at the same time there are crappy text displays, the hammer doesn't change colors, there is no heart, no Kong intro or carrying the damsel, and the animation could be better. Sound is pleasant (8), especially the during-game music, which is possibly the best. All effects are included and the hammer music is good, but some effects are repeated and are odd sounding. Controls score a perfect (10).

Bronze Medal: Vic 20 (43)

My first reaction was that I failed to review this myself as my cart won't work. Thanks again to our Vic 20 expert Andrew Tonkin and we have a great review, but maybe too favorable as this earns my highest Vic 20 score ever. If there is room to deduct, maybe 1 point in sound, but it would have to lose 3 points overall to miss the medal stand. Tonks scored this a 9 (out of 10) in RT #76. Once again I fed him my usual 60+ questions and he came through and then some. The Vic is 1 of only 2 versions with a demo - albeit a quick run through of each screen, but complete with music! & effects! The Gameplay is fantastic (9) with everything included but the moving ladders on Conveyors. The Addictiveness is remarkable (9) with a pause <space> and choice of the first 5 start levels, but still some collision detection troubles. The Graphics may not look that great, but they are very effective (7) at getting everything seen and not confused. Sure they're blocky, but colorful, with multi-colored Mario, Kong & enemies, with some background and details and OK animation. All the intros are there, plus How High and Kong carrying Pauline. Deductions for failing to change hammer color and no color warning on the timer. The Sound is crisp (8) with music for the intro and during the game. The effects and music are a bit repetitive but nothing is missing. Some effects and the music may be off a bit (unsure) but the bouncing I-beams, hammer music and its smashing sound are great. Controls score a perfect (10).

Silver Medal : Atari 8 bit computer (44)

My first reaction was Mario is ugly and this version is hyperactive and completely out of control. Gameplay is first class (9) albeit a bit fast paced and having weird jumping physics. Only elements missing are the moving ladders on Conveyors. Addictiveness is wonderful (9) and you'll get a lot of play time here, especially with a choice of all 5 start levels and a pause <space bar>. It starts off a bit hard and by level 5 is really hard due to so many varying barrels and numerous enemies. Your skill can keep you moving on, but most likely bad luck will take you down over an over - so not much chance of a marathon here, but you'll be determined to play it 50 times until you beat the screen once. Graphics are very nice (8) with decent details, lots of color variety, graphics variety, animation and backgrounds. The enemies are multi-colored but not the prizes. Has the best fireballs, but they are a bit too big and the displays, score and timers are vile. The intro is not here, nor is the timer color warning. Worst offense is a lack of hammer color change and then cheating and removing a ramp on the Girders. Sound is crisp (8) with possibly the best music during gameplay. There's no demo or intro

music but included everywhere else. A couple effects are repeated and some sound flaky. The timer warning is missing, but a nice addition most versions omit - Kong beating his chest.Controls score a perfect (10) and seem to be the best.

Gold Medal: Commodore 64 by Atarisoft (46)

My first reaction was we can only allow one review or medal per system and most of you will vote for the Ocean version. Gameplay is the best here, (9) superb, with all 22 elements (I scored) complete and not done better on any other version. I'm also pretty sure that the C64 versions are the only ones with blue barrels, which are the only ones to become fireballs. Addictiveness is remarkable (9) with all 5 start level options and a pause <space bar>. The Vic does all this plus a demo and is the only version better here. Graphics are wonderful (9) with the most enemies and objects in motion. Its second best to the C64O, only missing having the heart. All the intros and animations are great, there's nice color variety and details, all objects are multi-colored, and good graphic variety abounds. The Sound is outstanding (9), the best. While the Atari XE & 7800 music is more varied, there is good music throughout (here) with no effects missing, odd sounding or repeated. The bonus life audio cue is only included here and on the TI. Controls score a perfect (10). I think it was only released officially on cart.

Disqualified: Commodore 64 by Ocean (45)

My first reaction was it looks the best, and has some of the best sounds, but it also lacks a pause, and cheats on some audio effects. All notes are the same as the Atarisoft version, except as noted. Gameplay is great (9). Fewer maximum enemies. Addictiveness is very fun (8) but missing the pause and plays too hard too early. Graphics are super (9). Sound is outstanding (9). Does not have the audio cue when earning a bonus life. Climbing and collecting rivets are repeated effects. Controls score a perfect (10). Released only on disk.

Acknowledgements, Updates and Errata from last month.
Overall I never became a big DK fan, maybe the 2600 version has scarred me for life? Every classic version seems to have too many accidental or intentional bugs or added difficulties. The game is either boring or gets too hard too fast and it is only luck, not skill, which allows you to continue on and pass some levels/screens. I also dislike games that make you start over every time (Rivets) and not allow you to add some strategy to sacrifice a life or points so that you can play longer. But, in comparison to other Many Faces titles, I think that I scored this very complex and exciting game as would the typical VG fan - and you'll appreciate that. I am sure that I missed a couple things or mixed them up, or typed them in wrong as my score sheet is completely filled with tiny scribbles and additions and subtractions. The more factors I score, the larger my margin of error can be if I weigh some features too heavily. Whew! I'm tired and I'm sure that you are too.

Next Month: The Many Faces will finally take a break after going 69 out of 70 months in a row now (missed one month due to emergency surgery). Too much going on in an Olympic month & Super Bowl year (I'm a Steelers fan from birth) and I need to spend more quality time with my family - wife Kathy, son Timmy (5) and daughter Samantha (8). The children are playing more games now (and luring me in to play the DC, NES or N64 with them), but they did watch and help me play test DK this month. 8 Bit classic joysticks are still too hard to control for their little hands, much easier with an N64 controller. Anyhow . . . I am still expecting to cover 1 game review next month, probably the Lost Faces of the XE Mario Bros. This will continue our Mario Madness across 3 months (including DK Jr.). I should also have part 2 of my "Chris Oberth" interview completed next month and maybe a brief look at a new product, the CV128-in-1 Flash Cart. Contact Alan Hewston at: Hewston95@NOSPAMstratos.net or visit the Many Faces of site: http://my.stratos.net/~hewston95/RT/ManyFacesHome.htm.

ColecoNation
by Nathan Kozlowski

Maze Maniac review

Have you been meaning to check out some of the new games for the ColecoVision, but haven't found the cash to buy one? Well, then Maze Maniac might be what you're looking for. Released publicly in November 2005, only ten cartridges where made of Maze Maniac. However its creator, Mathieu Boyer, also made the rom freely available at the game's website for the world to download and play. Other notables at the website are the instructions for Maze Maniac, as well as the official high-score board where the top players are immortalized for centuries to come (or for as long as Mathieu keeps the site running).

In Maze Maniac, you're a little smiling head that is trying to get out of a series of mazes before you turn into a maniac. Or, you're a little smiling maniac that's working his way through a set of mazes in order to escape his demented prison and wreak havoc on the real world. Whatever you are, you're trying to finish the mazes in the shortest amount of time while avoiding fires, green holes, and sometimes (if you're good) ghosts. The game consists of twenty four different mazes and seven variations to choose from that determine how you'll have to navigate through them.

When you first turn on the game, you're limited to only three game options. Once you successfully complete one of the first three variants, then a fourth option appears which is required to complete before opening the fifth (which then opens the sixth and seventh). The initial challenges are Normal (which is the best for beginners, because it gives you multiple lives), Endurance (in which you only have one life to get through the mazes), and Cooperative (teaming you up with another player). Time attack (similar to Endurance), No Turning Back (which does not allow you to reverse your movements through the mazes), Competitive (another two-player game, but now you're racing against each other for the points), and Bomber (which introduces the use of bombs to make your own way through the mazes) are the four game options that need to be unlocked in order to play.

I've always enjoyed maze games, one of my favorite Atari 2600 games is still Maze Craze. Thus, it's no shocker that I enjoy playing Maze Maniac. Maze Maniac has kept the two-player option (which is a must for maze challenges) and has made the one player games more interesting (a weak point with Maze Craze). Adding the various obstacles and bonus items creates different strategies and challenges within the same maze. My two favorites are No Turning Back and the two-player games, because they both exemplify how the same mazes can be played repeatedly and not get old. It's just a shame that one needs to devote a good chunk of time to reach these specific games. Every time you turn on the game, you have to complete the initial modes before unlocking the unique maze games. It would have been nice to have created a way to bypass this lock, once the player has initially unlocked them. It's difficult to do on the ColecoVision, but not impossible.

The integration of the game with its website is another way that Mathieu has successfully made Maze Maniac a two-person challenge, even when one is playing the single game options. By creating a system of passwords that record scores and allows them to be posted online, the player is always involved in a two-player match and constantly has the motivation to try and improve his results. The work necessary to make this integration possible shows that the programmer cares about his creation and is committed to thinking of unique ways of making the final product more enjoyable.

While Maze Maniac does an admirable job of making twenty four mazes interesting even after they are solved, this lack of randomness is the game's most apparent weakness. A person instinctively looks to solve a maze by finding the end. Once this is accomplished, he/she focuses attention on a

new maze to perform the same objective. Maze Maniac initially asks the player to solve the mazes, regardless of which game mode is chosen. However, once the first mode is finished, the game now asks the players to master the same mazes for the rest of the options. While the die-hard gamer may be up to this challenge, your average person will likely tire of this new task and lose interest in the game. A way of randomly generating mazes (even if it had to be the same twenty four) would have helped increase Maze Maniac's gameplay value. If there is ever talk of a sequel or revision, then I strongly suggest simplifying the sound and graphics even more to make room for randomness in the maze construction.

While not the easiest to accomplish for most, I encourage everyone to play Maze Maniac on the ColecoVision. The emulators do a fine job, but you don't get the sense of urgency or need to think as quick when playing on the computer. The ability to pause, and thus solve the maze before you even take your first step, makes this game quite easy to master. Mathieu Boyer's first ColecoVision game is a great rookie effort and needs to be appreciated on the console that it was created for.

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

SHOULD I BUY THE CURRENT RETRO COLLECTIONS?
by Tonks

Recently I have had a few debates with other retro gaming collectors and fans about buying the current retro collections for X-box. (or PS2, Gamecube and PC) The debate has been caused due to so many X-box owners having a pretty good collection of emulators and ROMs on their hard drive. Many have said to me, "Why buy the new retro collections when I already have all the games on xmame?" Well I simply want to share a few ideas of why we as retro gaming enthusiasts should be buying the current retro collections.

1. It encourages companies to bring out more retro collections.

If one retro collection sells really well, then other companies will be encouraged to release collections of their own. These collections are easy to use, allows others to realise what great games have been produced in the past, and introduces potentially thousands of younger gamers to the delights of retro gaming. Some of the retro collections also contain loads of extra goodies that don't come with mame. But if the collections don't sell because everyone would rather use mame and get the games for free then the companies will not release further retro collections.

2. The games all work.

It is fairly frustrating when your favourite game just doesn't work properly. There are still many games on mame that don't have sound, have the wrong colours or simply crash no matter what you do. I still haven't got Space Invaders with sound - but I do now because of the Taito collection!!!

3. Limited amount of games adds to the appeal.

Having mame with 3000 games might sound awesome (and in many ways it is) but how many of those 3000 games do you really play? Having a retro collection with around 30 games just makes it so much more simple. Stick in the Capcom collection and you can have a blast at 1942 and Ghosts and Goblins. Stick in the Taito collection and have fun playing Quix and Bubble Bobble. No more having to endlessly search through the huge list of thousands just to find one game.

4. It is good for your conscience.

The debate will rage on for a long time, but the fact is that our ROM lists are illegal. If you don't own

an original of that ROM then owning a copy is illegal (unless it has been made freely available by the owners). So buying one of the retro collections means you are being a good honest boy (or girl - actually, do we have any female readers???) and you can sleep easy with a clean conscience?

I know that none of the retro collections are perfect. I know that some just don't put in the effort or value for money that they should. But I now have most of the collections and I think they are all pretty good. So support retro gaming by buying the latest retro collections and in doing so we are all promoting our awesome hobby!!

I'll be honest in saying that Skull & Crossbones was the Tengen NES game I looked the least forward to comparing against its arcade counterpart. With only a few more Tengen ports left on the list I figured I'd get this one out of the way now before moving on to better games. If you've ever played the arcade version of Skull & Crossbones then after reading this review you'll know why I forever dread playing the NES port. Released in 1989 by Atari Games, Skull & Crossbones is another arcade title that as with Vindicators, was grossly overlooked for the most part. Players take the role of either One-Eye or Red Dog, a pair of pirates on a swashbuckling adventure to reclaim their treasure and defeat the Evil Wizard who took it from them. What followed was a game that centered around something I have always enjoyed - sword fighting.

NES Version   Arcade Version

The execution is what made things stand out in my mind as the controls were slightly unconventional compared to other games. While player movement was controlled via a standard joystick there was one button to use your sword and another to turn around. Using the sword button along with different joystick directions allowed you to pull off different fencing moves. Since you would face the same direction even when moving back with the joystick, a certain amount of realism came into play. Instead of mindlessly going up to foes and beating on them until they die, you're in a full on sword fight with every enemy you encounter. Move up, lunge forward, parry to the side, take a step back, lunge forward again, turn around, slash the guy creeping up on you - it was great! Along the way buried treasure could be dug up for bonuses, event markers on the ground would trigger things such as swinging on ropes, and there was excellent audio and graphics throughout. Oh look, here comes the Tengen NES port to throw all that out the window.

First off the story has changed, instead of recovering treasure you are now on a quest to rescue a princess that the Evil Wizard captured. Why would pirates be rescuing a princess, it makes no sense but that's only the first misstep. Instead of being what was basically a pirate sword fighting simulation the core gameplay is changed to that of a platformer. No longer are you moving along through intense strategic sword fights, now you're jumping around like you're playing a bad hack of Rygar. Move around each of the small levels killing enemies that seem to randomly respawn until the game says you've killed enough and allows you to move on. Instead of your trusty sword, weapon powerups must

be found and picked up throughout the level, most of the time you'll end up throwing knives or using a gun. Also the graphics are downright ugly, especially when compared to the beautiful artwork of the arcade original.

I will give a nod to Tengen for keeping the two player simultaneous gameplay in there. However the screen is divided horizontally with player one up top and player two on the bottom, which makes the amount of the screen you can see far too small considering how large the sprites are. From a technical aspect, split screen multiplayer on the NES always impressed me but the game is just not fun. Considering the core changes, most of the stages are in there and an attempt has been made to make them somewhat like they were in the arcade but this just isn't Skull & Crossbones.

Skull & Crossbones in the arcade was hack and slash with realism and strategy. Skull & Crossbones on the NES is a reworked, rushed, and poorly conceived platformer. Not much to say, it's just bad. Is there anything redeeming about the Tengen port? Well the box art is really nice, reminiscent of hand drawn movie posters of old. Aside from that, this game is horrible and should be avoided at all costs. Without a doubt the only place the NES version of Skull & Crossbones belongs is walking the plank.

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

Nintendo Realm - Early November 1984 to Late January 1985
by Scott Jacobi

Before I start, I want to thank Michael McCourt for writing to me, and credit him with a term that I think is the perfect description for this column: Chronogaming. Chronogaming is the sequential playing of games in chronological order by release date. And that's precisely what this column strives to accomplish and present to you.

It's time for another dose of Famicom goodness as we wrap up 1984 and head in to 1985. This time around we have a lot more Namco goodness as well as Nintendo's own original entries that were responsible for establishing the core titles that would be released with the Nintendo Entertainment System in America and abroad. While Namco's titles were coming home (for the first time in some cases) many of Nintendo's titles later went on to become arcade game as part of Nintendo's Vs. series of games. One game is omitted this month, 4 Nin Uchi Mahjong released on November 2, 1984, a game developed by Nintendo to simulate the more common approach of playing mahjong with 4 players than just 2. But we kick it off with a bona fide classic.

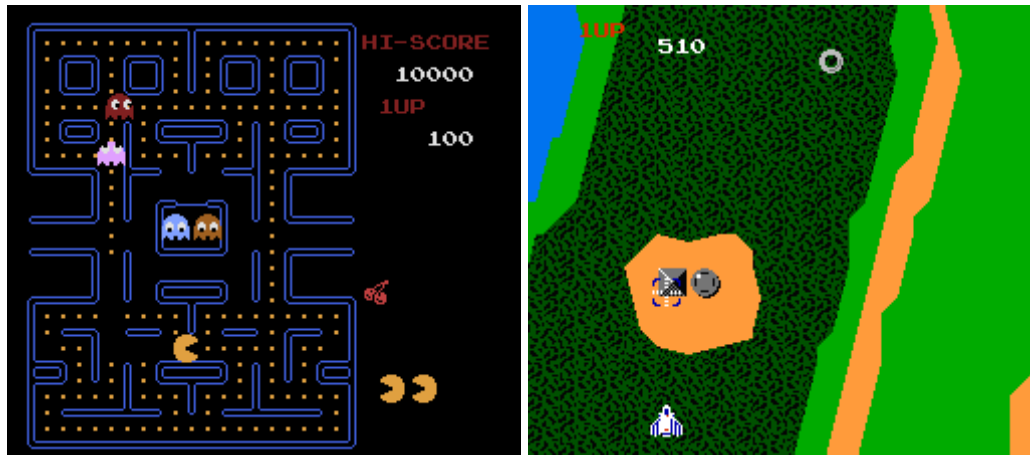Pac-Man, published by Namco and released on November 2, 1984
Pac-Man needs no introduction with RGTM readers. This is one of the greatest versions of Pac-Man ever released before 1985. It may not necessarily be the best (opinions will vary) but it was one of the first versions of the game to properly display the maze in vertical format instead of filling the TV screen with a horizontal version. (I believe the MSX version of Pac-Man precedes the Nintendo version as the first vertical presentation.) Pac-Man for the Famicom gets just about everything right (maze orientation, ghost colors, fruits, and intermissions) and sacrifices the number of dots contained in the maze in order to squeeze as much on the screen as possible. Score, lives, and fruit indicator have been moved to the right side of the screen. The only complaint that I have about this port is that the colors are a little dull, but I think that is due to the palette selection that the Famicom had available. Not arcade perfect, but closer than anyone else got at the time of it's release.

Xevious, published by Namco and released on November 8, 1984
Ah Xevious, the esteemed grandfather of the vertical shooter. Xevious is a game that I file under the category of games that I don't like as much as I think that I should. Perhaps it's the randomness of the enemy appearances. Perhaps it's the hidden nature of the flags and the silos. Whatever it is, Xevious is a worthwhile play, and the Famicom version is very close to the quality of the arcade version, save for some of the resolution and detail on the ground below (the roads look particularly odd.) You pilot

the Solvalou over enemy terrain bombing ground targets and taking down air targets that attempt to stop you. Ultimately you must face and bomb down the giant mothership. What really set this game apart for it's time is the game's method of evaluating your skill and increasing the difficulty of the enemies that you must face based on your performance. This idea would later be borrowed and improved upon in the Famicom and NES game Zanac.

Pac-Man   Xevious

Urban Champion, published by Nintendo and released on November 14, 1984
Urban Champion has garnered the least attention of all of Nintendo's early entries for the Famicom and NES, and in my humble opinion, rightfully so. It would not be fair to compare this game to Street Fighter II, as Urban Champion predates the ground breaking fighter by at least 6 years. Rather, it is more a contempory of Data East's Karate Champ. Nevertheless, Urban Champion pits you against an opponent in a one on one street fighting match that is limited to hard or soft, high or low punches. On each screen, you must force your opponent off the right side of the screen, and avoid allowing yourself to be pushed off the left. If you succeed at knocking your opponent to the right side three times, you will knock him in to a manhole and win the admiration of a lady in a window who dumps confetti on you, and the fight starts over again. As you progress more and more obstacles hinder your fighting, like people dropping a flower pot out of the window that stuns the person it falls on, or a police patrol rolling by which forces you both to reset your fight. Due to it's limited options and repetitive nature, it loses it appeal rather quickly.
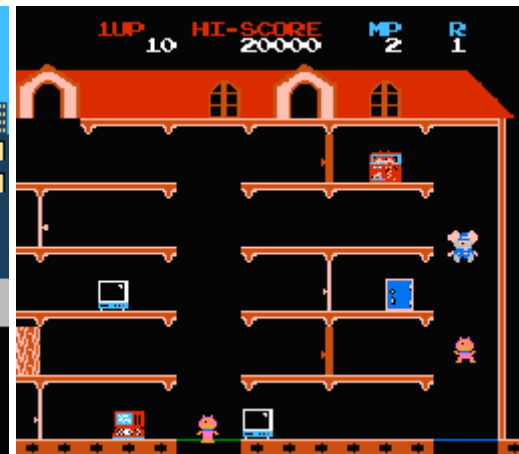
Mappy, published by Namco and released on November 14, 1984
Mappy is one of the lesser known early Namco arcade games in the United States. Like many of Namco's earlier efforts, it employs a rather cute cartoony style that suits the Famicom very well. Mappy is the story of a police mouse who is on a solo mission to reclaim all of the pairs of stolen goods from the Nyamco cat gang and their big boss Goro. The gang's store house is a mansion of platforms and trampolines. There are pairs of each stolen good, and bonus points are awarded when you pick up each item in the pair uninterrupted. In order to change levels, Mappy and the cats must bounce down to a trampoline and bounce back up to the proper level and slide over to the platform. Throughout the mansion there are doors, some normal, some special. If Mappy approaches a door and waits for some cats to approach the door from the other side before he opens it, he can knock down and temporarily stun the cats and run past them. If Mappy uses one of the special flashing doors, a wave will fly out from the door. Any cat that is caught in the wave is pushed off the screen and bonus points are awarded based on the number of cats removed. A round is completed when all items are collected, and every couple of rounds, Mappy is presented with a bonus round where he must capture balloons in an alloted time limit. Recommended.

Urban Champion

Mappy

Clu Clu Land, published by Nintendo and released on November 22, 1984
The best way to think of Clu Clu Land is as a reverse Pac-Man. You start with an empty grid and you must reveal the location of every gold bar. There's a catch however, as you don't have the same degree of control over your player as you had over Pac-Man. In order to move around the screen, Clu Clu must grab one of the poles as he passes by with his left or right claw. Doing so will begin to swing him around and reorient him. Other than colliding with a wall and bouncing back, this is the only way to change his direction. Of course there are enemies (in Clu Clu's case, sea urchins,) who are out to stop him, but Clu Clu can emit a sonic wave at them to stun them. Once stunned, you can then push them in to a wall to remove them from the board for a little while. Bonus fruits and timers appear which you can try to grab for points or to freeze the screen respectively. Clu Clu Land's appeal comes from the miriad of possibilities of patterns that the gold bars can be laid out in, from simple shapes, to patterns, to abstract designs. After the novelty of Clu Clu Land's controls wear off, you will either find it captivating or annoying, but the game is definitely worth trying.

Excitebike, published by Nintendo and released on November 30, 1984
Excitebike is probably better known for it's subsequent arcade release than for the original Famicom version. But in either format, Excitebike is a very original and timeless game because it hasn't lost any of it's appeal over twenty years later. It's still just as fun to play now as when I tried it out for the first time. You control a dirt bike racer as he covers a course loaded with hills and rampsin an effort to cross the finish line as quickly as possible. While you have the choice to race competively or alone in the cartridge version, both modes are combined in the arcade as a qualifying and competition round. Taking the ramps and jumping through the air is half of the fun, but in order to win the race, you must skillfully adjust the pitch of the bike so as to minimize the impact upon landing, or you will take the bump to hard and slow down. In severe cases you will fall off the bike completely and be thrown to the side where you must rapidly tap the buttons in order to speed your return to the course. When in competition with other racers, avoiding the other racers is advised, but if your skillful enough to cut them off with the rear of your bike you can send them tumbling and out of your way for a while. The cartridge version of Excitebike even allows you to build and test your own courses.
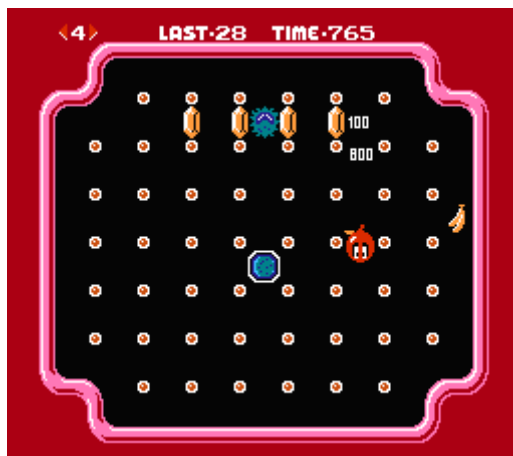
Clu Clu Land

Excitebike

Balloon Fight, published by Nintendo and released on January 22, 1985
Balloon Fight is Nintendo's interpretation of the very successful Joust. The similarities are as pleantiful as the enhancements. As the player, you must flap your arms and pop the balloons of your enemies by landing on them while avoiding being landed on. Unlike your opponents, you have two balloons, and thus an extra chance to continue should the enemy hit you from above. However, if you lose that balloon, your ability to rise becomes severly hampered. When you pop an enemy's balloon, you have the chance to kill them while they parachute down to a platform for bonus points or kick them off the platform when they land. If you don't kill them fast enough, they pump up another balloon and come back a little faster than before. When you kill an enemy, you get last chance for bonus points in the form of a bubble that floats up from the water. Along with the enemies, all of whose balloons you must pop to advance to the next round, there is a fish that hangs out in the water just waiting for someone to fly too close, and if you stay in the stage for too long, clouds will let loose one and then two lightning sparks that will kill you instantly. After every third round, you get a bonus round where you must try to catch all 20 balloons before they float off the screen. Out of all of the Nintendo games which were converted to the Vs. arcade system, Balloon Fight had the most radical change. In the arcade version, all of the stages are two screen high, so the game scrolls vertically. Of all of Nintendo's early games, this is my favorite game to chase the elusive rolling over of the score from 999,999 to 0.

Ice Climber, published by Nintendo and released on January 30, 1985
To me, Ice Climber is a deceptive game. At first glance, it looks fantastic with it's bright colors and a lot of animation going on throughout the screen. The problem is, for me at least, the concept wears thin in a very short amount of time. As the ice climber, you start at the bottom of the mountain and you must jump and climb your way to the top where a pteradactyl like bird is flying above the peak. In most cases, you must use your hammer (automatically) whenever you jump to chip away at the platform above your head. Once an opening is available, you must jump up to the next platform and repeat. At any given moment, any number of dangers can get in your way, from polar bears, to little snow beasts that try to repair the gaps, to birds the fly lazily around the screen. Icicles drop from above, some platforms push you in certain directions, and wind gusts can begin to blow you off of your current ledge. All in all, it's a giant vertical obstacle course. And while it appears cute and well made for it's time, after I play for a long time, I get a little frustrated with the controls. But this is the type of game that people either love or hate with very little compromise in between. So I would say the game is worth a try to figure out which side of mountain you fall on. Ice Climber was recently dragged out of modern day obscurity thanks to the addition of the Ice Climbers to Super Smash Bros. Melee on the Gamecube.

Balloon Fight
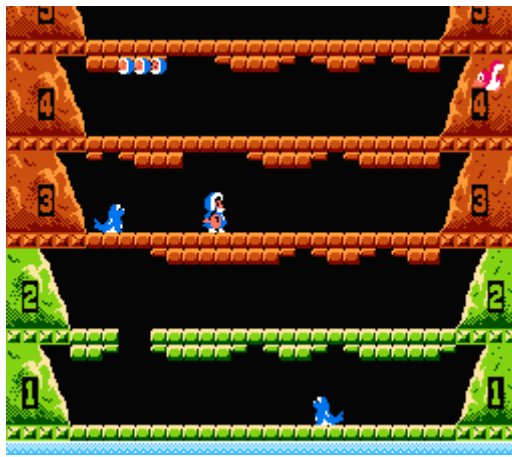
Ice Climber

The Thrill Of Defeat: Commodore Plus/4 & Commodore 16 - A-C
by Mark Sabbatini

Sequels to major hits are often a letdown, but this is ridiculous.

We're talking "Caddyshack 2" and "New Coke" ridiculous.

This is the story of two of the worst concepts in home computing following two of the best, albeit with a modified happy ending thanks to a modern-day fan base. Many of the games for the machines were decent and dozens are playable today with an emulator that works online using only a Web browser. Those unfamiliar with 8-bit computer games beyond the usual arcade megahits will find it one of the better such collections that are this easy to play.

The Commodore 64 was king (and tyrant, some argue, due to strong-arm marketing tactics) of the home computer world during the early- to mid-1980s, becoming the best-selling 8-bit computer ever. The company's Vic-20 was a noble prince, ruling the bargain bin crowd. Both offered lower costs than the major competition, vast amounts of popular software and were widely available in regular retail stores rather than computer shops. They had various quirks, often due to cheap parts, such as mediocre display quality. The BASIC programming language was terrible, but most consumers were happy to let preprogrammed software harness the power of the machines.

The machines that came to shove them aside were not heirs, but jesters.

Commodore Plus/4

Strictly speaking, the Commodore Plus/4 and Commodore 16 were not pure successors to the 64 and Vic, but stores frequently sold them assuming they were. Other machines entered the company's lineup, including a more competitive Commodore 128 intended as a true 64 replacement. But the result was mostly confusion that became increasingly irrelevant since the PC, Macintosh and - to a lesser extent - Commodore's own Amiga were rapidly bringing an end to the 8-bit computing era.

It might have been amusing to sit in Commodore's boardroom when the highly paid suits, presumably after intelligent discussion, made decisions such as:

- Making the Plus/4 and Commodore 16 incompatible with software from their predecessors and much of their hardware.

- Technology no more advanced than existing machines. In fact, many aspects are actually weaker, such the Plus/4 having weaker sound and gaming graphics than the 64.

- Preprogramming the Plus/4 with various applications such as a word processor and database manager, but making them among the most feature deprived and poorly programmed versions ever. Newbies whose first introduction to word processing was trying to slog through this muddle were driven away from computing rather than being attracted to it, to say nothing of the idea of paying more money to software companies for "quality" applications.

These misfires and more contributed to short shelf lives for the two machines. The Plus/4 was introduced in June 1984, the same year as the C16, and discontinued a year later. Software from Commodore was scarce, but a reasonable number of third-party titles eventually surfaced, often from companies making games for machines such as the Spectrum. Independent programmers also contributed, including many whose work appeared years after the machines were off the market.

There's enough raw horsepower in the machines to make them at least competitive again much of the 8-bit competition. The Plus/4 has 64K of RAM, 1.76 MHz 6510 processor, 320×200 video resolution and 128 colors (the latter among the best in the class). The built-in BASIC is far superior to the Commodore 64 and users were able to use nearly all the RAM for programming, in contrast to most machines allowing access to only about half the memory. But since most commercial quality games were written in machine language and users were increasingly looking to buy programs rather than write their own, these were not significant upgrades. The missing or downgraded items were far more critical: in addition to the weak two-channel sound chip, the Plus/4 lacks sprite graphics, a crucial feature for game programmers trying to manipulate objects on the screen.

The Commodore 16 has many of the same specs, but 16K of RAM and no built-in ROM applications beyond BASIC. Most games that run on the C16 are compatible with the Plus/4.

The software catalog is surprisingly robust given the limited life and capabilities of the machines, due no doubt in part to companies thinking one way or another something from Commodore would inevitably gain legs. There's no official versions of some top-line titles like Pac-Man, Flight Simulator and Wizardry, but well-known programs like Manic Miner, One-On-One and the Zork trilogy are among those ported. Many are competitive compared to those on other platforms, although there are some notably disappointments.

Overall quality is rather broad, ranging from games that look and play like poor Atari 2600 carts to some matching high quality Commodore 64 titles in all aspects. Also, the inconsistency applies to where the software comes from: some of the biggest whiffs come from reputed companies while home programmers can claim ownership of blue-ribbon efforts.

Those without a machine wanting to play games today have a few emulation options, but far and away the easiest method is the nearly 300-game online database at www.Commodore16.com. The Minus 4 Java emulator runs titles in a one-for-one pixel mode (meaning small screens on most displays, since the 320-pixel width is about a quarter of today's displays), with options for using keys as substitutes for joysticks and the ability to slow down the action. There's little guidance on playing the titles when you click on their links in the emulator (even a basic description or screenshot would be nice), but the site offers vast amounts of documentation, user group reports and other information which makes it easier to figure things out.

The reviews below are based on the emulated versions, since even a quality title that is buggy or uncontrollable on a modern machine is of little use to users who have no other way to play them. As such, it's worth noting the grades may vary considerably from reviews by those who played them on the actual machines (easily found in the publication and user group sections of the site). Also, a number of the games did not run or were impossible to control on my machine (a Mac powerbook) and most aren't included in the reviews. It's possible users of other machines may have more luck

with the titles not listed.

Those overwhelmed by the selection of games, or lack of information about them, will find a much better introduction to the machines at the Commodore Plus/4 World site at http://plus4.emucamp.com/playonline.htm. The selection of playable games, using the same emulator, is smaller, but quality is generally good and there are screenshots of each title. This site also has a considerable amount of general information about the machines.

The reviews will continue in alphabetical order, along with feedback from modern day users and other input, for the next several months. Anyone playing these games who has thoughts or disagreements with my opinions are encouraged to email them to me at marksabbatini@yahoo.com. Where possible, I will include them in future articles in an attempt to provide as complete a guide to games for these machines as possible.

AFL Balderdash (D+)
Like Tetris, if you're going to play a game this common, the only thing that really matters is how well it's programmed. And this is awful, unless the demons of emulation somehow are working their evils on it. First of all, the entire screen flickers and flashes constantly, inducing motion sickness. Second, the graphics are too dark, making your poorly drawn character hard to see. Third, if you trap yourself on a screen with no way to solve it there appears to be no way to abort the wave, meaning you have to wait for the very slow timer to run out. There's too many clones of this game on almost any platform to waste time with this version.

Air Combat Emulator (not graded)
This first-person air combat simulator helpfully notes the instructions for playing are "on the back of the inlay card," so my clunky efforts to figure things out were less than successful. Accordingly, I'm offering some excerpts from a review in the C16/Plus4 handbook, an excellent user magazine whose scanned pages can be read in the Information section of Commodore16.com: It says that despite slow missile firing and a seemingly random determination of hits on enemy plane, ACE is a good arcade simulation requiring lots of skill with the radar to find targets. "Certainly one of the dearer C16/Plus 4 games and a good value, although £2 less would have been ideal." A Plus/4-only version with numerous extra missions, options like selectable weapons, and factors such as daylight and weather gets much stronger praise for being "only a £1 more than the C16 version for at least four times the game." Fans of such games may want to tinker around with the emulated version and see if they can get things working.

Airwolf II (C-)
When you're dealing with those largely similar "just another horizontal space shooter" titles, it's the little things that often make big differences between the winners and losers. This is one of the losers. It's a Scramble-like multistage quest, minus the need to constantly bomb fuel tanks, scrolling somewhat unusually from left to right. The concept is OK, with various ship and weapon enhancements possible by collecting the right items, and a nice variety of landscapes and enemies. But your movement, the graphics and collision detection are all amateur class. The controls are too imprecise. Often objects tend to overlap and partially block each other out. And often you die by simply being near something instead of actually hitting it. Disappointing, considering this comes from Elite Software, one of the few well-known software houses to produce titles for these machines.

Arthur Noid (B)
An Araknoid clone, but a polished one with a couple of interesting touches. Programmed in 1988 (not '98 as the "Arthurnoid98" title might suggest), it's got the usual multitude of brick fields with various pellets that enhance your paddle or put multiple balls into play. There's also things like what appears to be a ball muncher that cross the screen in rare occasions - I didn't actually get any balls to collide with it, so I can't say for certain. The emulated version does a good job of substituting the arrow keys for the joystick, graphics are equal to any (not hard with this game) and overall it will please anyone into the genre.

Atari Golf (not graded)
Mentioned only for reference purposes, since this text-based simulation appears to be an official Atari title released in Germany (seems like an unusual arena for them, although someone more knowledgeable might know if this was common). Looks like a hundred other games of this nature, where you type in numbers resembling things like club selection and swing speed, and the result is graphically depicted.

Atlantis (C+)
No, this is not a conversion of the popular Imagic title. Good news: Instead it's an unauthorized rip-off of Drol, an amusing side-scrolling maze shooter that achieved modest success during the 1980s. Unfortunately, it's really slow and lacking a lot of the original's whimsical charm. The original involved maneuvering a little guy with a jet pack around a four-level maze, protecting children by touching them and shooting the cartoonish nightmares bouncing around in pursuit with "reality pills." Here you're a diver rescuing your companions from various sea creatures that aren't nearly as cute or innovative. Despite all the major flaw of running at about half the speed of the real thing, it's tempting to bump the grade up a bit because basics such as control, gameplay and so on are solid, but since it's a clone instead of original title it stays here.

Auf Wiedersehen Monty (B+)
A quality platform arcade game, although the emulated controls are a bit tricky (Z,X,], / for movement, <RETURN> to jump, and G to resume if you hit S or one of a few other pause keys). You guide a bear through a series of cavern-like screens, avoiding the typical variety of enemies while collecting "TC" circles that are the apparent item of desire. Enemy movement is fixed, the treasures don't seem vital for making it from screen to screen and there was nothing at least early in the game not seen elsewhere - ropes, crushing pipes, deadly falls into moats and so on. But everything is well assembled, the graphics are attractive and the level of challenge is nicely implemented. One thing of note is this seems to be a hacked version that offers unlimited lives.

Ball (C)
Very polished Breakout game that unfortunately is unreasonably hard due to a small playfield. The game looks more like Araknoid, but I didn't see any power pellets during what little I was able to play. Control is OK for a keyboard, but the ball angle and speed increase too quickly to levels where it's almost impossible to keep the ball in play.

Blitz 16 (D+)
One of my favorite bedroom programmer games that exists in some form for pretty much every old computer, but an amateur homebrew title nonetheless. A plane flies across the screen, dropping a level and reappearing on the other side each time it reaches the edge, and the player uses a single key to drop bombs on buildings at the bottom of the screen. The bombs must clear out all the buildings by the time to plane reaches them or it crashes into them and the game ends. I've always liked the simple challenge for short spins, but it has little replay value and this version is a bit pokey. And the graphics are strictly functional. It's a perfectly serviceable version, but doesn't stand out or compare to much more elaborate games available for the machine.

BMX Simulator (D+)

All the ingredients for a decent racing game are here, but somebody didn't cook them very well. It's a single-screen, overhead-view racer like the Off Road series, apparently with seven different tracks. Two bikes, either player- or computer-controlled, in theory race to complete a set number of laps. Controls are flexible and some of the graphics are attractive. Problems, however, are significant. The graphics for the bikes are poor and too close to the background colors, making it hard to tell where your bike is and what direction it is facing. And the computer AI is non-existent. Every time I played it got itself trapped into a corner of the screen unable to escape. When a bug that series survives the rest of the game doesn't matter.

Bobby Bearing (B-)
A Marble Madness derivative, meaning you guide a marble (or bearing, I guess, complete with a smiley face) through 3D mazes avoiding various pitfalls, but they differ from those of the Atari classic. Among the notable changes are the mazes are a series of linked single-screen challenges, rather than a series of scrolling playfields. Also, the starting time limit is far more generous. It's fun, creative, moves at good speed and the black-and-white graphics are decent, if not stellar. Physics and gravity could probably use a little help, but they're not seriously amiss. The real problem with playing this on an emulator is the same as any version - using keys instead of a trackball or analogue joystick just doesn't offer the kind of control needed.

Bob Driving (C-)
The Winter Olympics were happening as I wrote this review, so I really wanted to like this bobsled racer. And it has some virtues, despite being a pretty simple avoid-the-objects-scrolling-upward game that tons of people wrote, even as beginning programmers. The graphics are nice and controls logical once you figure them out ("<" and "/" for left and right, "." to go straight ahead). You're supposed to pass through all the gates in the shortest amount of time, avoiding trees and other obstacles. But it's far too hard, due partially to keys that are slow to respond and in part to very strict collision detection and other programming decisions. A single crash ends a game, which tends to drain the willpower to keep playing quickly.

Bongo (B+)
An intriguing cross between Miner 2049er and Popeye, likely to score with fans of either platformer. One or two players control a guy working his way through levels picking up drifting letters to spell "Congo" while avoiding another guy whose AI is basically taking the most direct route to you. Unlike Popeye, the letters go up as well as down and there's no penalty for letting them sit too long - but there is an overall time limit to each level. The "Miner" part is the platforms, complete with elevators, slides, trampolines to jump gaps and other ways of getting around. You can also trigger random jumps with the spacebar (it does not seem to have unlimited use) when you're trapped in a location you can't escape Mr. Enemy Dude from. The graphics aren't great or all that clear at first - both you and the enemy look rather big, goofy and fuzzy. And there's a slight lag after you capture all the letters and the end of the level - meaning possible death for those who relax or are facing close calls. But they're pretty minor grips. There's a relatively puny five screens, but a level editor helps compensate. Among the other nice touches are requiring a keystroke to resume play after you die and lots of selectable options such as starting screens and number of men.

Booty 16 (incomplete)

A dungeon maze platformer that looks promising, but was a bit too difficult for me to explore in-depth. You pick up color-coded keys to unlock doors and other objects such as bombs to get past obstacles and enemies, although I cannot say if there is an overall quest. Things move a bit slowly and the graphics, while detailed, suffer a bit of flickering. The difficulty comes from needing to be very careful choosing what order to open the doors, because it seems you can get trapped in impossible situations otherwise.

Bubble Trouble (D+)
This is half a game in search of a plot. You control a bubble on single-screen playfield, eating bubbles for points while avoiding giant letters that appear one a time. OK, but everything is way too simple. Most of the bubbles scroll upward from a single location and the letters simply appear at the top, descend straight to the bottom and go back up. It's enough of a challenge to avoid the letters that games don't go on forever, but there's no obvious goals and not much enjoyment due to the monotony.

Carnage (incomplete)
Either I'm missing something or this 1994 release is an incomplete version of a promising horizontal space shooter. You ship shoots things coming from the right of the screen, but the only controls I could get to work were the fire, up and down keys. It seems some sort of horizontal movement and maybe some weapon options ought to be there, but aren't. If this is the complete game, than it's merely some nice monochrome graphics surrounding a half-finished project. But since I can't say for sure, it's unfair to grade it as such.

Casino Blackjack (C)
Basic blackjack game that's most interesting as a way of learning some basic German, since that's the language it's presented in. Everything's simple enough for most people to figure things out even if they don't know the language. You can hit, double, stand and split pairs, making this a decent recreational pasttime, but it doesn't offer learning tools of "serious" programs such as card counts and advice for specific situations. Too common a game to merit a higher rating.

Caverns In The Mountains (incomplete)
Looks like a "Rogue"-type dungeon maze game using text for graphics, but it's in German and, unlike the blackjack game above, I couldn't figure things out on intuition.

Chippy (C+)
Tetris clone with a larger variety of bricks, mediocre controls and an annoying visual background consisting of diagonal lines that constantly scroll. Fans may enjoy working with unfamiliar pieces, but keystrokes sometimes are missed in the emulated version and the down key triggers an instant drop to the bottom instead of simply accelerating its pace, which I've always hated in any version. Things like those scrolling lines also keep it from feeling professionally polished.

Choplifter (B)
This is a sentimental favorite from my Apple II days, so it's hard not to give it a decent grade. The plot, for those unfamiliar with the multi-platform megahit, is to guide a chopper over a horizontal landscape, descending to pick up hostages and return them to your home base. Tanks on the ground and enemy planes in the air are the hazard, not only to to you, but also to the hostages if any missiles hit them. The appeal of the game was the flexible, but fairly easy controls and weapons - you can move your chopper backward and forward while facing in either direction or "sideways," with the latter position also allowing you drop bombs on tanks and pick up hostages. The problem with this version is all of the chopper turning and firing controls are triggered by a single joystick button or key press; hit it rapidly to fire and hold it down to turn. This leads to some unwanted actions, usually during the most

harried times. Also, this game's long term appeal is limited because eventually you can "win" the game by returning all the hostages to base. But it's a fun way to experience the classic if you haven't already on superior platforms like the Apple, Atari or Commodore 64 computers, and superior to conversions for simpler machines like the Vic 20.

Chopper War (C-)
There's some games that just scream "I was programmed on a mediocre computer" and this horizontal scrolling shooter is one of them. Your chopper flies over an ocean shooting enemies coming from the right of the screen, but there's nothing original about the concept and the execution is clunky. All the movement is blocky because the ship and enemies appear to be based on the text charter grid rather than a graphics screen, making gameplay more like an LED handheld than an arcade game. Considering the best games for this machine can come close to Commodore 64 levels, having one that could be an Atari 2600 cart doesn't cut it.

Convoy (D)
It's possible the horrible speeds and poor controls of this underwater shooter are due to emulation issues, but even with these factors out of the equation this isn't much of a game. Your sub at the bottom of the screen shoots battleships crossing the screen and dropping torpedos from above. The emulated version moves too fast and the controls, while logical, are imprecise. But the real problem is you only get one life. There's no motivation to play when you know a single mistake negates a good effort.

Cops And Robbers (B)
Solid multiscreen maze arcade game, where you try to collect diamonds from places like factories and mines while avoiding cops, monsters and other hazards. You can shoot enemies to make them temporarily disappear, but you only have a limited supply of bullets (more can be found in various rooms). Graphics are simple but effective, playing speed and controls are good, and the maze layouts and concepts are effective (if, like most of the game, simple and not terribly original). Major hangup is when you die you start over on the first screen. Also, to some degree progress can be made by learning and following patterns since enemy movement is rather predictable. But overall it's a well-executed version of a common concept and likely to draw players in for multiple games at a time.

Cross It 2 (incomplete)
A very slickly presented "action puzzle" game, where one has to figure out solutions to manipulating a series of Tetris-like shapes on the screen. Trouble is, the instructions are in German, so it's hard to know exactly how they're manipulated by the joystick controls and what the objective is. But the game looks solid enough puzzle fans might want to try it a few times to see if they can figure out the rules, because the reward may be worth it.

Csillaghorcos (C+)
Vertical space-shooter that looks and plays like a second-rate Megamania. Waves of aliens move in different patterns and attack your ship at the bottom of the screen by firing and/or diving. The action is quick enough and the emulated joystick control is good, but there isn't enough challenge or variety once you get past the initial learning curve. There seems to be about six different waves that repeat, and the patterns the aliens move in are predictable enough that I was cycling through the waves without much trouble after a couple of games. The graphics are also pretty bland. It's not a bad game, just nothing worth going out of the way for.

Game Over

Well time to say Game Over on this issue. Again I apologize for the short issue. Hopefully my life will start calming down enough for me to devote more time to this mag. Thanks for reading and be sure to check out the next issue of RTM.

\- **[Adam King](#)**, Chief Editor