

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, complete with more retrogaming goodness for those of you who still hold a candle for the Atari. Before we get to the articles, I have an announcement to make about the future of this newsletter.

This is going to be my final issue as chief editor.

When Tom Zjaba made the decision to discontinue this newsletter's forbearer, Retrogaming Times, 2 1/2 years ago, some of us wanted to continue the newsletter under a new name. So I volunteered to be the head editor, and RTM was born.

Unfortunately things have changed over the months. These days I just don't have the time or interest to devote to the newsletter. You'll notice that I haven't written any articles in the past 6 months, other than something here or there. Rather than constantly put forth a half-hearted effort, I decided to step down and let someone else take the reigns of RTM.

Don't worry, this newsletter WILL continue, just with a new person at the helm. So let's get this issue underway.

The Many Faces of . . . Super Cobra

by Alan Hewston

We continue our string of honoring titles that are now 25 years old - in the Many Faces of "Super Cobra". This is one of the few games we'll only be reviewing the sequel. In this case, the prequel, "Scramble", was only officially released on 1 home system in the classic era, the Vectrex. There were C64 and other systems that had rip-offs and clones, of both games, but none were officially licensed. At their roots, Scramble and Super Cobra are the same game. In Scramble, you fly a space fighter through a cavern with outer space enemies, and then in Super Cobra, your vehicle is now a helicopter, which invades a cavernous enemy base where you ultimately will find their Booty. Both are horizontal scrollers where the playfield scrolls and you use an 8-direction joystick to maneuver, avoid enemies, obstacles and the floors and ceilings of the cavern. You can move from the left edge of the screen to nearly half way across, and maneuver vertically almost the entire range of the screen. You have an unlimited supply of weapons at your disposal, but you are constantly running out of fuel. Monitor your fuel gauge (on screen) and watch it get a small re-supply with every enemy fuel tank you

destroy. One fire button sends missiles (machine guns) out horizontally, and another button drops bombs downward and slightly ahead of you. You earn a small number of points simply by progressing along each zone and earn larger scores for destroying enemies. In addition to the fuel and Booty, there are 6 enemy types, "Straight Rockets" that fire from the ground; "Artillery" firing from the ground; "Roof Bombs" that fall down; "Flobbynoids" that swarm and move left; "Fire Balls" that meander up/down; and "Flying Saucers" that move left and fire horizontally. In each zone there is at most one flying enemy; there are some enemies that are active and some that are inactive; and the combinations of which enemies and if they are active or not varies from zone to zone. But each zone is always the same on that version, varying from home version to home version. After 1,000 miles, each zone ends, and then after a brief pause in the action, the terrain and combination of enemies changes for the next zone. After 10 zones, you reach the Enemy Base where the Booty awaits you. After collecting the Booty you begin all over again, with the same 11 zones, the same missions, but at a higher level of difficulty (the enemies fire/launch more frequently and your fuel burns up just a wee bit faster).

Nutshell: See the fuel. Shoot the fuel. Fire like crazy while avoiding any contact.

For screenshots see:

www.mobygames.com/game/super-cobra/screenshots &

www.classicgaming.com/o2home/db/cart.asp?cartid=130&masterid=67

Original release: Arcade 1981 Stern/Konami - unknown. All home versions released in 1983 by Parker Brothers - mostly unknown credits

- Atari 5200 & 8 bit computer - by Paul Wilson
- Atari 2600, Colecovision, Intellivision, Odyssey 2.
- MSX (not covered in this review)

Rumor Mill: Planned by Parker Brothers, but never released:

- Vic 20 (announced Fall '83 release date) & TI-99

Home Version Similarities - except those in < > all home versions have: a choice of 1 or 2 players <2600, O2 & CV>; a pause feature <CV & O2>; choice of starting skill level <Atari 8 bit, 5200, CV & O2>; your current level (or difficulty) is never displayed on any version; each level has the same 11 zones in sequence; each zone has different terrain, obstacles and a unique combination of which

enemies are present and/or active; subsequent levels are harder because your fuel supply depletes just a wee bit more rapidly <INTV? & O2> and the enemies fire at you more frequently; all 6 enemy types from the arcade are present <2600>; 2 separate fire buttons (or firing techniques) <2600, 5200 & Atari 8 bit> are used, one to fire machine guns, the other to drop bombs; your machine gun fires horizontally all <CV (part way)> the way across the screen; on-screen there can simultaneously be 2+ chopper attacks of the same type (machine gun and bombs) <2600 & INTV both (only 1 shot each and the next one replaces the existing one wherever it is)>; your display includes an easy to read fuel gauge <O2 & INTV> and graphics indicating which zone you are currently in <O2 & INTV>; there's a brief break in the action <2600 & O2> and change in scenery at the half way point of each zone; you re-start each new chopper at the beginning or mid point of the zone; there is no bonus life to be earned; when all choppers are lost, there's an option to continue <INTV & O2> your next game at the



Spot the phony Super Cobra Cart(s) and win a \$1,000 Booty.

current zone, either at the start or mid-point; there's a short break and "mileage cleared" for each zone completed <O2 & 2600> and then "Congratulations" after escaping the base with the "Booty"; there is no fuel <Atari 8 bit, & 5200> on the final, Base zone, so you must not delay; if you miss grabbing the Booty, the zone repeats until the game ends or you collect it; you can move the stick hard left and thus move backwards faster <2600, O2 & CV> than the screen scrolls; you can only move right only about to the midpoint of the screen <O2>; there's no music during gameplay, save a short piece just as the action begins <INTV only on title screen>, and then again after completing each zone; your chopper makes some background noise and on some ports that effect changes with your speed/position; there are unique sounds for both the enemy artillery shots fired and rocket launches; there is no special sound when you destroy fuel or grab the Booty; but if your fuel runs low, you can see your gauge getting low and hear <O2 & INTV> an audio warning as well. The best effects on most systems are the distinct sounds for the enemy missiles and rocket launches. Only the INTV version has a demo mode - game select #5.

The 2600 & 5200 carts are not too hard to find. The CV & Atari 8 bit are a little harder to find, while the INTV and O2 are rare - primarily only released in Europe.

Have Nots: Odyssey II (32)

My first reaction was I expected and confirmed this port is easily better than the average O2 game. Using the O2 multi-cart, on an NTSC machine it plays just fine. The Gameplay is good enough (6) that you can tell it's Super Cobra but it is changed. Instead of long scrolling zones with 20-30 enemies, obstacles and fuel tanks, the action takes place on one screen (zone) at a time, with only a handful of enemies. Instead of varying your location (if there were scrolling), you can vary your speed (moving to the right) from slow (hold stick left) to normal (do nothing) to full speed (hold stick right), and still move nearly the full vertical range of the screen. You begin on the left and move to the right edge to complete each zone. At that point, the action freezes and the screen (along with your chopper) scrolls to the left revealing the next zone. Your chopper remains at the same height, so when possible, finish each zone near the middle so you can easily avoid any starting walls in the next zone. The next biggest deviation is the lack of a fuel gauge. Then there's the short, 1 screen, not scrolling, 4 to 6 enemy test. Both of these really hurt the game's depth and ability to slowly get more challenging. Fortunately a unique gameplay element was added - by limiting the supply of bombs. This really helps because now you must use your limited supply of bombs wisely. You get a set number specific to each zone, seen on-screen as pips for each bomb, which disappear when used.



Parker Bros really did have a sweepstakes to win a Super Cobra flight jacket.

Better still, unlike most home versions, there is a unique way to activate these bombs. To fire machine guns, press fire and immediately let go. To drop a bomb (if you have one), you press fire and hold it for a heartbeat, then it will release. Another big change is that you now have 10 lives or hits (seen on screen) before the game is over. When hit, you'll see a small, temporary fire & color change while the "hits" counter decreases yet the action continues. If you hit a wall, then your chopper explodes (still only one hit) and you begin again at the left edge of that screen - but at the same height when you exploded. So beware as this could lead to double-deaths. You cannot earn any more hits. As is the case on most versions, the enemies will fire at you or launch based upon your horizontal position on the screen, so it is often most prudent to move at the slowest speed, until you need to sprint out of

their way to avoid them. Flying slowly is not always the case, so be prepared for both extremes. AFAIK a few enemies in the later zones have some randomness to keep you honest regarding your speed. The best screens are the ones with the least landscape, and on those you face the swarms of horizontally moving enemies, providing the most arcade-like action. On the base zone, you MUST collect the Booty or you lose a life (hit) and the zone starts over again. Addictiveness is blah (5), with no pause in the action, no stating options, only 1 player, no continuation and the next game even starts up on its own. The double-deaths are annoying, but something you can try/plan to avoid. Too bad they did not let you accumulate bombs from zone to zone, that would add more strategy to the game. Graphics are mediocre (5) with all blocky graphics, no active scrolling, one screen per zone, fewer enemies, and significantly less action. On a good note, both of your chopper's rotors and some enemies are animated, some enemies are multi-colored and the chopper's explosion is about the best on the O2. Sound is decent (6) with music to begin each zone and the background chopper noise which varies depending upon its speed. Most effects are in place, but some are a bit odd and/or repeated and some cutting out of effects does occur. Controls are perfect (10).

Have Nots: Intellivision (36)

My first reaction was that I'll never own this rare cart, but IntelliSteve came to my rescue and answered most of my 50+ questions to provide Intellivision fans with a full review of this cart. Since Steve only had the (somewhat unique and lesser) O2 port to compare with, he could not help in our scoring. If you disagree with a score, blame me, not Steve. Now then, had I owned this cart, my first reaction would have been to notice the unique scrolling text messages. Begins each life or zone with "Get ready player y", "Choppers n", and then alternates between "Score" and "Fuel value" - all while scrolling in sync along the top of the battlefield. This is really neat, covering several elements but then also hurts your ability to know your vitals at a glance. Fortunately when your fuel is running low, the display changes to say "fuel critical", in red text. This helps give you that added visual cue/warning. Other messages are "x miles completed", "Congratulations", and if you miss the Booty, "Challenge again". The Gameplay is of good quality (8), matching the medal winners with all the enemies and good combinations of enemies in 11 zones. As noted, the choppers remaining, fuel gauge and score are not always displayed. You can select skill levels 1-4. 1) = easiest skill & 9 choppers. 2) to 4) = 6 choppers and slightly higher starting difficulty. 5) = selects the full demo with multiple zones and full audio effects. Addictiveness is fun to play (7) with the standard INTV diagonal pause feature, but no option to "continue". Like the arcade, you have 2 fire buttons - one per machine guns and 1 for bombs. Unfortunately, you can only have one shots or bomb at a time as subsequent firings will replace the existing one. Graphics are effective (7) with good clarity and use of colors, variety & decent backgrounds. The chopper and some explosions are nicely animated, but most everything is mono colored. The scrolling is smooth and there is a fair amount of detail and a wild variety of background graphics and color combos in use. A fair number of enemies can be moving simultaneously (7+?) moving in the swarm zones. Sound is worth while (6) I'm probably scoring it higher than Steve suggests. Steve says "effects & music are a C-, as they're extremely basic and mildly unpleasant". There's music on the title screen but none throughout, and no jingle when you complete a zone, start a new life or end the game. There is no audio warning for the low fuel. The rocket woosh is nice, but sometimes cuts out, when too many effects are occurring simultaneously. Minor audio cutouts are OK, and occurred on many games on most of these 8 bit era machines. Controls I'll guess a score of (8). For most non-Inty fans, the controller is somewhat difficult to use for an action packed and firing intensive game like this. Steve says a good controller does the job.

Have Nots: Atari 2600 (36)

My first reaction was the scrolling is choppy and seems too fast even at the default "medium" speed. At the "Fast" speed (skill setting) the game becomes even more of a maneuvering contest with little time for strategy or fun. So, give it a try at "slow" and enjoy it for a while. The Gameplay, albeit too fast IMHO, is effective (7), with most elements working as expected. There are fewer enemies on-screen at the same time. Missing are the "Flobbynoids", & "Flying Saucers", which are all represented by the "Fireballs". There is only one fire button to use, so shots alternate between machine guns and bombs. A limitation is that all missiles (1 to 4) often launch simultaneously. Addictiveness is not too bad (6),

aside from the fast speed of the game and just like the INTV, only one of each weapon can be displayed on-screen, before being replaced. There is a nice pause feature using the <B/W> switch. Fuel continues to be consumed between zones and you are not given a free re-fuel either. One should be able to adjust to this more realistic scheme. Zone 9 is REALLY long and zone 10 appears to have more than one random maze, one of which has a "killer" (darn-near impossible) passage. Finally, the Base zone has no fuel to collect whatsoever and if you miss the Booty you'll run out of fuel before the next time around - the ultimate reality check. Graphics are respectable (6) with good clarity and some details. The color and graphics variety are adequate, but the scrolling is choppy. The displays are good but the only animation and multi-color is your chopper. The number of on screen enemies is reduced, but sufficient to keep your interest. The Sound is worth while (7) with start (and end of zone) music and all of the effects that the medal winners have. Unfortunately some of the effects are poor, repeated and sometimes cut out. Controls are perfect (10).

Bronze Medal: Colecovision (38)

My first reaction was this has the best color choices and variety making the enemies very distinct from the less busy backgrounds. Gameplay is impressive (8), nearly all there, with minor deductions each for having only 1 player and no choice of starting levels (or difficulty). The bombs take a weird descent path but otherwise all enemy types are here with plenty on-screen action. The Booty zone keeps recycling with no fuel anywhere. Addictiveness is OK (6) with no pause, the action starts right up, and the controls will drive your hands to pain all-too-fast. The weird bomb angle makes it frustrating as some fuel or enemy target are impossible to bomb. The machine gun fire is not the full length of the screen so you have to adjust to this and make sure you shot what you thought you shot. The collision detection is only an issue here on the CV, where it is just quirky enough that you'll be perplexed a few times here and there. The Graphics are pretty good (7), with the best clarity and good detail and color variety. Besides the explosions, your chopper is the only thing animated, and there is no multi-color to be found. The displays and scrolling are fine and the number of enemies is sufficient to enjoy some moments of on-screen chaos. Sound is pleasant (8), probably the best of any version. The intro music and completing each zone jingle is good, with all the effects found on other versions as well. The machine guns and bombs each have different sounds, as do the enemy artillery and rockets. Alas there are some audio cut outs as well. Controls should be a 10 here, and the use of the 2 fire buttons could easily be the best, and very comfortable here IF the "Super" action controllers worked for "Super" Cobra. But no! Instead, you must standard CV controllers, of which I generously scored Controls a (9). It is very hard to repeatedly press and fire both buttons while steering non-stop - the cramping sets in. I had no better luck using Wico or Amiga sticks.

Gold Medal: Atari 8 bit & 5200 (42)

A tie for the gold. As usual, they are nearly the exact same game. My first reaction was there were no start level options here either, just 2 players. The Atari 5200 has the same scoring and notes as the Atari 8 bit computer, except as noted below.

Atari 8 bit Computer (42):

Gameplay is the most complete (8) with the option to continue, all enemies types are present, and has the most on-screen enemies and action (on average). Biggest penalty is that of only having 1 fire button and then like the 2600, alternating between bombs, and machine guns, with each press. Fortunately, you can have up to 2 bombs drop at once. Unlike others scoring values, the ground artillery, when shot consecutively, escalate within each zone (but not consistently). The Addictiveness is enjoyable (8) with a pause <space bar> and plenty of good arcade-like action. Graphics are impressive (8) the best, but there's the usual Atari over-use of detail, which ultimately makes for less clarity in the action. Add in all the enemies and their fire power, with 11+ objects on-screen and the action gets busy. The scrolling, details, graphical variety, and backgrounds (plus the partial destruction of and smoke from the background) are the best. The color variety is good, and despite your chopper and enemies being mono-colored, there is good animation and sometimes the enemies change color just as they become active. The displays are very good and the artillery bonus points are seen on-screen. Sound is sharp (8) nearly as good as the CV, having a few repeated effects and missing the

multiple chopper engine background effects. Controls are perfect (10).

Atari 5200 (42):

The Controls are surprisingly perfect (10) using a Wico controller. However, instead of using 2 buttons, they opted to copy the 800 method by using one fire button, but then instead of alternating shots, both a machine gun burst and a bomb drop for each press of the fire button. I feel that this modification takes away something from the gameplay (compared with the arcade & the 800), but then also makes the game a bit easier at the same time. The Pause is the <pause button> and all other elements and scoring are identical here with the 800.

Thus, all six home versions of Super Cobra have a slightly different type of firing and control setup. The Atari 2600, 5200 and 800 are the most alike.

Acknowledgements, Updates and Errata since last month.

Thanks again to Steve for providing me assistance and uploading a lot of files for me to review about the INTV port. Nothing else to report - other than it is getting noticeably harder to find good titles that I have most/all versions of.

Come back next month: We'll try to visit most of the Many Faces of Stargate for the Atari 2600, 5200, 8 bit computer, Apple 2, C64 & Vic 20. Contact Alan at: Hewston95@NOSPAMstratos.net or visit the Many Faces of site: <http://my.stratos.net/~hewston95/RT/ManyFacesHome.htm>

ColecoNation

by [Nathan Kozlowski](#)

Space Invaders Collection review

Programmer Toshihiro Nishikado and the Taito Corporation unleashed the arcade game Space Invaders on to the Japanese public in 1978, with Midway handling the American release, and the video game industry has never been the same since. Space Invaders is arguably one of history's most influential video games and it shows by how many times it has been translated and copied. Almost every classic system has a Space Invader clone in their game library. It took the ColecoVision a while, but it eventually received one in 1998 when John Dondzila released Space Invasion.

Only the Astrocade (1979), Atari 2600 (1980), and Atari 5200 (1986) had versions that were actually titled "Space Invaders." However, Eduardo Mello and Opcode Games changed that when they release Space Invaders Collection in September 2003. Space Invaders Collection brought ColecoVision fans authentic versions of both Space Invaders and the 1980 sequel, Space Invaders Part II (Midway's version was titled "Deluxe"). Opcode put out a second run in November with the only difference being a plus, the customized "Opcode" cartridge cases we've come to know and love.

Space Invader's background story is none too complicated. Earth's scientists have finally made contact with an alien race, but all they want to do is destroy everyone they meet. Nice. But before government spending can be questioned, more of the tax payers' money is needed for shields and big, fat laser bases to protect Earth. Space Invader chronicles the aliens' first attack and apparently first defeat, because they return in Part II with an even bigger chip on their shoulder.



Both games are very similar in gameplay with Part II having a few more challenges. As the defender of Earth, you have a laser base (does it need to be so freakin' wide!) that moves back and forth shooting the approaching rows of invaders and a series of shields that protect you until they are slowly eaten away by laser fire. Flying saucers periodically travel across

the top of the screen, just begging for you to pick them off. Once you destroy the attacking wave, another wave soars in starting closer to you than the previous one. In Part II, aliens will occasionally change in size and multiple and the passing saucers will drop new aliens to replace destroyed ones.

Space Invaders is a fun and simple game and that is why it has stood the test of time. Part II is the more enjoyable of the two games (what with the added challenges in gameplay) and it's the subtle touches that make it great to play. One of the most simple, but serious, elements is the consequence of allowing the invaders to touch the ground. The game, not just a life, is forfeited and this adds a unique, and sometimes nerve-racking, touch to the challenge. Many of the subtleties strategically influence the outcome of the game (see CV Tactics), but intricacies in design are also greatly appreciated. The alien fire slowly and steadily deteriorates not only the shields, but also the landscape below you. A lone saucer flying across the "ColecoVision" title screen is another nice touch that is specific to this console's version.

Space Invaders Collection is more than a set of games, it's an archive of video game history. Not only can you play arcade versions of Space Invaders and Space Invaders Part II, but you have the option to play either the Taito or Midway versions in either color or in black and white. All the bugs and tricks from the arcades have also been included. Additionally, this collection acts as living homage to the graphics and packaging of the original Coleco products. Everything from the box size and design to the layout and wording of the instructions alludes back to the ColecoVision's early days.



Whether you're a fan of Space Invaders or not, this is one of those rare times when you need to get this game. A lot of time and effort has been put into Space Invaders Collection and it shows the second you open up the box and turn the game on. Opcode has made a piece of history accessible to a larger audience and has helped to continue the ColecoVision's legacy. For that they should be commended.

Be sure to check out <http://www.coleconation.com/> for more great ColecoVision articles, interviews and reviews.

Continuing the Odyssey - Round Ball Generator

by David Winter, with assistance from Alan Hewston

With Alan's encouragement, this is the first of possibly several articles about the world's first video game console, the Odyssey. For more info about it, you can visit David's extensive pages and FAQ on his web site: www.pong-story.com/odyssey.htm.

While visiting Ralph Baer for the fifth time in August, 2006, we talked about unreleased games (as always) and interesting stories about the Odyssey. I also recorded him on audio tape for over three hours to have a complete and detailed interview of what he did: not only video games but before and after. We came to talk about the unreleased 4-Player Odyssey project, a 1TL200 Odyssey with 4-player capability. Having been in touch with several people who worked on this project, I knew that the prototype unit was long since trashed and that there was absolutely no way to find it. However, the documentation survived and I acquired it a couple years ago. That's how I discovered that this 4-player Odyssey featured a round ball generator, something unique that no other ball & paddle console (at that time) featured (except a couple computer programs).

Ralph said that it would be amazing to get in the lab and try building a round ball generator by ourselves, since I didn't have the documentation with me. We spent several days, starting with transistor circuits (which displayed a trapezoidal ball) and ending with something more advanced using a couple CMOS chips. After all these efforts, we realized that our designs were not practical due

to some signals which were too fast to generate something round. The only hope was my documentation.

Once I was back home, I took that documentation, scanned the "Round Ball" schematic and sent it to Ralph, who told me:

"(...) I wouldn't give you a nickel that this ever worked except perhaps on one breadboard (...)"

I insisted, saying that Magnavox made blue prints, built a complete prototype (not wire-wrapped), wrote a letter saying that the prototype was fully functional, and so that this thing had to be working. He replied (excerpts):

"I analyzed that circuit. All the "designer" did (...) is to make the second, pulse width determining stage into a sort of integrator which makes no sense. Even less sense is that he did the same thing to the vertical pulse height determining stage. (...) Then he takes these two supposedly analog signals and sums them (...). After summing H and V signals, he amplifies this composite "signal" (...) and will therefore square up the signal again. I have no idea of how this is supposed to work... I don't think it ever did. (...) We have played around with the round ball problem long enough to know what is needed: Horizontal Line segments that vary in length from near zero to max and back again towards zero... and there is no way that circuit addresses these requirements. (...) This is a dead end, David. That circuit doesn't work. Period."

Well, I know Ralph's talents in electronics for having worked with him and seen his smart designs in various fields. But I reminded one thing he told me sometime ago: when you want to build something, breadboard it so you can fix your mistakes. If you want to understand it, scope it.

And so I decided to rebuild this round ball generator. However, I had a couple worries. First, in order to be used in a 1972 Odyssey, it had to use the same 10-pin connector AND pinout. At a first glance I was quite sure it was the case because the two "player" generators were those used in the original Odyssey. So I checked the Odyssey schematic and got the confirmation: if I managed to rebuild it, the only thing I would need to test it was to plug it in place of the square ball generator. Secondly, I had to make sure I could list all of the required components. Such analog circuits are very precise and if you miss something such as a transistor value, you are almost dead. As one blue print had the component IDs and another had their values, I knew I could rebuild it.

Scanning the blue print was the easiest thing. However, it combined the PCB tracks, components foot prints, and their references. The next difficulty was to extract the PCB layout. You couldn't use any smart function since everything was printed using the same blue color. Everything had to be done manually. I started to draw a solder, and paste it on every other. That was very quick since I used the keyboard commands to paste while moving the mouse pointer. I then circled all the tracks to paint them in black. After finding a duplicate component ID and fixing it on my notes, I used a clever way to remove all the rubbish (foot prints, etc): converting the picture to two colors kept the black tracks and removed everything else! This saved a long time and allowed me to generate the complete PCB layout in less than an hour. I ran to an electronics shop, asked the guys to make the film and a couple PCBs.

And here comes the one drawback, which I hope to eliminate soon: this circuit board uses transistors which all have a weird reference, for not saying, internal to Magnavox (as of 1972/74). The only solution for now is to salvage the ball generator and one player generator from an Odyssey unit. This leaves one player and the round ball for testing. If you want to play Tennis, you have to have a second Odyssey unit to take the missing player generator. Or you use similar transistors but play with resistor and capacitor values to accommodate it to the original design. Once finished, I inserted my circuit board into the Odyssey in place of the square ball generator, and I was really amazed to see a nearly

perfect round ball on the screen. Indeed these guys at Magnavox did a very neat and clever design. Too bad they didn't feature that in 1972!

When I sent a screenshot to Ralph Baer, he quickly replied:

"Congratulations, you win. Now kindly explain to me how [this] thing works."

In fact the design is very clever and uses the behavior of a transistor with capacitors in order to generate bell-shaped signals which, once combined, form the round ball, as can be seen on this picture:



The Odyssey Round Ball in action

The picture was not very stable so the paddles look a bit blur. In reality they are really square and look much better. Of course, I had to fake the second player since its generator was used for spare transistors.

In any case, since the ball height and width can be adjusted separately, so one can even put round ball generators in place of the player generators so that they look rectangular with round top and bottom. Also, the ball can be resized from half to twice the actual size without any noticeable drift. Two sad things, though: first, I can't release the documentation, but if I can negotiate that, I will consider making a couple round ball generators for Odyssey fans. Second: although I have the PCB layout of the main 4-player Odyssey board, my documentation is missing the layout which tells you where to place each component. Building the round ball generator was the only thing I could do, but after all, what else was really neat in a 4-player Odyssey (which played the same games as the 1972 model) other than a round ball ?

That wraps up our first look at something new going on in the Odyssey community. If you enjoyed this article and want to hear more about this old system, then please let us know. David Winter is a first time writer for the Retrogaming Times Monthly. Our staff hopes to convince him to bring us more news and views of the Odyssey system. Give him your encouragement and feedback at: d_winter@hotmail.com . You can also visit his Pong-Story site, a large place devoted to the history of Ball & Paddle games at www.pong-story.com .

NEScade -- Bump 'N' Jump

by [David Lundin, Jr.](#)

Arcade games of the 1980's were great because it seemed that no flight of fancy would be turned down. While today realism is the driving force behind game development, years ago that was not the case. Creativity and fun gameplay once ruled the video game landscape and kept those quarters dropping into the coin boxes. In 1982 Data East combined driving action with platform jumping and created Bump 'n' Jump. Video driving wasn't a new concept nor were jump and hop games but once these two gameplay mechanics were joined together something totally new emerged. Speed along treacherous roads clearing you way through traffic by any means necessary. Bump other cars off the road or use your car's special jumping feature to smash them from above. That jumping power is needed for more than just smoothing out the commute, the road has a tendency to abruptly end and the only way onward is upward. Think of Spy Hunter (which wouldn't be released for another year) meets Frogger and you'll have a good idea of what this game is all about. Bump 'n' Jump was released on many of the popular joystick era consoles, as reviewed by Alan Hewston back in

Retrogaming Times #60, so it made perfect sense for it to appear on the NES as well.

While using the same basic game mechanic as the arcade original, the NES version goes in a slightly different direction with the backstory of the game. In the arcade the player was simply racing along in their jumping car, driving along through season after season. The NES version follows the trend of console video games of the day in that it paints a backstory of kidnapping and rescue. A ruthless gang known as the Jackals attacks you and kidnaps your girlfriend, driving off with her in their off-road vehicle. You have no choice but to hop in your car, called the "Popper," run down the Jackals and rescue your girlfriend. Corny as it may be, at least it gives the game a real objective other than just driving along. There are sixteen stages until the showdown with Dark Jackal, the gang's leader.



To start things off, control is nearly exactly the same on the NES as it was in the arcade. The joystick controls are mapped to the directional pad: left and right are used for steering, holding up accelerates, and holding down decelerates. The A button causes your car to jump once it's speed is greater than 149 km/h, in the arcade the jump velocity was anything higher than 99 although the units of speed are not given. An addition over the arcade controls is that the B button activates an emergency brake that is a welcome change, as it is critical to setting up some of the jumps and avoiding road obstacles in the later stages. Another addition to the NES version comes in the form of power barrels which fuel your car's jump ability. This is measured via a meter in the upper right of the screen that constantly ticks down. Once it reaches zero your car cannot jump, regardless of its speed, until a power barrel is picked up and the meter is replenished. This adds another element of strategy to the game as you have to constantly keep your eyes peeled for power barrels to keep your jump meter healthy. It's very similar to having to pick up fuel in games like Scramble, Super Cobra, and the later released Road Fighter. The last new feature is a repair mode which can be accessed by picking up a special icon. Honestly the repair mode would be useless if it wasn't for the fact that it adds 50 units to your jump meter, which is often a life saver.

The graphics aren't direct recreations of the arcade originals but are inspired by them. In the arcade each stage was based upon a different season. This is done away with on the NES and instead sixteen different stages are presented, however most of them borrow graphic tiles from others. A few of the later stages look downright ugly due to how they are colored but all the stages do have a different color set so at least there's some visual variety. Personally I feel the NES versions of the enemy cars are much more nicely done than the arcade originals, which looked like sticks and boxes with flashing colors for the most part. All the stages are completely different with different jump obstacles and blockade patterns when compared to the original. Additionally certain enemy cars seem to respond to the player location better than they did in the arcade, putting up a better fight. Another change between the two versions is that bumping into cars in the arcade would rob you of quite a bit of speed and momentum, on the NES this is barely noticeable. Audio is far superior to the humble music and sound effects of the arcade original and includes a series of background tunes that complement the action very well.

Without a doubt I prefer the NES release to the arcade original, it just feels to me like a more complete package. While things like momentum loss from getting bumped around are removed, added elements such as the power barrels and end of game objective more than make up for them. My only complaint comes after you get all the way to the end of the game and defeat Dark Jackal in an actual boss battle but I won't ruin that for anyone. Up until the last moments this game is a blast and expands and enhances virtually everything that made the arcade game entertaining and challenging. If you're looking for more of an arcade translation then the joystick era home versions are what to play. However if you want a remixed twist on the gameplay of a lesser known arcade classic, then Bump 'n' Jump for the NES would be a great addition to anyone's game library. Although different, it retains enough of the original game to make for an excellent gameplay experience.

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

Nintendo Realm - November to December 1985

by [Scott Jacobi](#)

Today we're not really going to talk about Nintendo history. Today is a little more about the culture of chronogaming itself. I'll be honest. Like retrogaming, chronogaming is immensely fun. Unlike retrogaming, chronogaming can be a harsh mistress. consider the difference. A retrogamer has his catalog of fun go-to games. He may occasionally come across a new old game, or receive a recommendation from a friend that he will certainly try out at least once. If the game is enjoyable, it will probably be added to the retrogamer's repertoire of games. If the retrogamer knows that a game is bad, it's doubtful that he will ever give it a shot. Not so with chronogaming. To the serious chronogamer, EVERY game must be placed at LEAST once, even if you KNOW it's bad. You might be humming along through a good streak of games, but as your eye wanders down the list, you spot that one game that you dread playing, and it haunts you until you finally reach it. And sometimes, bad releases come in bunches at a time. And in all honesty, this month's selection of 8 games, only two of which were brought to the States, ain't exactly stellar. You might very well yawn through this whole article or skip it entirely. My challenge is to find some redeeming quality about a game, or at least provide a tidbit of trivia that makes a review interesting to read. I've done the best that I could. On with the show.

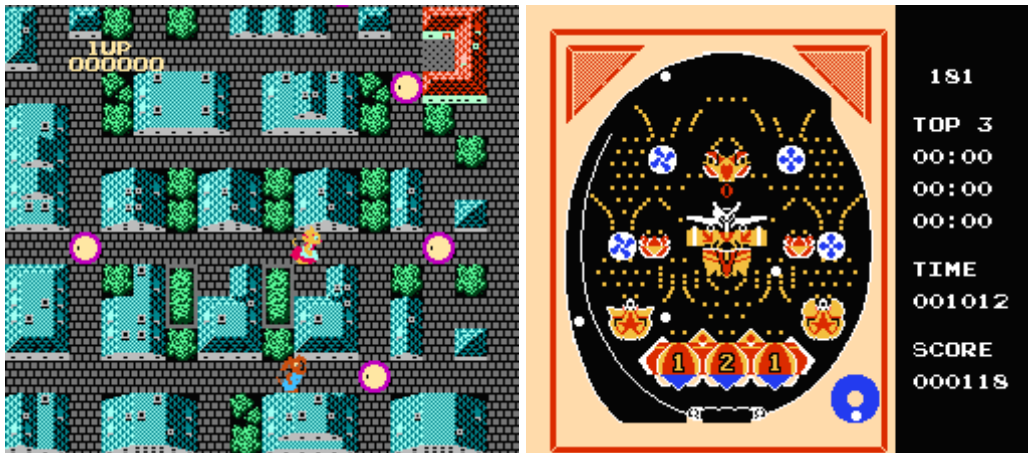
Onyanko Town released by Pony Canyon on November 21, 1985

We start this month off with a title that is a little too obscure and eclectic to be of mass interest to many readers. To the best of my abilities, I could find no direct translation of the word "Onyanko," but there's no Japanese text in the game, so it's complete playable by English speakers. The gist of the game is that you are a mother cat whose kitten has wandered away from home in the middle of your town. Your job is to recover your kitten, who you will find wandering the streets, and bring it back home. All the while, you must avoid the dogs that wander the streets as well. To aid your efforts, you have two abilities at your disposal: the ability to jump, and the ability to open or close manhole covers from a distance. If a dog is approaching you and a manhole is in between you, you can trigger the manhole to open and cause the dog to fall in. If you are being chased, you can run towards a manhole, open it, and jump over it causing the dogs to fall in after you. You can close the manhole cover with the dogs trapped inside for bonus points. You can also collect various items in other home's driveways for bonus points and an occasional fish, which grants you some kind of power-up while at the same time, attracting the ire of the fish shop owner who chases after you. In general, the game play is a little slow, and theme is skewed towards a younger audience, so I don't recommend going out of your way to find and play this game.

Pachicom released by Toshiba EMI on November 21, 1985

You have to walk before you can run. And before you can have a full blown, interesting adventure game involving the beloved Japanese pastime of pachinko with multiple machines and people to talk to, you have to have... this. Admittedly, I know only slightly more about pachinko than I do about

Mahjong, so I can't provide the best analysis of the game. But there isn't all that much to this game to get. For the unfamiliar, you insert tiny metal balls in to your favorite pachinko machine and send them in to the playfield at varying strengths and speeds. Your goal is to cause them to randomly bounce off variously placed pins so that they fall in to tiny slots that provide more balls or set off some special reaction. Some pachinko machines incorporate slot machine wheels in them as well. For the Famicom's first pachinko outing, Pachicom does a run of the mill job, having been ported over from the MSX computer. And like many of Famicom's first outings, it is rendered obsolete by any subsequent pachinko game, so this one is not recommended for you pachinko fans.



Onyanko Town

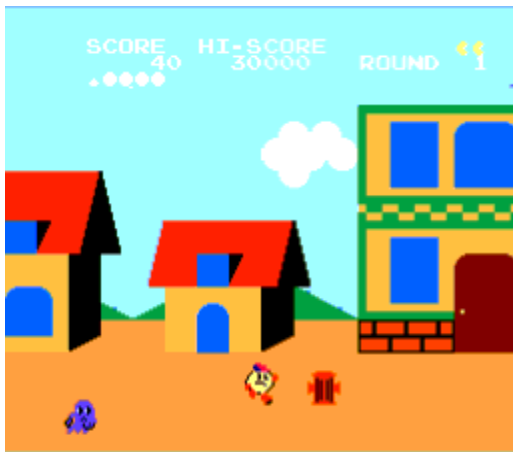
Pachicom

Pac-Land released by Namco on November 21, 1985

Many people are under the impression that Super Mario Bros. was the first side scrolling platformer in history and that Shigeru Miyamoto invented the genre. Many people are wrong. In 1984, Namco unleashed a game in to the arcades known as Pac-Land. And while it featured their beloved mascot, it presented him in an entirely new style of gameplay that was dramatically different than the types of games he became famous for. Rather than munching dots in a maze, he was beautifully animated (for the game's time) in a two dimensionally scrolling world with incredible detail. So when Super Mario Bros. sold exceedingly well, it seemed only natural that it's forerunner should be brought to the system. There was only one problem. After Namco had brought one incredible arcade port to the Famicom after another, they hit a technical hurdle when it came to Pac-Land. Simply put, Pac-Land was too gorgeous for the Famicom to handle. All of the magical detail that made Pac-Land stand apart from other arcade games was lost, and the Famicom received a game that pretty much played like Pac-Land, but looked and felt nothing like the original. In this age of emulation, I say stick to MAME, or find the exceedingly well ported Turbo Grafx 16 version.

Mach Rider released by Nintendo in the US on October, 1985. Released afterwards in Japan on November 21, 1985.

For a Nintendo developed title, this one is actually rather unremarkable. You are on a motor bike in the future, racing to your destination as fast as you can. You have guns and can fire at enemies and obstacles, but the real points are earned by ramming an enemy off the road. There are a couple of modes of play, one focusing on beating enemies, and the other two focusing on reaching your destination within a time limit. There's a even a design mode that lets you make up your own tracks. The entire game seems to be developed on a tech-demo premise. That is, someone came up with a cool technique to make the road bend by altering the point to start drawing the road on a per-scanline basis, and they decided to make a generic action game around it. I'm not saying that it's not fun to play, it's just not particularly interesting. What IS interesting is the fact that this Nintendo game was released first in the United States as part of the NES system launch before it debuted in Japan.



Pac-Land



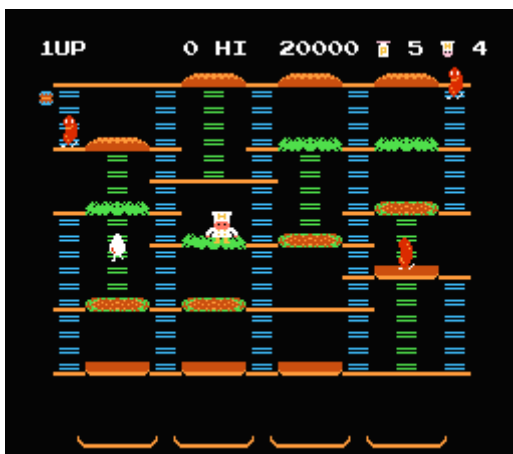
Mach Rider

Burgertime released by Namco on November 27, 1985. Released in the US by Data East on May, 1987

Now here's a game with heart. When I first encountered this game in the arcade as a child, I thought, "what a stupid premise. You don't blow up aliens or eat dots. You don't eat ANYTHING for that matter. What's the point?" but then I started to play the game. And the appeal of the game was immediately apparent. You're trapped on a stage that I can't even begin to describe, walking on top of all of the ingredients necessary to make a big hamburger, while running away from hotdogs and eggs, and the occasional pickle, and your only weapon against them is temporarily disabling pepper. Whether you think it's bizarre or genius, one thing is for certain: it's fun. And so it makes a welcome addition to the line up of classic arcade games that already grace the Famicom line-up at this point. Although the arcade game was developed by Data East in Japan (and licensed by Bally Midway in the US), this Famicom port was produced by Namco, perhaps because of their attention to detail on their own personal arcade ports.

Ikki released by Sunsoft on November 28, 1985

Ikki is not a game that will appeal to many American players. It harkens back to a time in feudal Japan when mobs of peasant farmers, monks, Shinto priests and local nobles, who rose up against samurai rule in the 15th and 16th centuries. As such, that is close to the premise of the game. You seem to be defending your section of land from marauding ninjas while walking about and collecting a number of Japanese coins littered throughout the area. The screen scrolls in eight directions, but the boundaries for your land are invisible. The screen won't scroll unless you're rather close to the top, and since ninjas seem to mostly appear from the north, that can make traveling upwards particularly dangerous. You also have to sit through a rather long opening theme song before the game gets started. Overall, I can't particularly recommend trying this game out.



BurgerTime



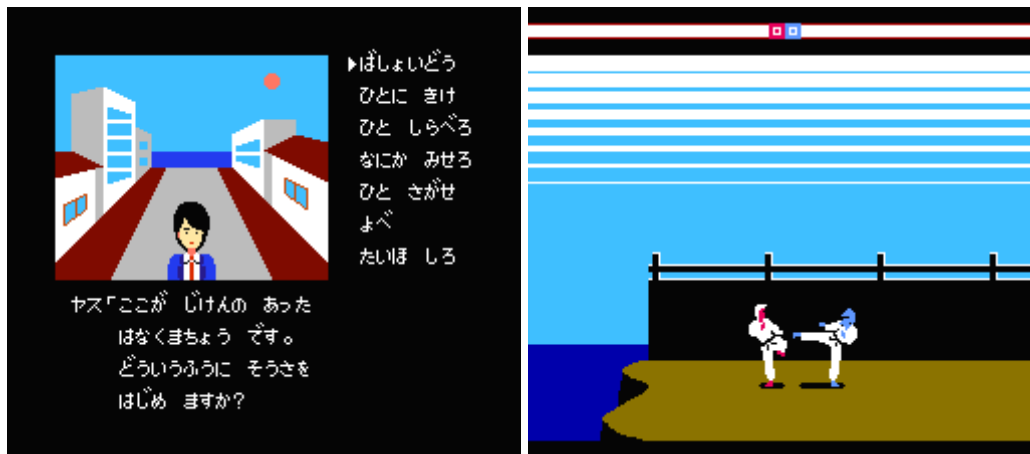
Ikki

Portopia Renzoku Satsujin Jiken released by Enix on November 29, 1985

This game, whose title roughly translates to "The Portopia Serial Murder Case," was to be the very first game that would bear the distinction of having too much Japanese for an English speaker to play properly. But thanks to the efforts of ROM translation group DvD Translations, who published a translation patch for the original Japanese ROM on June 16 of this year, that is no longer the case. The game, as the name implies, is a murder mystery type of game where you take the role of a detective who must find the clues and solve the mystery. While it features graphics, it is primarily text driven, and very much in the vein of Shadowgate where you must examine and collection objects, and find their true purpose later on. The game features of mix of investigation locals and first person maze interludes. I haven't delved too deeply in to the game play yet, but if you're a fan of slower paced games that require you to think through puzzles, this game is worth a try.

Karateka released by Soft Pro on December 5, 1985

Karateka was actually a very popular computer game developed in 1984 by Jordan Mechner who is in fact the creator of the Prince of Persia. It was originally developed for the Apple II, and then ported to a number of systems, including the Famicom. It was ahead of it's time in many ways, featuring one on one fights between you and an opponent, whose victory was determined by the depletion of a life bar, the kind that would become the standard for Street Fighter II and the many fighting games that came after. In the game, you swim out to the fortress of the evil Akuma, who has kidnapped the princess. Your mission, naturally, is to rescue her. But you'll need to battle through a number of skilled henchmen, life stealing traps, and even a trained hawk before reaching Akuma and taking him on in battle. The game's controls can be a little confusing at first because there is a distinction between being in a fighting stance, and being in a normal stance. Being in the wrong one at the wrong time can get you killed. But once you adjust to the controls, you will find the combat, consisting of high, middle, and low punches or kick, to be simple and elegant. The Famicom version is not without it's flaws (particularly in the sound department), but it pulls the port off admirably and was truly deserving of being brought back to the States where it began.



Portopia

Karateka

Game Over

Well, it's time to bring my final issue to a close. But as I mentioned Retorogaming Times Monthly will continue. Our own Scott Jacobi is going to take the helm as the new cheif editor. But before I go I want to give out a few thank yous:

- Thanks to all the readers who supported this newsletter ever since we took it over from Tom Zjaba 2 1/2 years ago.
- Thanks to all the writers to contributed all the great articles that we enjoyed ever since issue 1.

And most importantly, thanks to Alan Hewston for all his help in getting RTM off the ground (and for letting me be head editor).

Well, that's all I have to say. Once again thanks to everybody for their help, support, and everything else. Just remember that as long as you keep gaming, the game is never over for the old systems we love. See y'all down the road.

- [Adam King](#), Chief Editor

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