



COVERING 3 DECADES OF CLASSIC GAMING

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Press Fire To Begin

by [Bryan Roppolo](#)

Welcome to Spring everyone! Even though it does not feel like Spring at the moment, with snow falling all around me, I have faith that it will get here sometime before the end of the month (at least I hope!). Anyway, this month we have a HUGE surprise, and I mean HUGE. Remember back in the early days of Retrogaming Times when there was a column called "The Many Faces Of..." which was originally written by Tom Zjaba himself (upon getting the idea from future columnist Doug Saxon)? Doug Saxon eventually picked up the column before Alan Hewston made it his own and added his personal touch to what was then already the most popular column in the magazine. Anyway, the reason I bring up this historical tidbit is because the column is officially back and in business! This is after I got countless e-mails asking for it to return as well as seeing posts on on-line message boards saying that RTM was not the same without "The Many Faces Of..." It was hard finding someone that would be able to step in and fill Alan Hewston's shoes, but Sal Esquivel seems to be up to the challenge. He has a massive classic gaming collection and will be working with Alan himself to make sure each "Many Faces Of..." lives up to its name. Even though Sal is now at the helm of the main Retrogaming Times Monthly column instead of Alan Hewston, it should prove to be just as good if not better than it was in days past.

Now that I've got the massive groundbreaking news out, I want to shift gears (only slightly) and make another big announcement. Yes, another big piece of news! RTM columnist and promoter Paul Zimmerman is being interviewed by the [Pioneer Press](#) which is a free weekly newspaper delivered to the Chicago suburbs. In the interview he will be discussing the Midwest Gaming Classic which is being held March 27-28, as well as mentioning our magazine. I might have to get a copy of that article and frame it on my wall, just kidding. I wish Paul the best and can't wait to see how the article comes out.

Now let's get on to this month's issue!



Retrogaming News

Atari Party 2010

This year's Atari Party is being held Sunday, March 14th from 12:00pm - 8:00pm. at the Redwood Park Community Building in Davis, CA. They've got nearly 300 different games lined up to be available this year, running on 17 different types of hardware. There will also be a raffle and a screening of the movie "Once Upon Atari" and possibly "TRON". Doesn't sound like a bad way to spend an afternoon/evening! More information can be found out at <http://www.newbreedssoftware.com/atariparty/>.

Texas Pinball Festival 2010

The 2010 Texas Pinball Festival will be held the weekend of March 19th-21st at the Hilton DFW Lakes Executive Conference Center in Grapevine, TX.

There will be over 10,000 square feet of pure game room fun, with 175 pinball machines, classic video games and other game room goodies set up on free play for everyone to enjoy the entire weekend. Also, many vendors, collectors and hobbyists from the area are bringing their gear and there will also be video games for sale. The Pinball Festival will also be open for our night owls until 2am on Friday and Saturday, including a cash bar with food and drinks. Come visit <http://www.texaspinball.com/overview.htm> for more information!

Midwest Gaming Classic

This event is being held Saturday, March 27 from 10:00am to 8:00pm and Sunday, March 28 from 10:00am to 5:00pm at the Sheraton Milwaukee Brookfield Hotel in Brookfield, WI. The Midwest Gaming Classic is the largest all-encompassing electronic gaming event in the Midwest, which features home video game consoles, pinball machines, arcades, and computers. Come see the classic gaming and computing museum which has nearly every console ever manufactured. Also, you'll be able to compete in tournaments, listen to speakers, and much more! Did we mention Paul Zimmerman will be there in person and have a [live steaming feed](#)? Check out this website for more info: <http://www.midwestgamingclassic.com/>.



I have been a fan of the game "Tunnels of Doom" since I was 4 years old. I have fond memories of sitting in the basement at 2 AM crawling through dungeons in search of various orbs and amulets, hoping the loud hum of the fan from the computer would not wake up my parents, who would certainly not approve of my being awake at that hour. For many of us, retro gaming is more than a hobby, it's an emotion... it's a bridge between the now and the then. The same can be said for Howard Kistler, a friend of mine and a uniquely talented individual.

Two years ago, I was sitting at my computer looking up information on the TI-99/4A computer when I stumbled across something very interesting. Halfway down the third search page, I found an entry for something called "ToDR" or "Tunnels of Doom Reboot." I was immediately drawn to this page because (as previously stated) I have a strong affinity for the original game. What I uncovered would inspire me to begin writing video games, a hobby which has become a major part of my life. If you do not know Howard or have not seen his work, you are about to enter the world of **DreamCodex** "Retro-Remakes."

RTM: So you're the "retro-remake" guy?

Yes, I like to say I'm the only live TI-99/4A remaker in captivity. But it would be great to discover someone else revitalizing these classic games. There are lots of remakers out there, and as a rule most focus on the system they loved in their youth. So for me I eventually became a specialist in TI remakes, in part because it was my first computer love, and in part because no one else was taking on these nearly-forgotten gems.

I do my own games too, but I suffer from the classic "freedom of choice" syndrome and have trouble concretizing my game mechanics in order to get them done. Remakes in contrast give you a solid starting point and can be easier to plan out, though sometimes recreating the original's gameplay can be more work than doing your own thing. Tunnels of Doom Reboot is a perfect example of the latter case.



Battle screen from ToDR



Dungeon crawling screen from ToDR

RTM: What got you into this? There really isn't a big money market for retro-remakes...at least as far as I know.

Not a dime, actually, unless you're one of the rare folks who parlays it into something commercial. Which, besides requiring a significant degree of talent, means getting the go-ahead from the actual owner of the game you're remaking. Remakes occupy a legal grey area, since the remaker doesn't own the rights to the original and sometimes they can't determine who the owner is in order to ask permission. Most end up as freeware then, either by design or by necessity. All my games are free regardless, as I'm in it for the fun, not the dough. As a kind of compensation I have been on some gaming magazine cover discs, which is a real blast, and for a hobbyist like me that's a bigger reward than money anyway.

As for how I got into it, I didn't start out as a remaker of any kind. I dabbled with game design on and off for a number of years, but never finished a game until I entered a contest on Retro Remakes (www.retroremakes.com), which then launched the remake side of my gaming career.

RTM: Tell us about your first retro-remake...What was it and what challenges arose that you maybe didn't expect?

The game, rE/Generation, is a remake of one my favorite PC games, D/Generation, and it did okay in the contest, but more importantly it showed me that I could take a game from planning to completion and have something actually playable at the end. It was a trial by ordeal though, as not only did the contest have a tight deadline, but I decided to pick up a new development tool (the now extinct Jamagic) to create it in. About halfway through I changed it from a straight remake to a sequel, which also made aspects of it more difficult. If I were to remake it again today, I'd do just about everything differently. But it was my baptism into game crafting, and the prospect of coding a game from the ground up was never as daunting afterwards.

RTM: How important is maintaining the "feel" of a classic game to you...I know in playing modern "Frogger" interpretations, the classic feel is almost non-existent.

For me it's crucial that the remake retain as much good from the original that it can. Of prime importance is the gameplay, because obviously it's a brilliant game or you wouldn't be spending the time to remake it. There are exceptions, where remakers have done a drastically different game but stayed with the spirit of the original, because they wanted to challenge themselves, but overall the best remakes play like the original, only with improvements and/or more content.

Commercial remakes are a very different beast than the fan community works. Like remakes of favorite movies, they are more often a crass attempt to cash in on a much-loved predecessor, rather than carefully updating it for a new generation. Both game and movie remakes also point to a creative laziness, or even cynical materialism, that says it's better to retread something that worked before instead of trying something new. Thankfully this is a minority occurrence in the fan remakes world, where respect and affection for the original result in a much truer homage.

RTM: Tell us a bit about your conversion of ToDR. From reading your website, you did an extreme amount of work. Right down to using a hex editor to decipher the original code.

ToDR was one of those projects conceived in passion and birthed in pain. After having gotten a game or two under my belt I decided it would be fun to do an RPG, a genre that I enjoy a good deal having been a pen-and-paper role-player since way back when. And it seemed like Tunnels of Doom would be the perfect choice - I love it on the TI, it remains a high-rated favorite of the 99er community, and it was a groundbreaking game in several respects. Plus it seemed just this side of doable, complex enough to be interesting but not so complex that I couldn't do it in a manageable time frame.

Well, turns out I was wrong about that. I started out coding the game's graphical interface, thinking it would be the tough part. I dissected the data files to work out the vital stats of the game creatures and items, and to determine how things were operating under the hood. I'm not sure why, but at the time I seemed convinced that this would be enough and that the rest of the game would almost fall into place around these elements all on its own. I announced the project, sure that it would be completed in six months. That was a mistake, as poor planning of the game logic and input handling made it an absolute nightmare to complete. Four years after beginning the project I was able to release a playable remake that I think contains some essence of the original, but it was a grind that I never want to repeat. All game developers sooner or later end up with a project that, as the saying goes, kills them or makes them stronger. I think ToDR did a little of both.

RTM: It seems to me that you "limit" yourself graphically. This is by design, right?

Can I pretend the answer is yes? Actually, it's somewhat true, as I like pixel graphics and simple vectors, and many of my games are deliberately low-resolution or minimal on purpose (Chirality, and to a lesser extent MunchMates). Others are simplified because they simulate an older system (such as the C64-alike Devil Ronin). But to be honest, my graphical skills aren't up to much more than what you see. Tunnels of Doom Reboot probably represents the current apex of my game art skills, I'm afraid.

There's a term in the game developer community for this - "programmer art", or sometimes "coder art". It means that the person who coded the game also did the graphics. As you can imagine, the mathematical talent for coding doesn't always correlate highly with an artistic gift, so programmer art ranges from the competent to the horrific, with a lucky few touching on the gorgeous. Some coders can call on their graphically adept friends to do the artwork, just as many (including myself) will involve musician friends to provide soundtracks. But with the usual remaker "team of one" you get graphics from the programmer, such as mine, which I charitably self-rank as "serviceable".

RTM: What qualifications do you have for a game to want to remake it? You obviously do some that are nostalgic for you, but what about Yeti? From what I understand, you had never played the original Bigfoot prior to your interest in re-making it.

The main thing is that the game has to have a compelling, and ideally unique, play mechanism that grabs me with its brilliance. It might sound hyperbolic, but Bigfoot has that. It's an elegantly simple platform game that manages to squeeze in a good number of tactical elements, and it does so transparently so that you never feel like it's too much work or that the game is being unfair. If a game has that creative genius in it, then it's a top contender for remaking.

The other class of games I take on are, as you say, ones with personal nostalgia value. You'd have to go to great length to say that Munchman is a wholly unique game by any metric, but it's one I loved as a youth and I wanted to bring it back. That it managed to garner a small measure of praise for being more than just another Pac-Man has as much to do with the creativity of the original as with any changes I made. So basically, rescuing games from undeserved obscurity is my other guiding light in remaking, and a major factor in why I became a TI remaker in particular.

RTM: What were your favorite games when you were young? I know for me Tunnels of Doom and Faxanadu were my absolute favorites.

Definitely Tunnels of Doom and Hunt The Wumpus on the TI, plus the timeless Munchman, Parsec, and Tombstone City. And then on to the Commodore 64, where Forbidden Forest, Jumpman, Archon, Realm Of Impossibility, and the Temple Of Apschai trilogy took up many afternoons. After that it was the Amiga and games like Starglider 2, Lemmings, Deuterios, and Eye Of Horus. Plus working on Unix environments and mainframes in college gave me a taste for roguelikes, which I have loved ever since and play to this day.

RTM: How did these early gaming experiences inspire you to do retro-remakes?

It's accepted wisdom in the "old computer" community that early games emphasized gameplay over graphics, and that it was the cleverness of them that made them so compelling. I subscribe to this in a large part myself, plus I like the accessibility and purity, if you will, of older games. Tapping into that and adding your own variations is one of the aspects of remaking that makes it a



Screen from rE/Generation



Screen from Yeti

rewarding experience. And you're able to reach an audience of other people who also love the source material, as well as bring a beloved favorite to a new audience who has never known the original.

RTM: What are you currently working on?

Not atypical of game designers, I've got about a dozen projects in various states of completion. Some are nearly done, such as the forthcoming remake of the TI game Bigfoot (re-titled Yeti), others are frameworks in search of a game (the embryonic Engine Of Creation), and still others are essentially game engines I wrote because the mathematics behind them intrigued me (One-Switch Pinball, which may or may not ever become a released game). In the realm of actual games in development, after Yeti there are a few other TI titles I want to tackle, plus I'd love to return to my unfinished Amiga game Paramodo and give it a proper PC release.

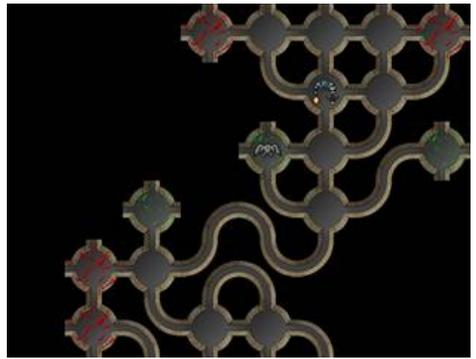
RTM: Have you ever released a game for an older system? For instance, you mentioned the TI-99/4A. Were you a TI Programmer in the 80's or 90's?

I started writing games, and software in general, in the 1980s on the TI. I wrote titles in Extended BASIC, but unfortunately they are all lost. Or maybe not so unfortunately, as I don't doubt they look better through the filter of memory than they would to my eyes today. I did some C64 and Amiga game development too, but again nothing which ever got truly completed, much less released. However, the homebrew scene has really got me interested now, and I think it would be great to take up the challenge of writing a new TI release today, or even de-making one of my original games onto that platform. Time will tell.

RTM: What do you have planned as far as "retro-remakes" for the future?

Hmm, well, part of me is leery about disclosing works in progress, as there are a number of games I've announced and then abandoned due to various factors (remakes of Solar Fox and Max Headroom number among them). But I think it's safe to say that any TI remake I have underway has a good chance of seeing the light of day, so I'll let you know that I have a Tombstone City remake about one third complete. I am looking at doing The Attack and possibly Superfly alongside Tombstone City, since all three utilize similar mechanics and would make a fun trilogy. And while it's early yet, I do intend to remake the most requested TI game, Parsec. Tentatively titled Parsecutor, it's at the basic engine stage, and is likely to take some time as this is one that I'm going to have to get just right. That's the way it is with remakes - you take on a beloved game and if you get it wrong, you know about it, but if you get it right, that's the sweet spot and everyone's a winner.

Please visit Howard's site www.dreamcodex.com to download for free all the masterfully crafted retro-remakes discussed in this article and more!!



Screen from Hunt the Wumpus

Press Play On Tape - Today Fiumaccio, Tomorrow Atlantis!
by Keith Bergman

Any retro gaming is like time travel, and for TI 99/4A users the Wayback Machine is usually set to 1982 or 1983. In those final two years of the computer's production, when its price dropped and its market share exploded, we saw the release of most of its most beloved games. Parsec, Hopper, Microsurgeon, all those Atarisoft coin-op conversions... a cornucopia of classics came out of that era.

But today, let's set the dial back even further... back to a time before Extended BASIC, and indeed before the 99/4A itself. In 1980, its older brother, the 99/4, was wowing early adapters with its chicklet keyboard and overheating power supply. Hunt the Wumpus and Early Learning Fun were about as exciting as it got in the realm of official software. But the first few kitchen-table programmers were beginning to explore the 99/4's possibilities, creating new software using the console's built-in BASIC.



Santa Paravia and Fiumaccio

While I'm sure earlier examples exist, the oldest commercially released game I own for the 99/4 is from 1980, from a company called Instant Software out of Peterborough, New Hampshire. Their version of **Santa Paravia and Fiumaccio** came on cassette, with a nice-looking folded instruction sheet, complete with instructions on how to send the tape back if you accidentally erased it. The game was apparently also released for the TRS-80, Apple II and Commodore PET, and originated from a type-in program published in SoftSide magazine in 1978 by George Blank.

Loosely based on the even older computer game Hammurabi, Santa Paravia and Fiumaccio allows 1-6 players the chance to run an undistinguished city-state in 15th century Italy. You control every aspect of your subjects' lives, be it harvesting crops, building markets and industry, attracting nobles and clergy to your city-state, or buying up more land to expand your domain. The goal is to rise to the rank of king (or queen -- this is one of the few early games I've seen that makes allowance for a female player).

Santa Paravia is a game of formulas. Raise taxes too high and commerce suffers. Train too few serfs to be soldiers and your territory gets invaded by rivals and annexed. One bad harvest can lead to famine and the death of a large chunk of your population. This being 1980, and a port from another system,

graphics are nonexistent -- information scrolls up the screen and a series of menus gives each would-be baron and count the choices to make for each year of rule.

I spent an evening playing Santa Paravia, and my performance could hardly be classified as kingly. I went bankrupt twice, routinely mismanaged the grain supply, lost most of my population during famines, and at one point wound up somehow with -1 noblemen in my kingdom (although I'm blaming that doozy on a game bug and not my poor management skills). I never rose from Sir to Baron, the next rank up, much less made it to King -- although unlike Hammurabi, even in my worst turns the people didn't rise up to behead or otherwise depose me. Perhaps they were too weak from lack of food...

It took some doing to even get the game to work -- curiously, though it loaded just fine in TI BASIC, it kicked out an error when I tried to load in Extended BASIC. With a disk system attached, I got a MEMORY FULL error when I tried to run the game, so I saved it to disk and reset the computer booting into Extended BASIC. No dice -- it wouldn't load from disk in XB either, though again, the disk copy would at least load in BASIC.

It took saving the game to my compact flash drive, copying the listing in the TI-Dir software on my PC, and then pasting the listing into Extended BASIC on the Classic99 emulator to get Santa Paravia running in Extended BASIC. All that for a program that, by rights, should run just fine in XB -- it doesn't use

any of the graphic character sets that only BASIC can access. My hunch is that something in this native 99/4 program's code just didn't like the 99/4A and the Extended BASIC environment, or vice versa.

Admittedly, even by retro standards Santa Paravia is primitive. This is a relic from the Stone Age of computer gaming, barely graduated from time-shared mainframes when "graphics" meant that your Star Trek game drew a map onscreen with asterisks and minus signs and "sound" meant a beep. But nostalgia, again, wins out -- heck, someone has made an online version of the game and there's a Wikipedia entry for it. And really, this is the first "God game" -- here in these lines of BASIC are the seeds of everything from Populous to Civilization to The Sims. And it's still a challenge, three decades later, to walk that fine line and balance your city-state's needs in an unforgiving virtual world. Give it a whirl, and you'll find a new respect for the Paleolithic roots of the gaming subculture.

Last month I told you about Atlantis, a TI BASIC game from England that pushed the limits of the unexpanded 99/4A. I promised a gripping account of my efforts to convert it to Extended BASIC and save it from its fragile original cassette (and ten-minute loading time) in an emulator-friendly way. Well, a shorter-than-usual month and a programming project of my own didn't help matters, so I regretfully must postpone this project until next month's issue. I'll make it up to you with a double-sized column, with an extra helping of 99/4A rarities and a surprise or two from some other platforms as well. Until then, may your volume and tone controls always fall within suggested industry parameters...

	Retro What If...? <i>by John Reder</i>
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Recently I discovered a game that I should have known about but never did. It seems to be well known in some circles and has been around since 1993, but many of my friends, who like me claim to be life long gamers, were just as surprised as I was to recently learn of it. I've got to tell you that this game has everything I love all rolled into one simple 9MB download. What is the game you might ask? Well, it appears to be the answer to a big 'what if' question, 'What if Battlezone were multiplayer?' If you haven't heard of [BZFlag](#) (Battle Zone: Capture the Flag) before, this is the game that answers that question.

If you read many of the books out there that cover the early years of Atari you may recall a story about how Atari licensed a version of Battlezone to the military for training purposes. This is not that version, but to me it feels a lot like how I pictured it would be!

When you download BZFlag and install it on your system (it is an Open Source project and can run on many systems like Linux, Windows and Mac) it installs in a few quick seconds. When you start it up, you will need to give it a call-sign and a password. It will accept anything in these fields. They are there for you if you choose to register them with the stats site to track your in-game abilities. The stats registration is also free and there is no cost involved in playing this game.

About the game:

This game is very simple, and this is why it and any other classic game appeals to me. I just want to be able to turn it on, play for a few minutes, then get out cleanly. It is a fun time waster if you have only a few minutes to spare, but beware, you might find yourself hooked. It's possible to spend all night on-line blasting away in heated closely contested battles.

In the game, you are a tank driver and given the same perspective as you remember from the old arcade game Battlezone. The games' graphics engine scales from simple polygons all the way up to textured objects and cool lighting effects. It can run well on some pretty old machines as well. The graphics aren't the best compared to today's high end titles, but for us classic gamers, we understand that the graphics aren't what makes a game fun. BZFlag has many servers to choose from, each server may have a unique custom battlefield configuration (Map) as well as its own variant of the in-game rules (note that you can also download many map editors for free and host your own server if you wish). Some servers are simple drive and shoot ones using a single weapon around flat battlefields, while others give you the ability to jump or fly taking the battles into surreal Escher-like vertical challenges. The game may have dozens of power-ups in the form of little white flags strewn about the map which give you everything from specialized weapons or the ability to go through barriers to others with a more negative impact, like only allowing you to make left turns.

The basic game variants are 'Capture the flag', 'Rabbit Chase', 'King of the Hill' and 'Free for All'. The main idea is to kill other tanks in order to up your score, in team based games you want to avoid shooting tanks that are the same color as you are. There can be up to 4 unique teams playing at the same time, with an additional player type simply called a Rogue. The Rogue role is for players who would rather shoot at everything than be part of a team. They get no points for captured flags and are simply there to get kills. In any case, each game is fast, furious and usually filled with players who have become v-e-r-y good. It might be overwhelming at first, but once you learn some of the strategies that are commonly used you begin to score some points of your own. The game defaults to keyboard and mouse for controls, but I found setting it up to use a joystick gave me quicker reflexes and higher scores.

I thought that this now 17 year old game was worth a mention here, since it was obviously inspired by the old Atari arcade classic and brings to life my old fantasy of playing Battlezone against real people! If you try it out, look for me on the battlefield, my call-sign is 'RedRum65' and my stats are downright embarrassing, but I'm hoping to redeem myself in the near future! Happy hunting!



	A Pixilated Commentary <i>by James Sorge</i>
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Hello, this is James Sorge bringing an editorial on an interesting issue regarding one of the more recent trends in the video game market today. If you have been following Paul Zimmerman's "A Pixilated 21st Century" column, you already know that a new genre of games have been popping up: "New" classic games, which are appearing on WiiWare and others as downloadables, and sometimes as regular sold-in-store titles. Some of these titles include: New

Super Mario Bros, Castlevania: The Adventure Rebirth, Mega Man 9, Bionic Commando Rearmed, and Blaster Master Overdrive.

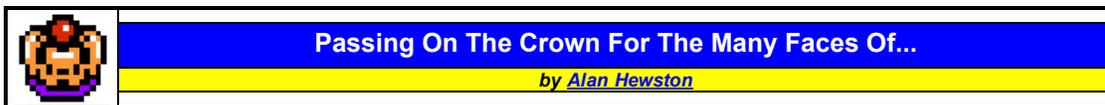
I say that these games are a shot in the arm to what the industry needed. A lot of the new games (like for example Call of Duty 2: Modern Warfare and Halo) are first person shooter clones of Goldeneye that really lost their luster 10 years ago and promote old fashioned brainless play. It also brings back a lot of games the way they should've been made but were restricted due to system limitations, like for example Bionic Commando Rearmed. This whole "retroware" concept reacquaints people with why classic games were good in the first place, the challenge and charm that up until recently has been lost. Interestingly, it brings up some ratings issues that were never addressed in the old days. Castlevania still cracks itself as a T rating, while Bionic Commando Rearmed got an M rating. You would've never guessed this 20 years ago, and these are games we played as kids.



Castlevania: The Adventure Rebirth

Some of these titles are clearly not as long as most newer games though. Castlevania: The Adventure Rebirth has 6 stages and lasts about a half hour on a speed run, while New Super Mario Bros. Wii will probably last you two to three hours and it includes warps. This isn't necessarily a bad thing though. I have an insane amount of backlog playing games and sometimes I need a shorter time playing a game rather than 40 hours which is quite a significant investment. Sometimes I want to just pick up the game for an hour and put it down instead of playing it for a month straight for 40 hours, like for example Mega Man Star Force 2, or worse, Pokemon. Those games eat way too much of my time.

In a final note, this goes out mostly to the game industry people, care about your old gamers as much as new gamers. If you keep making new games that cost \$50 every time and we can't afford them, then we won't pay for it and play it. Downloadable games at \$10-\$15 are a nice alternative to recent expensive titles, even if they are shorter like Castlevania: The Adventure Rebirth. It's not bad to make a short game if the price comes down as people will buy it.



No, I'm not back . . . yet, but we know that our readers would like to have more reviews like those that I used to love to write. While I am hopeful that I'll have more free time in about 16 months, I'm still too tied up with my family and ever growing list of things to do in life. So, in the mean time, and in case I do not make it back, we'll be passing the torch to Sal Esquivel. Sal will write reviews that continue my articles, the "Many Faces of . . ." and possibly from time to time write those for the next generation, the NES and SMS. You may recall Adam King's series, the "8-Bit Face Off". If all goes well, Sal may have a double review this month, where he reviews Gauntlet for both of these formats.

Sigh. Deep down, I am greedy and do not want to let go of my Many Faces of reviews, but I know how hard it is to find the time. I've tried, and failed, so we'll let someone else take over. Our readers keep asking for more of those reviews and we're confident that Sal has the experience and volume of titles in hand that he'll do a good job. I do hope that Sal can be creative and write new reviews each month and not go back and redo the ones that I did. There are plenty more titles to go, and thus Sal will be able to introduce you to some of the titles that not everyone will know. That's what will keep the RTM unique and fresh. Sal may also tell you from time to time about projects that his classic video game team are working on.

I am also hoping that Sal puts together reviews that cover as many of the Faces that he can get his hands on. If there are 5 faces out there, hopefully he can cover all 5 and not just review 3 of them. I know that I tried my best to do this as well, and then catch up and do a Lost Faces review when I got one of those elusive titles. With the ROM image libraries even bigger than ever, and the use of multi-carts or other special uploadable carts that allow you to play the original games (ROM images) on the original systems, Sal should be able to do a great job with his reviews being based upon the real systems, the real controllers and not emulators.

We wish Sal the best of luck and hope that you give him constructive feedback.

Alan Hewston is still a rocket scientist at the NASA Glenn Research Center in Cleveland, Ohio. His children are now 12 and 9 and take up a lot of his free time, so he spends more time doing what his family enjoys - playing strategy board games like Ticket to Ride, Carcassonne and Settlers of Catan. Alan is quite prolific at expanding these and other similar games, to add new cards, tiles, maps and game elements. All this is primarily what has taken him away from the Many Faces of Reviews. Family comes first, and he is still gaming regularly, just not electronically like he used to. Alan can be reached at alan@retrogamingtimes.com.



Welcome to my first Many Faces Of review. Alan Hewston has done a bang up job on this part of Retrogaming Times Monthly, so needless to say I have some big shoes to fill. I admire Alan's previous articles very much and I could never outdo him, only equal him.

Let me start by telling you about the scoring system here. It's pretty much the same as Alan's but with a new addition, the "Authenticity" category. This will be scored from 1 to 10 (10 being the best) based on how close the game in the review comes to the original arcade version. If a game wasn't released in the arcade then this category will simply be omitted from the scoring.

All the categories will be scored on a 1 to 10 basis (10 being the best). The categories are:

- Authenticity
- Gameplay (Playability)
- Addictiveness
- Graphics
- Sound
- Control

Now onto the game for this month, Gauntlet!

"Welcome Green Elf!"

This is a sound that anyone who has ever put a quarter into a Gauntlet arcade machine will recognize.

Gauntlet is considered the first major graphical dungeon game, and kids and adults alike clamored to arcades to play the cool Dungeons and Dragons type search and shooter.

As with a lot of Atari titles though, this one is flooded with controversy as to the origin of its concept. A man by the name of Ed Logg is credited on the original arcade and NES version as the designer. However, a man by the name of John Palevich came forward after the release of the NES version and claimed that Gauntlet was a rip off of Dandy (a.k.a. Dandy Dungeon), a game he wrote in 1983 for the Atari 800 computer.

After all the mud slinging, not one lawsuit was filed and Palevich was awarded with a Gauntlet upright. Ed Logg now has no credit in any versions released after 1987.

Now for the review (Hooray!!!)

This is a simple game. Get through the mazes alive, collect treasure along the way and find the exit all the while killing the bad guys as they swarm over you. Gauntlet sports a Birdseye view, which is nice because it provides a more distanced view of things to come (and believe me, you need that!)

Machines covered in this review:

- Atari 8-Bit
- Commodore 64
- Amstrad CPC
- Apple II

Machines NOT covered in this review:

- MSX
- ZX Spectrum



Have Nots: Apple II (15)

Oh my lord, why did they even bother! This version is just horrid. It looks like they did a direct port from the Atari 8-Bit and didn't change hardly any of the code. I guess they were just hoping it would run good enough to get them some sales from Apple users. Authenticity (4). Some elements of the game are missing, namely the thieves that throw the little balls at you. Gameplay (3). What Gameplay? The screen movement is just jerky. Obviously this shows the lack of raw processor power and consequently the lack of ability to do fast paced graphical games on the Apple II. Addictiveness (2). You can't get addicted to a game that moves this badly. Graphics (3). There are four colors, brown, sky blue, black and white. Ugh. Sound (1). This game starts with a title screen that includes the theme music (or a bad attempt at it). I was barely able to make out the tune. The sound effects cancel each other out because of the Apple II's pulse sound system. Controls (2). What can I say, sluggish and unresponsive. I'd have better luck taking out the disk, folding it into a paper airplane and trying to fly it.

Bronze Medal: Atari 8-Bit (28)

Well, I started with this version of the game because it's one of my favorite machines, but what a let down. This is Atari's own title and it's one of the worst versions. How sad. Authenticity (4). The thieves are missing in this one as well. The title screen is there, but the graphics and music could have been done better. Also, the detail of the characters are fair at best. Gameplay is fair (5). It moves smooth but way to slow for a Gauntlet game. It also doesn't have much in the way of Addictiveness (4) due to the fact that it moves slow. I find myself banging on the controller saying, "Faster, damn it! Faster!!!" Graphics (5) are rather plain. Not much detail here. In fact they are just flat boring. On the exits all you can see is just a big number 4 or letter E representing what the exit does. Sound (4). Once again just boring. All the sounds (except the digital voices) are here but they are not anything like what you'd expect or want them to sound like. Controls (6) are responsive but they don't have to be that fast due to the sluggishness of the game itself.

Overall, I can't recommend this version to anyone due to the lack of speed. These people could have done a better job here, but it receives the Bronze due to the fact that there were so few versions on the first generation 8-bit systems.

Silver Medal: Amstrad CPC (31)

Well, this one is almost identical to the Atari version. Authenticity (4). Again, no thieves. Gameplay (5) is fair just like the Atari version. Addictiveness (4). Same old story, this one just moves slow. Graphics (6) here get a better rating because this conversion is a little more colorful and a bit sharper. You can even see the "Exit to 4" words on the exit instead of just a big number 4 or letter E, but once again there is poor detail in the characters. Sound (5). They attempted to do better here as the sounds are a little sharper (not by much). The title screen sound and graphics are tit for tat with the Atari 8-Bit. Controls (6). They're responsive, but once again this makes little difference due to the lack of speed in the game overall.

Gold Medal: Commodore 64 (37)

This version looks like the Amstrad adaptation at the title screen but with a little sharper graphics and a nice SID soundtrack of the theme song. Upon starting, one would think that it's another port like the previous three I mentioned, but wait! What's this? This is the version that those others were ported from! Authenticity (4) takes a hit again due to the lack of the thieves. Gameplay (7) was faster and fun. I'm not a Commodore guy, but this was a decent

game to play. Addictiveness (6). This version was actually fun to play and kept me interested longer. Graphics (7). Characters were still short on detail and a little plain but with more accurate colors. This Gauntlet version also sports "Exit to 4" words on the exit instead of just a big number 4 or letter E. The Sound (6) was pretty good. The SID is definitely a very capable sound chip. A good rendition of the theme and sound effects were all there (except the voices once again. Bummer). Controls (7). Much better than the others, but once again this is due to a pretty decent increase in speed of the overall game. This is a version I could recommend playing.

This was a fun review. All the versions have their positives and negatives, but overall if I'm going to play a Gauntlet home version from this era, then it would definitely be on the Commodore 64.

Tune in next time for the long awaited Two Faces of Kool-Aid Man. Until then, Keep Gaming.



Well, I wanted to do a review of Gauntlet for the NES and Sega Master System, so Alan and Bryan suggested I use the 8-Bit Face Off for these platforms. This is my first article in the 8-Bit Face Off column, so please bear with me as I try to get a feel for it.

Gauntlet SMS (1990 U.S. Gold)

Ok, now this is nice. It sports the music (not very good though) but no title screen picture. It's a pretty authentic version of the game. As soon as you start you know it's going to be a cool version when you see your character very detailed and familiar looking then hear, "Welcome Elf!" A little fuzzy, but it's there. Also, The thieves are here throwing junk at you just like they should be. Gameplay is excellent, fast and smooth and your character fires nice and fast. It's very addictive, in fact I had trouble putting the controller down so I could move on to the NES version for this review. The graphics are nice and provide a wonderful look to the game. Colorful, crisp...just plain nice. The sound is good, but not as good as the NES due to the Dinkity Dink style sound that the Master System has always suffered from. The controls are amazing, fast and responsive. This is just an all around good Gauntlet game.



Gauntlet NES (1988 Tengen)

Alright, now this was just a work of art. Atari (under the name Tengen) brought back Ed Logg to design a whole new set of dungeons for this. People that had mastered the arcade were not going to be able to just come and walk through this one. It feels very authentic due to the fact that it has all the well known Gauntlet elements included. All of the sounds are here except two of the digital effects. This port, like the SMS, has all the bad guys included and also sports the "Ahhhh" when you eat food and the "Oww!/Ugh!" when you start getting trampled. Its gameplay is great and it was a pleasure to play. The game is very responsive, fun and extremely addictive. The bottom line here is that it's easy to get addicted to a game when the gameplay is there, but even more so when you have new screens that you've never seen before. The graphics weren't quite as nice as the Sega though. The Master System had larger more detailed sprites, but this really didn't affect my enjoyment of playing the NES version. In fact, I hardly thought about it when I was playing. The dungeons and characters were well done and the colors were crisp and very easy on the eyes. The sound was great! This version got a major upgrade. New music tracks (some of them from Gauntlet II) run during gameplay. One might think that this would be a distraction, but on the contrary, it adds a lot to the environment. Very cool indeed. The controls were just as nice as the Master System here, responsive and smooth.

Analysis

Overall, it was a tough battle between these two because they were both fun to play, but in the end the NES won out due to the inclusion of certain quirks (digital sounds and overall feel of the game) that reminded me of the arcade.

Winner: NES



For the first time in a while, there won't be an Apple II Incider column. There were several reasons for this. First, it's the end of the month and that means it's busy at work, as the busiest time for sales organizations is the end of the month. Many salespeople are trying to close deals and Sales Engineers like me get pulled in for many different things. The second reason for the lack of a game review? I got a new toy to play with in the form on an Apple iMac. Actually, it's my dad's machine but I'm going to use it pretty often.

However, even though there is not an Apple column, I am glad to say that after several months off Vectrexenstein is alive! As I mentioned a few months ago, the original Vectrex emulator I found and used was nice but seemed to only work with one game. It also did not seem to be in active development.

After searching for a few weeks, I found a new emulator called ParaJVE. The good news was that it appeared to support multiple games and also was in active development.

The problem I ran into was that ParaJVE didn't seem to run well on my home PC. Alas, I had no choice but to use another machine to try out the emulator which I did this week.

As a Star Trek fan, I originally wanted to review the Star Trek game for the Vectrex. Unfortunately, I had a difficult time getting the game to run properly, as it would load but I could not use the keyboard to control the game.

Ultimately, I settled on an unknown (to me) title called Solar Quest. In playing the game for about 30 minutes, I found Solar Quest to be a cross between

Asteroids and Defender.

The game control is eerily like Asteroids. I used the keyboard, where the arrow keys spin your ship in a circle and the numeric keys (1-4) allow you to fire, thrust and perform a "hyperspace" type maneuver.

Unlike Asteroids, where you were blasting asteroids, the enemies are other ships. The ships are passive at times but will suddenly attack you, so you have to be ready to thrust out of the way.

The Defender aspect comes in when you destroy the enemy ships. Round objects appear after you destroy the enemies and they drift toward the object in the center of the game screen (the sun according to the game manual).

Originally, I didn't know what those round objects were so I just destroyed them. However, I found that if I ran into them I didn't get destroyed and gained points. In reading the manual, I found out the round objects were supposed to be survivors of the ships you destroyed and you were supposed to save them.

The odd part? If I rescue the survivors, I get points. If I destroy them, I get some points as well!

All in all, I wasn't impressed with Solar Quest. The graphics were pretty bland and the game play wasn't inspiring. In reviewing a few games for the Vectrex system recently, I am starting to see the system's limitations which restricted the type of games that could be developed.

However, there are still a lot of games on the emulator and I will try to review them as we go along in 2010 to see how creative developers were able to get!



	<p>Mutated Output: The Harlequin Romances Of Retro Programming by <i>Mark Sabbatini</i></p>
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Only three Harlequin romance novels exist, but they and competitors' imitations account for more than half of all paperbacks sold thanks to a stable of "authors" changing names and places. Or so I've been told.

Tempting as it is to mock fanatics finding so much emotional comfort in churn-and-burn literature, the topic came up during a discussion about computer software. It seems there's a compatibility between factory wordsmiths and bedroom programmers, even if it's more about money than love.

Back in the retro era it was common for a single programmer to spend several months on a title. Everyone knows the stories about Pac-Man and E.T. being rushed for the Atari 2600 in five or six weeks. But some notorious coders were cranking out a staggering number games in similar time spans, such as Ed Averett writing pretty much the entire Odyssey 2 library by reusing huge chunks of code. They were deservedly scorned by many, but also had their devotees and it's hard not to respect what's a certain kind of talent.

Among the most prolific were those putting out monthly "magazines" of programs on tape and disk. Some were contributions by readers and pros, but a lot of in-house stuff had to be coded to deliver the ten promised titles for \$20 a month (or whatever the offer was).

I saw ads for a few of those during my Color Computer days, but didn't give them much thought for a long time. Looking at the list of titles from their back issues was disincenive enough, since the issues were obviously loaded with trivial, unoriginal and oft-repeated concepts. A "baseball card database" one month might become a "stamp collector's database" the next. Hammurabi might be recycled to govern residents of a space colony rather than a medieval kingdom. And it was always possible to write a lotto number generator if something was needed to fill out the collection at the last minute.

That changed in the latter stages of the CoCo's life when the one company that lasted more than a short time, T&D Software, started including titles formerly sold commercially by Tom Mix, one of the machine's best game producers. They redefined CoCo gaming standards with Donkey King, still my favorite 8-bit version of the arcade classic, and I've raved in this column before about other titles like Buzzard Bait (Joust), Sailor Man (Popeye) and Draconian (Bosconian). T&D suddenly gave me a chance to collect titles I couldn't afford at a bargain price, along with other stuff to try just for the hell of it.

Not surprisingly, when a company is churning out hundreds of programs some of them almost can't help being worthwhile. A few things grabbed my attention and, after a bit, I noticed the programmers were responsible for some entertaining stuff I'd collected elsewhere. I ended up picking up most of T&D's back library at a bargain library, plowing through hours of dreck to unveil the rare gems – an effort I considered more than worthwhile.

This month's collection of obscure reviews wraps up my look at favorite programs from The Rainbow magazine before turning to some of the best work from T&D from the perspective of myself and other modern-day users. Links to all of the magazines and disk files can be found with a search in the forum area of www.coco3.com.

Blitz (C+) June 1988

A highly polished piece of vertical space-shooter simplicity bearing a passing resemblance to the old Apple II classic Sabotage. The player controls a tank that shoots bomb-dropping planes overhead. That's it and it might not merit attention here, except for the extra polish. First, there's a decent title screen with instructions explaining among other things the slightly unusual controls. The arrow keys aim the tank's turret, but also move the tank once the gun reaches its left or right maximum. While this only takes a moment or two, obviously you can't dodge or reverse direction instantly which complicates things a bit. The "F" key triggers a continuous rapid-fire that takes out planes and the bombs they drop. Hit anything and it blows up with considerable shrapnel, which will take out anything it hits. A good thing, too, since when things get heated you'd have no chance without some chain reactions. The presentation is highly professional. Your tanks don't just appear; they bounce into place from your reserve supply at the top of the screen. The planes' bombs obey the laws of physics, picking up speed as they descend. The graphics and sound are commercial quality, and there's ten selectable skill levels. The easiest is truly a "for idiots" option since the planes at the top of the screen don't drop any bombs, therefore making you invincible until you reach 10,000 points where an extra tank is awarded and the skill level increased. One big annoyance is loading the thing, since you'll need to load three separate BASIC programs and wait several minutes while each POKE's the game's machine code into memory. The code can be saved afterward if you have a real machine or emulator with virtual disk capability (Warning: if not, choose the "tape" option when it asks you to save – otherwise the thing crashes, although you can recover by typing "GOTO 60").



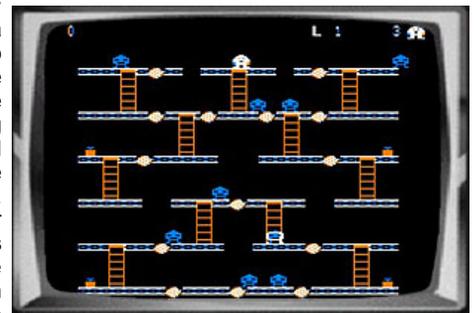
Tut's Tomb (B-) July 1988

This maze shooter is commercial quality in many ways, but suffers from a few glitches and is insanely hard. The player controls an explorer picking up treasures in a series of single-screen mazes, avoiding the usual spiders, scorpions and disembodied dragon heads one finds in dungeons. A key also needs to be collected so the player can exit each level. The player can shoot creatures, but only left or right, and every time one is killed a new one appears. The graphics are first-rate, even compared to commercial games, and I crave these sort of games and thus really wanted to like it. But it comes up just short for a couple of reasons. There's a few bugs promoted as features, such as the player's ability to shoot through some bricks and the fact monsters aren't always deadly to the touch. Also, I thought the collision detection on shots was off, but author Chris Kernan states creatures can be killed only by hitting their upper bodies. I'd let it all slide, except it's too hard to make any kind of progress. The monsters are all over you from wave one and you just don't have the responsiveness or firepower to fight back fairly. Kernan, in a subsequent article where he provides more levels, does explain there are some patterns and movements that can help, and I guess I'd learn them if I stuck with it longer. It's hard not to have tremendous respect for this as a type-in game, but that's not the same as saying it's fun.



Prospector (A) December 1988

This 50-screen platformer by Lee Chapel is unquestionably The Rainbow's best game ever, in my humble opinion. The CoCo was a bit lacking in this genre and Prospector ranks just a notch below a handful of the better commercial programs. The player roams levels using four-direction-and-jump movement, picking up gold nuggets imbedded in the floors while avoiding various creatures that are deadly to the slightest touch. They range from the always-present hordes of Snarfs that merely move back and forth to some pretty nasty things that give chase and lay eggs that spawn bombarding offspring. Scattered are a few stun bombs that halt movement of most enemies momentarily. Once all the gold on a level is collected, the player must move to an exit platform that appears to warp to the next level. If you do complete all 50, the game returns to level one with smarter and faster creatures. Besides ladders and platforms there's elevators, teleporters and floaters to add variety. The rather quick and quirky player movement, graphics and level appearance has a Miner 2049er feel, but it's clearly a different type of game. Two more things elevate this game to elite status: 1) a practice mode lets you control everything from starting level to monster intelligence and 2) it's possible to design custom levels, but only someone familiar with old-style BASIC and a lot of patience is likely to do so these days. The biggest problem I had with this game is it redefined my standards for a quality Rainbow game – and nothing ever came close to it again.



T&D Magazine Games

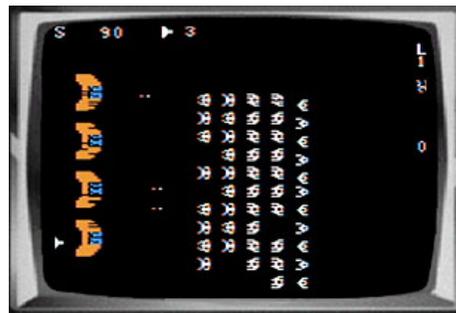
Rat Attack (B-) Issue 28

Just another snake game where you eat rats, grow longer and try not to collide with your tail or anything else bad. So why did I play it a stupid number of times after "discovering" it (turns out it was actually popular among other T&D fans)? Dunno, other than it's well programmed and reminds me vaguely of Serpentine, Br0derbund's classic that is still my favorite of the genre. The snake has to slink around 10 mazes, avoiding a computer-controlled snake in the process. Eating a rat increases your length, but unlike some other versions you can stop at walls safely. After a bit your snake starts shrinking again to its two-segment original and, while that'll keep you alive, you won't make any real progress in the game. Getting your snake to 100 segments results in a bonus life and point bump. There's some nice touches like nine electable speeds, key or joystick control, and a pause button. Not quite commercial quality, but among the earlier T&D offerings that made the disk feel worth the price of admission.



Super Vaders (C+) Issue 39

Space Invaders isn't the world's most complex game, so I was always baffled and more than a little miffed CoCo programmers were so awful at converting it. The machine has a hi-res black-and-white graphics mode, but instead almost every version uses the garish green/yellow/red/blue color set available in the medium- and low-resolution modes. So not only is everything ugly and chunky, but doesn't look remotely like anything from outer space. This version finally comes along and on almost every level gets things right. There's the coin-op layout of 55 invaders looking reasonably authentic. All the gameplay elements are captured fairly well and there's some customizable options such as guided missiles (yours or theirs) and diving invaders. But there's one huge problem: the entire game is SIDEWAYS! That's right – instead of moving from top to bottom, the invaders "descend" from right to left, while your ship picks them off along the left side of the screen. You adjust to it quickly enough, but it's never possible to shake off the thought of just what the hell somebody was thinking (OK, I understand the bit about TV sets being horizontally oriented, but programmers on other machines have dealt with it fine). I'll play it, but ultimately the desire to see a decent version of this game remains.



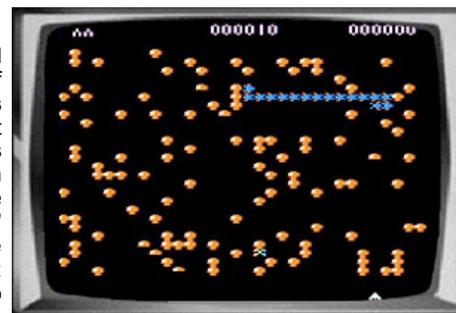
Flippy (C+) Issue 52

A clone of Kickman with a seal instead of a unicyclist catching descending balls. Nicely done for the most part, with cute animation of the seal catching the ball on its nose and using its flippers to bounce missed balls back in the air. Sound is sparse, but whimsical, and after each wave (when enough balls are balanced on the seal's nose) the creature playfully kicks the balls off the screen. Only real flaw is the seal suffers from terrible and constant flickering, which is surprising given the professionalism of the rest of the game. The main reason the game doesn't get a higher grade is there's no avoiding the fact the whole thing is rather monotonous. Oddly, a similar game on the same disk is Able Builders, a Kaboom-derivative that got some love from T&D fans.



Kingpede (B+) Issue 61

The CoCo was largely stuck in the mud when it came to Centipede games, with several mostly awful unofficial clones released. The only decent title was Colorpede by Intracolor, but at \$30 was one of the most costly CoCo titles at the time. This Rodger Smith port came five years later when players had long left such games behind, but it made a nostalgia trip more than worthwhile. Not only does it match the playability and graphics of its Intracolor cousin, but it's actually a conversion of Atari's insanely buggy sequel Millipede. All of the creatures from the coin-op version are there (best as I can tell, not having been all that great at the arcade machine) and the pace is just as fast. There are some minor differences. Instead of starting at a certain point level, players merely choose "easy," "hard" or "tuff." Creatures aren't introduced during the same stages. Also, it seems like Kingpede gets harder quicker, with multiple scorpions poisoning mushrooms by wave three. Spiders max out at 800 points. And so on. But if you're picking a clone after all these years, it's amazing this is the one to go with.





The Homebrew Sleuth: Colecovision Cosmo Fighter 2

by Collin Pierce



SYSTEM: COLECOVISION

AUTHOR: MARCEL DE KOGEL

YEAR OF RELEASE: 1997

Did you know that homebrews were around as early as 1997? Neither did I.

Cosmo Fighter 2 (was there a first one? I actually have no idea) is a possible candidate for the first homebrew ever. It's certainly the earliest one I can think of. Unfortunately, it doesn't stand up too well by today's standards. It's one of those games that I could imagine being a decent hit in the early eighties at the height of the Colecovision's greatness, but it really is an antique as far as gameplay is concerned.

Graphics: C+

As far as graphics go, this game is just okay for a Galaxian-style space shooter. In fact, they barely try to improve upon the original at all. It's just your ship, the enemies, and stars and planets going by in the background. The planets are actually a nice touch, adding a little more detail to the game and perhaps are impressive from a technical standpoint, but overall, the game looks bland and uninspired. To an average gamer it looks like they aren't even trying to push the system to its limits.

Gameplay: C+

Now, if you are looking for a Galaxianesque shooter, the graphics probably won't bother you, and from that viewpoint the gameplay might not either. Be warned though. This game is ridiculously fast and difficult, so difficult that I can't even reach the boss of the first wave! If you are a mere mortal, your first game probably won't last a minute. Enemies will appear without warning and blast your ship to bits without mercy. This is for **HARDCORE CLASSIC GAMERS ONLY**.

The enemies are bizarre, to say the least. You start off fighting little green bird-like things that move back and forth as they progress down the screen towards you, all the while shooting bullets that are way too hard to see against the stars. After fighting these guys for a while, blue bomber ships will start attacking by flying across the top of the screen at high speeds and drop large red bombs at you that fall at an even higher speed. Next come the springs. Yes, springs. They bounce along the bottom of the screen from left to right trying to smash you underneath. How are they bouncing in space off of no visible surface? Who knows. Throughout all of this, little yellow noodle things fall from above and try to collide with your ship.

That's as far as I could get. I've never seen what comes next with my own eyes, but I've heard that next come little purple bugs and then the boss. At least you can stare at all these enemies in the attract mode.

There are three difficulty settings, Beginner, Intermediate, and Expert. Remember how I said I couldn't even reach the first boss? Well, that was on the Beginner difficulty. I'm too scared to even think about trying the higher levels.

This game is definitely for the hardcore gamer only. In fact, it's so fast and frantic that even I can't really enjoy it much.

Controls: B+

Move with the joystick, shoot with the side buttons. It's as simple as that. Well, almost. Your ship seems to have rapid fire, but of course you can only have a few bullets on screen at once. The problem is that it's hard to tell when you can shoot and when you can't. Sometimes, it feels like you can't shoot even though your bullets should be off the screen by then. Simple and usable, but it all feels slightly unpolished.

Sound: D+

There is almost nothing. There's no music at all from what I've seen, not even a "Game Start" song like Galaga. The sound effects are very sparse. There's basically the sound of you firing, an enemy firing, and a bomb or noodle falling. I don't even remember if the springs had a sound effect. The lack of sound makes the game a lot more boring.

Replay Value/Fun Factor: C-

You might come back to it once in a while, but probably not that often due to its boring atmosphere, repetitive gameplay, and lack of mercy towards the player.

Overall: C-

This game might have flown back in 1980, but it offers very little to today's gaming audience, even a classic gaming audience. It's nothing that hasn't been seen before in a more fun and interesting package. And at \$35, I think you'd get a better deal by putting a quarter into a Galaga machine. I'm afraid I just can't recommend it. This game may be the first homebrew, but I think the only thing it proves is how far we've come. Still, thanks, Marcel de Kogel, for creating an important piece of homebrew history.



If someone were to ask what the definitive game of the late 70's and early 80's was, several different titles could come up. Asteroids and Lunar Lander in the late 70's along with the likes of Donkey Kong in the early 80's made this period an exciting time for gamers worldwide. These titles, however, were arguably overshadowed by two of the most widely known and successful franchises of all time – Pac-Man, with the first game in the series being released in 1980, and Space Invaders, first released on arcade systems in Japan in 1978. Each of these have been remade, re-released and re-imagined countless times, but one of the more recent titles put out is Space Invaders Anniversary for the PlayStation 2, released in 2003 in Japan and 2004 in Europe. As the title suggests, Anniversary came 25 years after the innovative fixed-shooter was first released, and is a compilation of "9 different versions of the everlasting Space Invaders", as the back of the case proclaims.

Upon booting up the game, you will be greeted by an interesting, if very limited arcade area, labelled as "Taito's Virtual Arcade" (pictured below). Taito Corporation is the publisher of the Japanese arcade and PlayStation 2 versions of Anniversary. This game was also released in conjunction with the company's 50th anniversary. The player can view all of the nicely rendered arcade machines, and a clever feature included is the ability to view each version of the game from a unique perspective. Using the *select* button, you can view the game from a perfectly flat, top-down perspective, or with the camera slightly pulled back, in an attempt to make it feel as if the game is being played from the viewpoint of someone standing at the machine. It's certainly an interesting idea, but it has to be said that most people would probably switch back to the flat, top-down perspective after a short time.



The full list of Space Invaders titles included on the PlayStation 2 version is suitably large, but the tried and tested formula stays similar throughout. Whilst the enjoyment levels experienced with the early Space Invaders titles at their original release still remains, the replayability factor always looms. Despite having so many versions of the title included, they are all for the most part very similar in terms of mechanics, and given that the game doesn't have the

ability to compare scores with other players worldwide, it shuts out the score-chasing element unless you have fellow retro-game fans to play with locally. It is hard to see anyone other than a hardcore Space Invaders addict coming back to the game time after time. For this type of fan, however, it is an incredibly convenient package, especially if they don't have the older consoles at hand. It is a little disappointing though to see some of the more unusual incarnations of the game not included, possibly due to licensing issues. The likes of Super Space Invaders, Space Invaders DX and Space Invaders '95 are nowhere to be found, which is frustrating, as the PlayStation 2's DVD disk could easily cope with more content. The full list of titles included is as follows:

- Space Invaders Tabletop: Cellophane version
- Space Invaders Tabletop: Monochrome version
- Space Invaders Tabletop: Color version
- Space Invaders: Upright version
- Space Invaders Part II Tabletop: Color version
- Space Invaders 3D
- Space Invaders Part II: Upright version
- Space Invaders Versus Mode
- Space Invaders Doubles Mode

The most unusual take on the game in the collection is certainly the "all-new" Space Invaders 3D. The game mechanics remain the same – shoot all the invading alien ships whilst taking cover behind four flimsy barriers – however, the viewpoint from which the user plays is from the perspective of the ship itself (as seen below), rather than of a top down playing field. This restricts the view the player has of the invaders, as only 4 columns of aliens can be seen at any one time. This actually makes the impending danger seem all the more threatening, as the increasingly quick opposition bear down on *you*, as you control the ship almost in first-person, rather than at a ship you control from a distance.

The clever Versus mode is also an interesting addition, and is arguably the most enjoyable iteration of the game included depending on whether or not you have a fellow gaming friend locally at the ready. This mode involves the two players on opposite sides of the screen, with the usual batch of enemies jolting side to side in between the two. There is certainly some strategy involved, as you can't shoot through to your opposition without damaging the line of ships that is effectively acting as your shield. This mode is very entertaining, and can come down to a battle of wits and risk against reward.



The graphics are authentic to the original version's releases, which for many would be seen as a good thing. One queries how much more appealing the package would be, particularly to a younger generation of gamers, with reworked graphics at a higher resolution. Everyone likes shiny visuals, right? Another gripe with the game is the music. Despite giving you the option to choose what music is played, none of the included tracks make for particularly pleasant listening. Also, in order to change a track you have to go into the start menu, then to options, so on and so forth, and eventually select your pick. An annoyance, however, is that the game doesn't shuffle from song to song automatically. Unless you want to listen to the same song over and over again, you're going to find yourself going back to the music selection regularly, which does feel a bit tedious and unnecessary. The lack of cool collectibles or extra games doesn't give the player a huge incentive to return to the game multiple times, but the included interview videos, particularly that with Tomohiro Nishikado the series' creator, does make for enjoyable viewing. Also, the fact that all 9 games are available to play from the start is certainly good for someone who wouldn't have the ability to focus on the game enough to play regularly, but perhaps locking one or two versions of the game until you get a certain score on a certain machine could have made for an interesting challenge.

On the whole, Space Invaders Anniversary is a flawed package, and despite a lack of real replayability, is still a recommended purchase for fans of the series or of retro gaming in general. This is down to its ease of use when compared to hooking up and dusting off all the old systems and playing Space Invaders on those, and also the game's incredibly affordable price. At its original release in the UK, it was priced at a reasonable £19.99 (\$30.29), but the game can be found at various outlets for under £4 (\$6.06). It is a worthwhile purchase, especially at that bargain price.



February was a great month to be a Pixilated fan. Especially for Sunsoft's surprise Blaster Master: Overdrive. Here are some of the retroare highlights for the month of February:

WiiWare

Blaster Master: Overdrive
[Mouse House](#)
Phoenix Wright Ace Attorney: Justice for All
Tomena Sanner

DsiWare

[Fieldrunners](#)
[Flipper](#)
Legends of Exidia
Oscar in Movieland
Prehistorik Man

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

DSⁱWare™

Legends of Exidia ([Click here to see a video for the game](#))

Legends of Exidia is the first RPG for DSiWare. This is actually Might and Magic 2, which was released for mobile phones in 2007. Looks like it has nice 16-bit graphics and music.

Oscar in Movieland (Video to the right)

This is the 2nd Oscar game for DSiWare. Oscar in Movieland was released as Oscar in 1993 for the Amiga computers and in 1996 for the Super Nintendo.

Prehistorik Man ([Click here to see a video for the game](#))

Prehistorik Man was released as Prehistorik and Prehistorik 2 for PC, Gameboy, Gameboy Advance and Super Nintendo. I hear this DSiWare port is the Prehistorik 2 version. Looks like it has nice 16-bit graphics and music.



Blaster Master: Overdrive ([Click here to see a video for the game](#))

Blaster Master is a classic for the NES. So, I was pretty excited to learn that Sunsoft, Blaster Master's developer, would be releasing games on the Virtual Console and that the first one was Blaster Master! Soon after that they released another game. But, this time it was a new title for WiiWare. But, it wasn't just any new game. It was a new Blaster Master game!! Well, this one is great! It is similar to the original, but with updated graphics and sound, but it still looks 16-bit. There are remixed songs from the original, but I do like the original songs more. There is now a map, which is very helpful, especially because it shows where the caves and save points are. Very handy! Also, now you can shoot diagonally. No more jumping to try to hit the enemy above you. You hold the Wiimote sideways, always a good sign for a retro game. If you like the original Blaster Master you need to buy this now. If you never played Blaster Master before, you need to give this one a try. Fans of Metroid and Castlevania will love this one!

Tomena Sanner (Video to the right)

This is great! Even though you don't hold the Wiimote sideways for this game, you do only press one button, the "A" button, which brings back memories of all the single button controllers from systems of the past. The game is great to look at, has good music, is fast moving and is just great fun to play. It is also very addictive. Your best times and scores can be saved and uploaded to the worldwide leaderboard to see how you match up. At the end of each level there is a mini rhythm game where you need to keep time (by pressing the button at the correct time) so that your man can keep break dancing until the song is done. Yes, break dancing! You can tell the designers love the classic retro games from the past and wanted to make this another retro game classic. They did! For a \$5 budget title, this game is a classic and well worth the asking price.

If you ever notice a retro game that you want me to give my impressions on, send me an email about that game and I might include it in the following Pixilated.

[Mega Man 10](#) was released March 1st on WiiWare! My impressions will be in next month's Pixilated.



Video Game Tattler
Issue #5
by Anita Beak



If you polled gamers across the world, you would find that the majority of them love Mario. The popular plumber is by far the most popular character in video games. But even Mario has critics. When we did some dirt digging in the Mushroom Kingdom, we found some people who don't just dislike Mario, they hate him. The once quiet bricklayer union of the Mushroom Kingdom is now becoming quite loud and outspoken on their anger for Mario. Union head Sammy "Bricks" Brickowski had this to say about him, "Yeah, we hate the guy. You would too if you saw all your hard work destroyed over and over. I mean, the guy just goes around and smashes all our brickwork. You have any idea how hard it is to build a brick wall that floats in the air?" This prompted us to ask him about the coins hidden in the bricks and if this is the problem. He responded, "If I ever figure out who is doing that, I will cut his head off and stick that in the middle of a brick. I'd like to see Mario's face when he smashes a brick wall and a head pops out." When asked why they have not done anything to stop Mario, Sammy gave this answer, "Stop Mario? Are you kidding? The guy has political immunity thanks to the princess. He can do no wrong in her eyes."



Gorf Is Frog Backwards

Most every classic game fan knows that Gorf is just frog backwards. What Gorf has to do with frogs is anyone's guess. We could only fathom that it sounded better than other animal names backwards. Dog is God, which would be too controversial. Bird is Drib, which just sounds stupid. Cow is Woc, which has possibilities. Take Pig backwards and you get Gip, which may scare people from putting a quarter in the machine. Personally, I want to see them redo Gorf and call it ReGorf, which is Froger backwards.



Do Bullets Have Feelings?

One segment of the video game world that is overlooked is bullets. From the beginning of gaming with Space Invaders to the shooters of today, bullets have always played a major part. But did anyone ever bother to find out if these projectiles of death have feelings and how they feel about killing? Well, Video Game Tattler decided to do it. Over a two month period, we went across the gaming landscape and extracted hundreds of bullets from walls, people, trees and barriers and asked them the same question, how do you feel about killing? And the overwhelming response was....NOTHING! The darn bullets said absolutely nothing. No matter how we phrased the question or in what language we spoke, they did not answer. So this brings up to the conclusion that bullets don't care. So keep shooting with no remorse.

Tom Zjaba is the founder of Retrogaming Times and is both a video game and comic book enthusiast. Be sure to stop by his [Arcade After Dark](#) site to see a plethora of video game related comics which are not published in Retrogaming Times Monthly.

	The Gaming Post <i>Places For Gaming Fans To Check Out</i>
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■ [Atariage](#)

■ [Game Gavel](#)

■ [Retro Gaming RoundUp](#)

Game Over

There goes another great issue of Retrogaming Times Monthly, however, don't fear as we'll be back next month with even more retrogaming goodness. I encourage everyone to send feedback to Sal Esquivel to let him know what you thought about his "Many Faces Of..." column so that he can get an idea on what needs to be changed, if anything. Also, feel free to send off an e-mail to me as well since I would love to hear what you thought of the comeback of this cornerstone RTM column. I know that I am looking forward to what Sal has in store for us in April as the weather turns even warmer!

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

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