

# RETROGAMING TIMES

monthly

ISSUE #69 - FEBRUARY 2010

'70s



'80s



'90s



COVERING 3 DECADES OF CLASSIC GAMING

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## Press Fire To Begin

by [Bryan Roppolo](#)

February should prove to be a pretty major month, with Valentine's Day and the Winter Olympics in Vancouver coming up. I'll be watching the Olympics for sure and am looking forward to it. It's too bad nobody took up the challenge of looking at some Olympic themed games this month, but even without a theme in line with the Olympics, we still have a good issue for you. One thing that I am very proud to mention is that five new columnists have signed up to write for Retrogaming Times Monthly, and one of them makes an appearance this month! Some of these new columnists sound very promising and are excited to add more to our magazine. Hey, if we manage to pull in five new columnists every month we might be able to produce some larger and higher quality issues. Here's hoping for that!

One thing you might notice is that the New Years slump has caught up with us this month, as we have a smaller issue than usual. I guess that kind of fits the month of February though since it is the shortest month of the year! However, I am expecting that once more of the new columnists get on board it will become harder and harder for the New Years slump to get us, and I'll even bet that next year we don't even see a noticeable slump.

The last thing I want to mention is that Retrogaming Times Monthly has an improved website which debuted in January. If you came to this issue via the main page then you saw it. I wanted to create a website that would feel more like a video game, since the original fairly static one did not seem to be interactive enough, and interactivity is what gaming is all about. Therefore, we now have a main page with sound effects, more colorful graphics, a place where you can actually drag a game console to a TV screen, and a magical staff that turns all of the staff members of RTM into video game characters. It was a fun page to make and I hope you all enjoy it as well as this latest issue. Now on to the good stuff which lies below...



## Retrogaming News

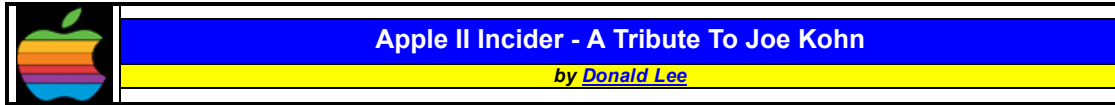
### Retrovision 2010

Come for a retro gaming weekend in Oxford, UK. Being held from February 5-7 (Friday-Sunday), it is sure to be a blast for all the retrogamers in England. There will be retro gaming, a raffle, competitions, beer, food, and more! All of this for only £15 per person for the entire weekend, and did I mention there will be beer at the show? Check out their website for more info: <http://www.retrovision.org.uk/>.

### Retrocade IV

The epic classic gaming party returns to Harrisburg, PA for all of you central Pennsylvania gamers! There will be a Pac-Man high score tournament, arcade operator's birthday cake, music hits from the '80s, many classic '80s consoles, as well as FREE pizza and refreshments. One day only so make sure you make it on time! The party starts at 5:00 in the afternoon on Saturday, February 20 and concludes whenever the last person standing drops dead. There's

no website for this event, but you can contact the organizer by sending him a private message on AtariAge at <http://www.atariage.com/forums/user/22552-maerz/> to find out more, such as its exact location.



Several days after the 2010 New Year had rolled in, I decided to stop by the [A2-Central](http://a2central.com) website to check for any new Apple II news. Even though I don't use an Apple II anymore, I'm always curious to see what's new within the community. Imagine my surprise when I read the following:

<http://a2central.com/2109/joe-kohn-of-shareware-solutions-ii-passes-away/>

It is with heavy heart that I report this-one of the Apple II's notable personalities has passed away.

Joe Kohn of Shareware Solutions II, died on Jan. 6th, 2010 following a battle with metastatic cancer. He was 62 years old and lived in Marin County, California.

Joe got to know many Apple II people when he was a Sysop on the Source, and his interest in the Apple started to grow. He became interested in writing about the II and was a regular contributor to the Apple IIGS Buyer's Guide and then wrote for InCider/A+, most notably writing about shareware programs. He then started Shareware Solutions II from 1993 thru 1999, while running an online store for Apple shareware and freeware titles. He was active on several of the online services when they were still supporting the Apple II, including CompuServe, AOL and Delphi.

An avid Apple fan, Joe owned numerous Apple II computers, including the rare Mark Twain IIGS. He used the GS as his preferred machine for all of his work.

In his later years he was president of the Marin Chapter of the Californian Native Plant Society and became an expert on native wildflowers and other California plants.

Burial will be in Marin County on January 8th, and a memorial service will be held on Saturday.

There is no contact information for the family at this time, but we will update this in the future should a memorial book be posted online.

Joe Kohn was probably not that well known outside the Apple II community. However, inside the community, he was known for his dedication to the Apple II computer. As noted above, he was heavily involved in many of the computer's aspects during his life.

I first knew about Joe from his writing in the InCider/A+ magazine. He originally started writing a column about shareware programs entitled "Shareware Solutions". In later years, Joe had a hand in writing many feature articles about about topics as well.

When InCider/A+ ceased publication in July of 1993, Joe started his own 20 page bi-monthly newsletter entitled Shareware Solutions II in an attempt to fill the void. I didn't subscribe until a few months later because I had been reading another magazine entitled II Alive that was published monthly by a large mail order company named Quality Computers. At the time, I felt like I didn't need to pay for two publications.

However, after hearing some positive reviews from other people, I decided to support the Apple II community and subscribe to Shareware Solutions II. It was a decision I didn't regret. The newsletter kept me abreast of Apple II news that I otherwise wouldn't have gotten. Remember that the Internet was not widely known or used as it is today.

Also, Shareware Solutions II was the first publication that discussed the Internet at length. I got a lot of information and tips on how to use the Internet as it existed in the mid 1990's. This meant a lot of discussion on tools like Gopher, FTP, Pine and Lynx. The Internet in the 1990's was a vastly different animal than the one that exists today, where the majority of users were using text based tools. It wasn't until the mid 1990's when web browsers first appeared. Even then, the websites were mainly text and graphics. Flash and other dynamic content simply didn't exist back then.

I subscribed to Shareware Solutions for about two to three years and eventually let the subscription lapse. Even though I was still using my Apple IIe for many things, I had gotten my first PC (Windows 95) around 1996. With access to the Internet and my ability to read the comp.sys.apple2 Usenet group, I felt I could follow the Apple II world without a print publication. Joe, being the diehard Apple II guy that he was, tried to get me to renew my subscription many times but I turned him down.

Though I exchanged many emails and messages on comp.sys.apple2 with Joe over the years, I never actually met him in person. In his final years before his death, he had been leading nature tours for people to explore the beautiful plants and flowers that exist in the Bay Area. I had been hoping to go on one of Joe's tours but alas I will not get the chance now.

Even though I never met Joe Kohn in person, I feel great sadness that he has passed on. From the many messages I read on a couple of Usenet groups Joe participated in, I think my feelings are echoed by many who knew the guy. The Apple II community lost one of their biggest supporters and he will definitely be missed.

Rest in Peace Joe. I hope you are enjoying yourself wherever you're at and I hope you were able to bring your trusty Apple IIgs along with you.



## Press Play On Tape - Please Wait 10 Minutes

by Keith Bergman

A couple years ago, I met Michael Capobianco, science fiction author and former TI-99/4A game programmer. Along with partner Gene Harter, he created Not-Polyoptics, an inventive early software company dedicated mostly to simulation and strategy games. During our conversation, he recalled being one of the first programmers to run into what's become a vexing dilemma for software makers - when do you take advantage of the newest and best hardware and leave a previous platform (or configuration) behind?

For Not-Polyoptics, the answer came down to simple economics. When they released a game on disk, instead of cassette, or one that required memory beyond the TI's built-in 16K RAM, they sold about a tenth of what their most popular "console only" games did. Even requiring Extended BASIC, that lifesaving enhancement to TI's slow, sprite-less built-in language, cut into sales to a huge degree. The bottom line, at least in the early 1980's, was that the user base of people with a TI-99/4A, a tape deck, and nothing else to work with, was massive.

Of course, that left Not-Polyoptics, and anyone else trying to make good games on the TI, stuck with 16K of RAM, slow loading times, single-statement program lines, and a processing speed that would drive a saint to distraction. Programmers quickly learned to squeeze every byte of free space out of that TI, cutting their programming down to bare bones, often using so much space that users who did have expansion systems would have to unplug them to free up those precious few bits of memory they took up while connected.

Several crafty programmers, including Harter and Capobianco, figured out an inelegant solution to cramming more into less space -- rather than waste program code defining variables, why not have the program load what it needed from a data file? It's cumbersome and time-consuming, but a few lines to tell the computer to load data take up less room than screens full of LET X=40 and LET Y=97.

Fast-forward to the far-distant future dystopia of 2010. Retro hobbyists are now playing their TI games on emulators or loading them into their original 99/4A's from compact flash drives. Memory is as plentiful as air, and just about any standalone program that can be loaded off a tape or floppy disk has been moved onto an emulator or to an FTP site, preserving it for posterity. But what of these games from the past that are left dragging their data files behind them like a digital albatross? They can't run on a 16K TI with a disk drive attached, and getting that data file into memory and properly saved to disk is going to require studying -- and then modifying -- the original game code.

In this column, we'll talk about Hordes and another game like it, as I rediscover them on the actual TI-99/4A hardware. My project for next month's column will involve trying to save the games for future generations, by bringing them out of their console-BASIC confinement and rendering them usable on disk, with memory expansion, and in emulators.

**Bear with me on the photos this month -- since I can't do screen grabs from an emulator, you're getting digital camera shots taken of a none-too-sharp original TI color monitor.**

First up in the tape deck is [Atlantis](#), a game from the UK released by a company called Intrigue Software (motto: "games to remember"). I found Atlantis, plus a few other Intrigue titles, years ago in an eBay auction for which I ended up paying a small fortune (apparently there's at least one other obsessive TI cassette game archivist in the world). I've never seen more of their games for sale, nor have I found any other information about this company or its titles, which leads me to believe they faded away after TI's withdrawal from the home computer market. But before they left, whoever was cooking up the code at Intrigue had fully mastered the art of pushing TI BASIC to its outer limits.

Atlantis is a bit daunting to even begin. Loading is at least a ten-minute process -- you load the game from side A, flip and rewind the tape, then wait over seven minutes for data to load from side B. During that time, the game logo appears on screen, then changes appearance - the word "ATLANTIS" is formed out of oxygen bottles. This is about as close as I've seen on the 99/4A to the "splash screen" that Commodore Vic-20 and 64 users are used to viewing while their games take forever to load.



Atlantis "Splash Screen"

It's worth the wait, though - Atlantis may be the nicest-looking, and most engrossing, TI BASIC game I've ever seen. You're a diver, searching the ocean for pearls and jewels while avoiding running into fish and coral reefs, and keeping a wary eye on your oxygen supply. Sticking close to the surface will allow you to keep breathing, but risk it all for deeper dives and you'll find oxygen tanks down below. Swim off an edge of the screen and, after a few seconds' time to redraw, another section of ocean opens up before you. Eventually, somewhere in the murky depths, you may even find the lost city of Atlantis and its riches.

The playfield for this game is huge -- 84 different screens to explore, a feat that seems impossible in 16K. As you descend into the ocean, the coral becomes a giant, nearly impenetrable maze where doubling back, conserving precious oxygen bottles, and remembering your pathway into the heart of the reef are the keys to survival. At least, I think they are -- the keyboard responds to your commands about once every second, which is common for BASIC games, but it leads to frustration as the dense coral begins demanding hairpin turns to avoid life-draining collisions. Too many collisions with the reef and you're as dead as if you ran out of air.

I still haven't found a lost city or its treasure, or even gathered many pearls and gems from the depths, but Atlantis is a game that invites repeated exploration. Given the ridiculously long load time, I find myself loading it in to play once, then leaving my 99/4A on all day with it running - just in case I feel like playing again at some point. It's a crafty, tense, engrossing game, one that chafes under the limitations of its language but also accomplishes more within those limits than most would have thought possible.



Exploring the Coral Reef

It's games like this that really make me feel like an archaeologist. Someone coded this 25 years ago. They had to learn a lot, and really pull out all the stops, to make it work as well as it does. And all that effort is now almost entirely forgotten -- this isn't some beloved classic that keeps getting revisited every few years like our favorite arcade games. It's not even available for download for the hardy few retro fiends keeping the platform alive. It's anyone's guess how many cassette copies of Atlantis survive in British attics or forgotten in dusty boxes in thrift shops, but sitting here playing it, it's easy to imagine this is the last copy left on Earth. It makes me eager to get to work converting it to an emulator-friendly, disk-based version, so that it doesn't wind up completely lost to time.

Melodramatic? Maybe a little. But given how few copies this game might have sold, and the utter lack of information about Intrigue Software online, it definitely seems like a case of "if I don't do it, who will?"



**Hordes**, my other excursion for this month, isn't quite as fun to play, for one understandable reason. The game is so memory-intensive that there's no room for a computer-generated player. It's for two or more human players -- all well and good for those of you with friends, or a normal sleep schedule, but how does that help me at 4am when it's TI time, huh?



Let the conquest begin!

Hordes is, for all intents and purposes, a TI BASIC version of the popular board game Risk. Like Atlantis, it must load data from a file, but this one's right after the program on side A, so at least you save a few seconds of rewinding time. (I'd trade that, and then some, for some labels on the cassettes -- every Not-Polyoptics cassette game I own comes on a black tape with no label whatsoever. They're not even labeled for sides A or B! And if you get two or three out at the same time and don't put each one back in its case when you're done with it, you have no idea which one is for which game.)

Anyway, I digress. After you tell Hordes how many players there are, and it loads its data, it draws what appears to be a screen full of random gibberish. As the computer begins redefining those graphics, though, a rather distorted map of the world emerges from the chaos. Each player picks one of the TI's colors to represent his conquests, and the computer dutifully, if slowly, colors in the map accordingly -- territories are assigned at random in the beginning. You attack your enemy, fortify your position, and aim for global domination, painting the entire map in the primary color of your empire.

One addition to Hordes not found in Risk is the presence of ships -- players can siphon off armies from their land territories to put a flotilla of troop transports or battleships onto the seas. Ships can move around the board to fortify troops on other continents, or to attack enemy strongholds in far-off lands. Though the input system to create and maneuver your ships is a bit awkward, once you get used to it, it adds a whole new dimension of strategy and opportunity to the game.

Speaking of awkward, Hordes only allows single-key input during gameplay. If you want to, say, move twenty troops onto a convoy ship, you must consult a chart in the manual to learn that entering "D" is the Hordes equivalent of typing in the number 20. There are single keystroke equivalents all the way up to the number 42. Given TI BASIC's crude tools for manipulating screen display and input, this is probably inevitable (in Extended BASIC, for example, ACCEPT AT and DISPLAY AT statements might make keeping a map on the screen and accepting normal input a much easier process).

But again, the real wonder is that Capobianco and Harter got the game to function at all in the space they had to work with, to say nothing of adding an elegant new idea like the ships. In 1981, when any color or sound at all in a microcomputer was cause for celebration, playing through Hordes' shortcomings would still have been quite a novelty, and a refreshing change from losing all those little plastic board-game Risk armies under the couch in the den.

If I can get Hordes to load from disk, in 32K of memory, and either put its data file on disk or eliminate the need for it altogether, how much more fun would it be? Perhaps adding an AI element for a one-player option would then be a good project, either for me or another intrepid 99'er? (Fellow TI archivist Bill Gaskill has alerted me to the existence of a listing in the Triton Products catalog of Hordes on disk, offered for sale in 1988 or so -- if this was legit and not a printing error on their part, a faster-loading and more user-friendly Hordes may already exist. We'll tackle the project anyway, for the sake of knowledge).

Whew -- that's enough digital archaeology for one month. Next month, I'll document my attempts to bring Atlantis and Hordes into the new millennium, and we'll discuss a game called "Santa Paravia and Fiumaccio." It's a classic from the mainframe and minicomputer days, but it's noteworthy for our purposes because a commercially-released version of it in 1980 from "Instant Software, Inc" is the oldest cassette-based commercial program for the 99/4A I own. Technically, it's not even for the 99/4A, but for its earlier cousin the 99/4, with its documentation making reference to that machine's built in Equation Calculator at the startup menu.

Until then, keep your spindles tight, your splicing tape handy, and don't let life demagnetize your bits...



## The Homebrew Sleuth: Atari 2600 Seawolf

by [Collin Pierce](#)

*Author's Note: Yes, I know; this review was pretty easy to write, and perhaps a little too glowing. Still, I wanted to start this column on a high note and thought that this game was a great intro to the realm of homebrews. I wanted to show off a game that would make a good first impression, and since this was the first homebrew I played that made me really excited, I thought it was appropriate.*



**SYSTEM: ATARI 2600**  
**AUTHOR: MANUEL ROTCHKAR**  
**YEAR OF RELEASE: 2004**

Seawolf is based upon a 1976 arcade game by Midway, in which you are a submerged submarine firing torpedoes at ships patrolling the surface. The arcade game was Black and White, primitive, and in my opinion, not very fun. You had a time limit instead of a lives system, not that anything could kill you, and besides the fact that on the actual cabinet you looked into a periscope to see the screen, it lacked atmosphere and a sense of danger.

The 2004 remake by Manuel Rotschkar, on the other hand, is a masterpiece that improves on the original in every way.

**Graphics: A+**

The first thing you notice when you turn on the system is the extremely beautiful graphics. Everything is vibrantly colored and detailed, with a lot of "WOW!" factor. At the top of the screen is a wonderfully rendered sunset. The different types of ships are all easy to tell apart, due to subtly different colors and shapes. Everything is very well done.

#### Gameplay: A+

In comparison to the original arcade version, *Seawolf* for the Atari 2600 is lively and exciting. Just like the arcade game, you must shoot your torpedoes through drifting underwater mines to hit ships at the surface, but that's where the comparison ends.

The Arcade had two types of ships: slow big ships and fast moving patrol boats. The Atari version has six; besides the standard gray ships and patrol boats, you now have green battle ships that take multiple hits, submarines that submerge and disappear if you don't hit them quickly enough, brown ships that drop depth charges to destroy you, and Red Cross Medical boats that bounce your torpedoes back at you!

Luckily the game mechanics have changed. Instead of operating under a strict time limit, you now have lives, fuel, and ammo. If you run out of torpedoes, you lose a life. If you take too long and run out of fuel, you lose a life. When you run out of lives, the game ends. There is no way to regain lost lives, however you can restock on ammo and fuel to prevent it. Every 1,000 points you get, a little white supply pod will float by. If you shoot it, your fuel and torpedoes will be restocked.

It isn't as simple as move and shoot, though. There's actually a lot of strategy going on. Do you save your torpedoes for easy targets and risk running out of fuel, or do you shoot whenever you get an opening and risk running out of torpedoes? One of my favorite little tricks is that the torpedoes bouncing back at you from hitting a Red Cross Ship can actually still hit an enemy ship on the way back down, which opens the possibility of "trick shots."

On top of all this, there are four difficulty options selected by the settings of the difficulty switches on your Atari. The left switch controls the strength of your sub against the enemy ships. The right switch controls whether the different ship types all come at you from the beginning, or start appearing one by one as you score increases. Each configuration is color coded, and your score indicator reflects this.

Not only is the game stimulating, but the fact that it offers a highly customizable experience gives it extra marks. It is all very fun.

#### Controls: A+

Move your sub with the joystick, fire torpedoes by pressing the button. It couldn't be simpler. The fact that the controls are very tight and responsive helps too.

#### Sound: A+

There isn't much of it, but it's all good. The game starts with a very appropriately moody song, perfectly setting the tone for a submarine game. I'm not sure about this, but I think it's taken from a famous submarine movie. *Das Boot*, I think.

The sound of torpedoes firing, ships exploding, and even the occasional sonar ping signaling the arrival of a supply pod, all sound great and resemble reality (or at least the movies) as closely as the Atari will allow.

#### Replay Value/Fun Factor: A+

Just like the best Arcade and Atari classics, this game will have you coming back again and again. Its fun, exciting, and involving gameplay could easily get you hooked.

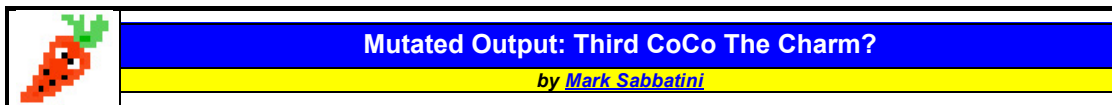
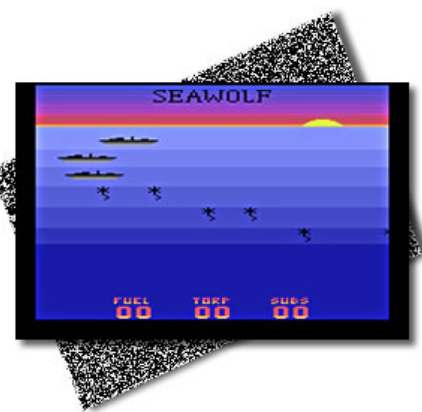
#### Arcade to Home: A+++

It's better than the Arcade game in every way. And I bet you thought the Atari, as much as we love it, wasn't capable of such a feat!

Well, maybe it's because the Arcade game is older than the Atari itself.

#### Overall: A+

This game is a masterpiece, comparable to all the great Atari classics. It's so rich and well-realized, and yet so simple and easy to understand that I would compare it to the work of Activision. It's certainly the kind of game they would have put out for the system.



*Editor's note: Due to the author breaking a leg and requiring extended hospitalization, this column's scheduled reviews of games from Color Computer magazines is on hold for a month. The magazine reviews will return next month, followed by the topic below.*

When *The Rainbow*, a long-running CoCo magazine went to a press conference where the technically upgraded Color Computer 3 was unveiled July 30, 1986, it was easy to get the impression the CoCo as the star of the show. Tandy rented space at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York City, brought in guests like Bill Gates and attracted plenty of mainstream publications like *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. From reading the issue of *The Rainbow* rushed to press immediately after the press conference, a reader would think everyone was there for the latest update in Tandy's machine.

"The CoCo 3 is the computer of choice in the foreseeable future," wrote Editor Lonnie Falk. "Its technical superiority is so vast that it offers virtually unlimited potential for the person who owns one."

At \$219, he added, "Tandy is practically giving the machine away."

The CoCo intro, however, was just one of many new computer introductions at the show, including updates of the phenomenally popular and best selling

1000 series of PC clones. To the extent those "other" publications mentioned the CoCo 3 at all, it was a sentence at the end to the effect of "Tandy also introduced a new version of its consumer-level Color Computer with improved memory and graphics," which is quite sad really, since the Coco 3 had much to offer.

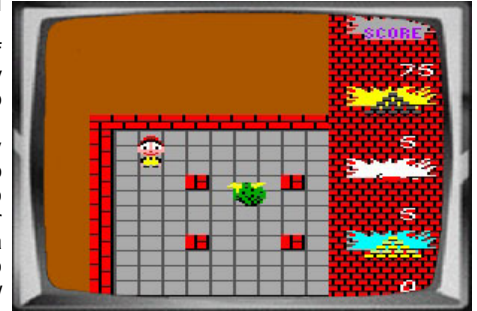
In the end, the computer was never able to compete with the other big guns of the time. This happened for a variety of reasons, including a series of incompetent decisions and bugs leading to delays and frustrations, but the loyalties of fans kept the machine in stores for more than five years.

As with the first two CoCo's, software was relatively scarce and featured few "name brand" bestsellers. However, some of those games far surpassed what even the designers likely thought possible. One of the most amazing projects is an exact replica of "Donkey Kong" running in an emulated processor.

So this month and in months to come, this column will examine games for this overlooked machine. February brings a sampling of high-profile releases, good and bad, from classic-era and modern coders.

### A Mazing World of Malcom Mortar (C)

This arcade maze/strategy game is the sort of thing I enjoy a bit more than this grade indicates, but I also realize the concept isn't overly original and there are games of this ilk with better depth, variety, graphics and...well, just about everything. Sold by Tandy in cartridge form, it had the advantage of being far more widely available than higher-quality third-party titles, so most CoCo fans are likely familiar with it. The main character is "B. Rick", who wanders around scrolling mazes trying to trap evil creatures by laying bricks to trap them so he can escape. Touching the nasties is obviously bad news. Some can also shoot and others can destroy the bricks you lay. You can prevent the latter by making the bricks you lay "permanent," but this has a potentially game-ending drawback we'll get to shortly. In addition to your limited supply of bricks (more can be collected in the mazes), you also have dynamite at your disposal. This can be used to try to blow up creatures (very tough to do) or blow up temporary walls. But they cannot destroy walls you've made permanent and therein lies a problem: If you put yourself in a situation where you cannot escape or have insufficient bricks left to trap the creatures, the game ends. On the other hand, if you've trapped all the creatures, a yellow brick road will show the way to the now-open exit for that level. Mazes get more difficult, of course, and the ultimate objective is to trap the evil Malcolm in his boss-stage lair. This requires "magic" bricks (another type that can be collected) which, like permanent ones, are also indestructible. The game allows keyboard or joystick control, a nice touch, and it's fast and increasingly challenging at a pace that's reasonable. The graphics are blocky – aside from a few extra colors, this could easily pass for something from the original CoCo's. My one real wish is the game allowed multiple lives instead of making you start over every time you die. Allowing the player to start at the last level completed would also be an acceptable option. As it is, the desire to play diminishes greatly when you have to keep replaying the entire game every time you make a mistake.



### Castle of Tharogad (C-)

Everyone involved in this project deserves to run a gauntlet of angry Coconuts armed with their plastic machines to beat the offenders over the head with. My personal inclination is to give this game a "D-minus" for so badly screwing up the sequel to one of the most famous and beloved CoCo games ever, but I'm forcing myself to be objective enough to realize it does have some play value to the uninitiated. For those unable to decipher the clever spelling (a group that not surprisingly includes *The Rainbow's* reviewer in another display of that magazine's astonishing ineptitude at critiquing software), this is a follow-up to *Dungeons Of Daggorath*, a real-time 3D RPG that is unquestionably Tandy's best CoCo game (its been remade for Windows and still has an active fan club). In that game you wander a "wire-graphics" 3D maze, gathering useful items like swords, torches and magic rings while fighting off a variety of evil creatures. You need to descend through five levels to reach and kill the wizard, encountering some surprises and extremely hard challenges along the way. These types of games were common on a multitude of platforms, but DOD had a few unique features, including a heartbeat that substituted for hit points. Things like moving, attacking and getting hit all raised your heartbeat. If it got too fast you'd pass out (and mostly likely be killed by a creature) or simply die outright. A single hit by a strong creature could do you in, so this was no reckless hack-and-slash quest. Anyhow, I go on at length about other features, but this is a review of the sequel. The goal here is to reach the top level of the castle and save the "good" wizard. All the gameplay elements are the same as DOD except for one thing: the interface is icon driven instead of command driven. So instead of typing "A R" for attack right, you double-click on the right hand icon. Problem is, cursor movement isn't as precise as it ought to be and many of the commands are anything but intuitive, involving a series of clicks on different icons. The save feature is beyond absurd – instead of saving your progress on cassette (or, dare I say it, floppy disk since this was the late 80s) you get four nine-character passwords to type in. Obviously these passwords contain the necessary data to set up most of your position, so someone able to decipher the code could create any situation they wanted. Also, notice I said "most" of your position - all injured creatures are restored to full health and their locations randomized, a "feature" no doubt resulting from the limited information the passwords can contain. One other claimed improvement is the graphics are now "filled" rather than outlines, but they rate somewhere between non-factor and ugly. All in all, this game is a staggeringly disappointing step back from the original.



### Donkey Kong (A)

The biggest breakthrough in gaming for the original CoCo occurred in 1982 when Donkey King, an unauthorized version of the similarly named coin-op, redefined the standards for quality and system requirements. Before, games were often of Atari 2600 caliber; afterward they were at least somewhat comparable with machines like the Colecovision and Commodore 64. Donkey King had all four of the coin-op's levels, an extreme rarity among versions on other computers, and the graphics and gameplay were more than equal to the competition. Had it been eligible as a "Many Face Of" entry (obviously not, since it wasn't an official version) it'd have been somewhere among the medal winners. Anyhow, the same coin-op is responsible for what some see as the CoCo's most groundbreaking game – only this time as a nearly 100 percent accurate emulation of the original's Z80 code. John "Sock Master" Kowalski released this for free in 2007, saying he hoped to inspire others to port more games to the CoCo 3. A simple description of how he programmed it, along with some useful links, is at his homepage at <http://www.axess.com/twilight/sock/dk/>. As for the game, there's little to be said for anyone familiar with the original. It is indeed an exact copy in almost every



way, including the ability to adjust DIP switches. The main differences are the screen has slightly fewer vertical pixels (225 instead of the arcade's 256) and only one-player games are allowed (press the fire button once to insert a coin, press again to play). Just hearing the authentic sounds and background music is enough to floor anyone familiar enough with a CoCo to know its hardware isn't supposed to be capable of either. One other feature I love: selecting the USA or Japanese order of levels. I'm one of the rare freaks who loves the conveyor belts, but hates having to reach the third cycle of screens to play them. Using the Japanese setting means I get to play all the screens each time through. This isn't the most fun CoCo game – plenty of others reflect the years of advancement since the original Donkey Kong debuted – but you'd have a hard time arguing it isn't the most impressive.



## Mine Rescue (B-)

The game Super Pitfall was released on both the NES and CoCo and, like virtually every other Pitfall sequel, mostly what it does is remind you the original is still arguably the best (my personal vote is Pitfall II, as long as it's the Atari 2600 version). Steve Bjork programmed the CoCo version that was sold as a cartridge by Tandy. At about the same time Bjork released Mine Rescue, selling it through his own company, SRB Software. Cynics said it was the same game as Super Pitfall with different graphics (similar to his "official" Tetris and "unofficial" Bash! efforts). The games use the same game engine and sound, but there are some modest differences in gameplay. The goal is to navigate large scrolling mazes bringing oxygen tanks to trapped miners. You can carry only five tanks at once, but more are scattered in the mine and at your starting point on the surface. You have to reach all the miners before you run out of your own air supply. Impeding your way are a lot of creatures that move a lot like the creatures in Super Pitfall. The graphics aren't anything special, although Bjork mentioned back then how the techniques were a breakthrough in compression, and neither is the sound or originality of concept. It's a reasonably fun game that will take a bit to complete (which can also be said for Super Pitfall).



## Return Of Junior's Revenge (D+)

Even giving this game a few breaks due to circumstances – primarily being rushed to market as the first major third-party CoCo game at a time when users were starved for anything – this unauthorized port of Donkey Kong Jr. is slow, ugly and not much fun. Looking at a screenshot and promo copy promising all four levels, it's easy to get taken in. But those freeze frames don't look nearly as convincing in action, lurching rather than gliding through the motions. Beyond that are all the things that have frustrated CoCo gamers for years - beeps and blips for sounds, speeds roughly half that of the arcade original's, and controls that can be finicky (Tandy's non-centering joysticks made it all-too-easy to fall off vines by accident). Sure, it gave the truly desperate something to boot up while waiting for better things, but there's a long list of titles for the original CoCo's that outshine this in every way.



Columns for the Sega Genesis is a Tetris style Puzzle game that didn't really do so well on home consoles for several reasons. We'll be looking into the reason why in this month's issue of "All Eyes On..."

### Graphics: 10 / 10

The games' graphics sets are very well done considering the simplicity of the genre, and it includes that trademark multi-hue spark effect that only the Genesis can do properly.

### Sound: 5 / 10

The sound is mediocre at best, a really low priority here. It does not have the feel that its arcade counter part did. If anything, after a while you want to turn the sound off.

### Controls: 1 / 10

What to say about this Cluster Knot. The controls are non responsive and are not very effective. You can only change the order of the column, you can't rotate it, and they move left and right as slowly as possible. This is fine when the falling speed is slow, but when it gets to level 19, the columns are twice as hard to control as the Tetrominoes/Tetrads in Tetris.

### Gameplay: 2 / 10

Most block games have a randomness to them, with the exception of this and Tetris (excluding Tetris 2, aka Tetris Flash), so that if you start randomly slamming pieces down when you get in trouble early on, there's a chance they will eventually "Super combo" (meaning you get rid of a bunch of columns in one blow) without any intelligent design. By repeating this several times, you can rack up some serious points.

Now what this also means is if a player screws up, a lucky accident is likely to occur that will allow them to continue playing. This makes the game more fun, A LOT more fun. However, Columns doesn't do this. Unlike Tetris (which has a simple objective of put the block in the slot), it is extremely hard to plan out how the pieces will fall since there is gravity. Combine that with the fact that you can't rotate pieces, and you have the ingredients for an excessively hard game with no real care for fun. You're either playing at professional levels or dying almost immediately.



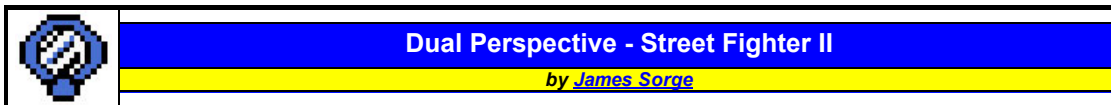
Hmmm...That treasure chest looks mean!

## Replay Value, Longevity: 2 / 10

I rarely play this game. I only do so when I want something to show me why I keep going back to my regular games and consider them my regulars.

## Overall Rating: 5 / 10

Get Tetris, or better yet, snag a copy of Tetris 2, Dr. Mario, or Magical Drop (any version). Cleopatra Fortune is also a good candidate. If you want this game, get it in the Sonic's Ultimate Genesis Gems Collection, at least then you get other games to play too (fun things like Rystar and Altered Beast).



Hello, this is James Sorge back with Dual Perspective, the column that reviews games from both the playing and World Record Perspectives. This month, the victim is Street Fighter II and its spin offs, Capcom's original famous fighting game series.

### Graphics: B

It's kind of cartoonish, but the graphics still hold up in today's world. They do the job serviceably and most of the characters have their own unique nicely drawn sprites. There is some reusing of sprites in the game though and this marks down for it.

### Sound: B+

Ryu's song is a classic and the others are well known. The music/effects definitely fit the bill here.

### Difficulty: A+

If you are playing this multi-player, fighting games are a total terror to learn and can take months or years to master even the simplest moves. This was OK when the games were simple, but when Super Street Fighter II Turbo came out (the next-to-last of the Street Fighter II series), it really made the game too advanced and killed the casual player market for it, probably to the point it made fighting games obsolete in most people's eyes.

### Replay Factor: Variable

This is going to depend on how seriously you take games and what effort you are willing to put into it. If you are the casual player and like easy titles, this is not for you and you won't replay it when you beat it. If you are of the hardcore type or like difficult games to master, then you are going to enjoy this. It's really for a select crowd in my opinion.



### The World Record Perspective:

There is too much history to track every single variant of this game and every system it's on. I know of at least seven variants (Street Fighter II, Street Fighter II Champion Edition, Street Fighter II Hyper Fighting, Super Street Fighter II, Super Street Fighter II Turbo, Hyper Street Fighter II Anniversary Collection, and Super Street Fighter II HD Remix) and there are also arcade, SNES, PSP, you name it, versions as well. Scores range from the 1.5 million range down to 100,000 depending on what system you're on, so check the board before trying it. Some are easily obtainable, others not. Also, if you're doing it in versus mode against other people, 50 win streaks are good and over 100 even better, though it's hard to expect that anymore without arcades.

### The Penguin Says:



"This game is obviously well known and has more variations than a pixelated penguin can keep track of, however it is definitely high up on people's lists for a reason. The World Record potential is very variable as it depends on which track you are doing, as some are easy while others are total terrors."

"Overall I give the game an **8.5 / 10**, as the difficulty to master the game keeps it from getting a higher score, and give the World Record a **Variable** rating, since some records are easy to beat while others not so much so."



Arguably Sony's first true video game mascot arrived in 1996, as Crash Bandicoot was released for the Playstation 1 to mixed reception. Popular videogame website Gaming Target piled the praise on Naughty Dog's first PS1 project, particularly commending its visuals and gameplay. On the other hand, another well-respected videogame website, Gamespot, was critical of the game, claiming the gameplay was "flat", and that the controls were "sluggish". Crash Bandicoot had generally been a success, and the California-based developer was encouraged to create a sequel in the hopes that it could become a long-term franchise for Sony. Many gamers were hesitant, questioning what original ideas they could bring to the table. The following year saw the release of Crash Bandicoot 2: Cortex Strikes Back. In a year full to the brim with titles that to this day are heralded as classics, such as Diablo on PC, Mario Kart 64 on the Nintendo 64, and Castlevania: Symphony of the Night on the Playstation and the Sega Saturn, could the loveable genetically-advanced Eastern Barred Bandicoot make a big impact?

The game begins with Crash being abducted by series villain Doctor Neo Cortex (pictured below), who claims to have changed his ways, now dedicating his efforts to saving the world. Crash is then thrown into the first of the series' unique warp rooms, where there are 5 level portals to choose from on the fictional N. Sanity Island, with there being 6 warp rooms in total. Locations on said island vary in appearance, from forest and jungles, to beaches and icy caverns.

His main objective within the game is to gather Crystals for Cortex, which allow him to keep the planet from being destroyed by repelling the power of an upcoming planetary alignment. Whilst the story is somewhat nonsensical, it will certainly help keep the audience entertained, and serves its purpose in a game heavily-focused on the gameplay rather than storytelling.

Whilst the gameplay is very similar to that of its 1996 predecessor, the sequel also adds a menagerie of new features and moves for Crash. The aforementioned Warp Room system was a new addition and allowed for a clear and easy to interpret navigation system between levels, as well as the ability to play the 5 levels per



Warp Room in any given order. There is a purple-glowing crystal to be obtained within each of these, and once all of them are obtained, a boss battle is activated. Once defeated, the following level would be opened. New moves such as the ability to crouch, crawl, and perform a body slam are all great additions and serve a purpose. Crouch enables a far greater, and longer jump, allowing Crash to access previously inaccessible areas, where further item boxes or other rewards can be found. Crawl allows Crash to surpass danger and enemies with far less difficulty. The body slam enables him to destroy several item boxes at once, as well as dealing a fair amount of damage to enemies.



Crash Bandicoot and Doctor Neo Cortex

The game features two major types of gameplay. The first of which combines a limited 3D environment with 2D side-scrolling, with the player's control over Crash changing accordingly. The other is a popular style from the first game, the Indiana Jones-style chases, where the player runs towards the camera whilst being pursued by either a foe or a large spherical object of some kind. The sequel stays true to the unique style of platforming found in the first, as various hazards like pits, spikes, and TNT crates stand between Crash and his goal. A far more treacherous item for Crash to contend with is the bright green nitro crates, which explode on impact. The slightest touch will set these off, so you'll be sure to see these in the most inconvenient places, at the most inconvenient times! They become particularly familiar and more frequent in the previously mentioned chase scenes where you flee from a rampaging object or creature. Don't be surprised to see your lives whittle away during these sections, as you struggle to memorize the level's layout, leading to several restarts. A checkpoint is certainly one of the more welcomed features during this type of level. However, these green boxes of doom... aren't actually so dangerous. At the end of each level, a metal crate with the 'nitro' symbol will appear, and when jumped on, will render all the other crates around the level inert, which will often allow for access to a secret gem. Collection of these will ultimately prove pivotal to the storyline.



Along with the gems, surplus content can be found in the form of a bonus stage located within each level, which allows for further appl... "wumpa fruit" to be collected. For every 100 fruit obtained, the player will gain an extra life. These lives are certainly not few and far between, as extra life crates can be found on a fairly regular basis. This combined with the protective Aku-Aku mask (pictured to the left), allowing for multiple hits to be absorbed before losing a life, makes the game very approachable and not intimidating for rookie gamers. That is not to say that this is a cake-walk however, with levels becoming increasingly difficult as the game progresses.

Crash Bandicoot 2 was incredibly well received by critics, receiving numerous perfect scores from video game publications. Flaws from the previous games were improved upon, such as the controls previously labeled as 'sluggish'. Whilst adding many new features, it maintained the same charm and impressive graphics from the first, leading to many considering it as a classic. It was released on the North American PlayStation Network January 10, 2008, having already been available in Europe. At the incredibly reasonable price of \$5.99, this is certainly a recommended buy for a fan of the platforming genre, but more importantly, anyone who likes a game that is downright fun!



I hope everyone is having a great Pixilated new year so far. January was a great month to be a Pixilated fan. Here are some of the retroware highlights for the month of January:

#### WiiWare

Chronos Twins DX  
Fast Draw Showdown  
Heron: Steam Machine  
Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney  
Uno

#### DsiWare

AiRace: Tunnel  
Animal Puzzle Adventure  
Chronos Twins  
Dark Void Zero  
Starship Patrol  
Trajectory

As you know, I don't have a DSi (yet), so I really can't talk about the DSiWare games from a hands-on experience. The following is some information I learned about the DSiWare games as well as a more thorough look at WiiWare titles:



#### Dark Void Zero (Video to the right)

The story goes, Dark Void was a long lost, unfinished game made by Capcom and planned to be released on the Playchoice-10 NES arcade cabinet and NES; and that Dark Void Zero is a recreation of that game using the same 8-bit graphics and music. It looks like fans of 2D action platformers like Metroid and Castlevania should enjoy this one.

#### Chronos Twins ([click here to see the trailer](#))

Chronos Twins is a port of a planned GBA game that was eventually moved to the DS (only in Europe). Now that same game has been ported to the DSi for everyone to enjoy! (I discuss the WiiWare port in more detail below).

## **Fast Draw Showdown** (video directly to the right)

Fast Draw Showdown is another fun game! It is a port of the 1994 live-action laserdisc arcade light-gun game from American Laser Games. The actors are very funny, due to the great one-liners and how serious they all are. It is setup like this: in a scene the bad guy says a one-liner and then it is up to who can fire the fastest. If you shoot the bad guy first, they usually say another one-liner before dying and then you move on to the next scene; as simple as that. You really want to keep playing, just to see the next character. Great fun!

## **Heron: Steam Machine** ([click here to see the trailer](#))

Heron: Steam Machine is based on Pipe Mania, which is a computer game that came out in the late 1980's. This update looks great with simple graphics, nice animations and great music! I just recently got into Pipe Mania and all I can say is, what a fun puzzle game! Heron Steam Machine is just as fun, but I think it is a harder game.

## **Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney** ([click here to see the interview/trailer](#))

Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney is a port of the GBA game, which was never released outside of Japan, but was ported to the DS for all regions. I am pretty sure this is the port of the DS game. I played the DS version and did not like it; just way too much reading for my taste. I do like the 16-bit graphics style though. I heard if you enjoyed the DS version you will enjoy this adaptation as well. Plus, it is only \$10.

## **Chronos Twins DX** (Video directly to the right)

Chronos Twins DX, as I mentioned above, is a port of a DS title that was only released in Europe. The game is a 2D platformer with 16-bit graphics and plays great with many boss battles and puzzles to solve. I only wish the music was more like SNES instead of sounding more modern to go with the gameplay and visuals. This game also gets hard, but not as quickly as Heron. I think fans of Castlevania and Mega Man should enjoy this game. I know I do.

Be sure to mark your calendars: Mega Man 10 comes out in March!





■ [Atariage](#)

■ [Game Gavel](#)

■ [Retro Gaming RoundUp](#)

## Game Over

I hope all our new readers from Facebook Land as well as our regulars had a good retroblast this month. The Homebrew Sleuth looks to be a promising addition to the magazine and I am greatly looking forward to seeing what is on tap for next month from Collin. One of the things I forgot to mention in the introduction to this issue is the fact that from now on each month will have a different color scheme in the header (some colors might be repeated). February is Magenta to go along with Valentine's Day, while January was Yellow, and December was Red. I have no idea what next month's color will be, but I figured it would be kind of neat to have a different color for each month. Anyway, thanks for stopping by and I hope to see everyone next month when we finally hop into spring!

- [Bryan Roppolo](#), Retrogaming Times Monthly Editor

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