



COVERING 3 DECADES OF CLASSIC GAMING

### Table Of Contents

#### ATTRACT MODE

- [Press Fire To Begin](#)
- [Retrogaming News](#)

#### THE RETROWORKS

- [Show Report -- California Extreme 2010](#)

#### THE GAME REVIEW H.Q.

- [Mutated Output: Few Sparks As Lights Dim At Radio Shack](#)
- [The Homebrew Sleuth: Battle Kid - Fortress Of Peril](#)

- [A Pixelated 21st Century!](#)

#### POWERING DOWN

- [The Gaming Post](#)
- [Game Over](#)



### Press Fire To Begin

by [Bryan Roppolo](#)

I'm sure the first thing that you guys are saying is that this issue is really small. Well, you are right. The main reason for this was because I sent out only 1 reminder to everyone for their articles, instead of the usual 3. Therefore, many people forgot about the deadline and were not able to submit anything. Oh well, I guess next time in September we will have the full crew back. That issue will also be our Back to School edition, so hopefully we can get some good school memories and maybe an article about the ever popular school game, Oregon Trail!

As I am typing this, the 2010 Classic Gaming Expo is currently under way after a few years off. That's great to see, as it's pretty much the premier classic gaming event in the USA. With any luck, we will have someone reporting on the show for next month's issue. In other retro gaming news, a homebrew version of Tutankham for the TI-99/4A is still being worked on and progress is being made. Parker Brothers ended up not putting the game out for the TI-99/4A system back in 1983, and only 2 prototype copies are known to exist. Needless to say, Tutankham is a great game and should be a welcome addition to TI-99/4A game players once the homebrew version (which is actually based on the Colecovision version) is complete.

I'll see you guys in September when the school bell rings, and I assure you there will be more, many more, articles then!



### Retrogaming News

#### The Big Bang 2010

This event is being held August 5-8 at the Bridge View Center in Ottumwa, Iowa. It will feature some of the best games for consoles and PCs that you have grown to love over the years. There will be cash prize tournaments with prizes in excess of \$10,000, celebrities, nightly concerts, including Days of the New, a 24-hour Bring Your Own Cartridge game area, and more! By the way, RTM favorite Paul Zimmerman will be there as well! Visit our website at <http://ivghof.com/> for more information.



### THE RETROWORKS

The "Anything Goes" Retrogaming Times Monthly Section



## Show Report -- California Extreme 2010

by David Lundin, Jr.

By the time this issue of RTM goes live, almost a month will have elapsed since California Extreme 2010 took place. However only two days after the show I find myself getting this show report together, wanting to get my thoughts down while the sights, sounds and smells are still fresh in my mind. This, my third year in attendance, saw the show once again take place at the Hyatt Regency / Santa Clara Convention Center as it did last year. California Extreme is the premier arcade collector's show on the west coast if not the entire nation. For one weekend every year a giant room fills up with nearly every arcade cabinet and pinball machine you can imagine, all set to free play. The amazing part is for a very nominal fee you can enter this mythical temporary arcade and play all you want for the entire weekend. Two days never went by so fast in your life. The show weekend this year fell on July 17th and 18th, running from Saturday morning until 2am Sunday and then picking up again a few hours later until 9pm Sunday night. This is a show where collectors, operators, record holders, designers, game players, pinball junkies, game design royalty, vendors, any group you can think of is there. It doesn't matter if you've played games for years or you're walking up to an arcade cabinet for the first time, everyone is welcome and the atmosphere is electric with fun.

As I've said in years previous, pre-registration is the way to go with California Extreme. You get into the show a half an hour early, a discount on show shirts, your own laminated show badge with your name on it and more importantly a special check in area that speeds you into the show. Although I didn't have any problems previously, the check in procedure at the door was super streamlined this year, getting you ready to go even faster. Make sure to pick up some raffle tickets as well since there are drawings for great prizes though out the weekend, including a grand prize of a full size arcade game or pinball machine. This year one of the grand prize choices was both a Star Wars and Tempest upright with the conversion kit for Empire Strikes Back and Tempest Tubes! Once again my girlfriend Jessica accompanied me and also my brother Ian came to the show this year, making it his first. The three of us were at the show from opening to closing each day, walking out on Sunday as the show floor was being powered down.

I'm pretty easy to spot at these shows since I tend to wear video game shirts that I haven't seen much of elsewhere. On Saturday I was attempting to bring myself some good mojo by wearing my Sega MANX TT SuperBike shirt, trying to win the matching hat in the raffle. While it didn't help any, I didn't mind in the least. On Sunday it was back to one of my all time favorite gaming shirts I've picked up over the years, Tetris is for Commies, which always gets positive comments. Speaking of Tetris, I had a really evenly matched game with another show patron at the Tetris cocktail in the cocktail table area on the backside of the show floor. Oh, I wear some pretty crazy Galaga sneakers as well but that's kind of hard to see in a darkened arcade.



The layout of the show floor last year was great but this time around it was even better. The area of cocktail tables and the LaserDisc music video setup was moved to the back corner of the building, meaning less traffic cutting through the area which provided a more relaxing area to sit down and play some Omega Race. The majority of the vendor tables were once again located at the front of the building but they had their own little wing off to the side that gave them more room. The vendor area then wrapped around the outer wall onto the show floor ending with the shirt tables. Traffic flowed smoothly throughout the building with long aisles of games and pins, incredibly only having one row which dead ended in a curve of games. The Extreme Team did an incredible job of laying out the show floor this year and as usual, there was really absolutely no wasted space - a game of some type everywhere you would turn.

There were quite a few of my favorite machines here starting with Championship Sprint. I spent many hours in my younger days playing Championship Sprint and it continues to be my favorite of the Sprint Series simply due to how balanced the track designs are. Super Sprint is a lot of fun but a few of the tracks are just too technical for their own good, there isn't any flow. Also the more standard size of the Championship Sprint upright makes it more appealing for acquisition. There were actually two machines at the show, one that was for sale. The for sale machine developed a display problem halfway through the show and the asking price was cut in half. If I had the space to work on it I probably would have made the purchase. Chase H.Q. is another game I hadn't played in a long time. A driving game where you are an undercover detective chasing down criminals in your powered up sports car. The cabinet is unique in that once you catch up to the suspect, police lights in the marquee flash as the siren is turned on. Then it's time to bash and smash the fleeing perpetrator off the road and bring them to justice. The Exidy prototype Teeter Torture is always a game looked forward to by both myself and Jessica as it really is unlike anything else and has a unique control method that simply can't be replicated any other way.

A big surprise was Magical Truck Adventure. It's essentially a railroad handcar simulator, a game I had heard of but never seen or played. Up to two players must pump handcar levers to move along the tracks, using a pair of pedals to either bank the handcar onto two wheels or make it jump over obstacles. Almost how Prop Cycle can get crazy intense on your legs, Magical Truck Adventure can kill your arms and upper body. Two days after the show my arms are still stiff after playing through the game. Some of my favorites from last year such as Varkon, Bosconian, and Zoo Keeper returned. Ian and myself played through Smash TV on Saturday night since he had never been through to the end of the game. I also made sure to get plenty of time in on Zeke's Peak, still one of the coolest and most unique games ever created in my opinion. I also made sure to play some of my favorite pins such as Lethal Weapon 3, Cyclone, Super Orbit, Arabian Nights and Space Shuttle. Uptime on all games was incredible with only a very few machines out for the weekend and we all know how temperamental these old games can be.



I only attended one of the hosted events in the ballroom adjacent to the show floor this year. That event was the "Game Show Game Show" which featured arcade related Password, Match Game (with a guest panel of gaming alumni), and 1 vs. 100 (with the entire ballroom audience playing). The winner of each game then advanced to arcade Jeopardy hosted by Owen Rubin. Aside from that I simply spent all the time I could on the show floor, soaking up the atmosphere and well, playing games.

I do want to take a moment to mention a few of the vendors at the show. First and foremost to bring up something

I mentioned in the 2009 show report. One of the offered wares at the show were night lights made out of pinball machine pop bumper caps. Essentially it looked as if you had a pop bumper plugged into an electrical socket and at first I thought that's what they were. It was only toward the end of the show did I realize they were night lights. Jessica was able to contact the gentleman that builds them earlier in the year so I knew I'd be able to purchase one when the show came around again. I'll be honest that one of the things I was most looking forward to at CAX 2010 was obtaining one of these lights. So when the show opened early to pre-registered attendees, Jessica and I made a quick walk over to the vendor area. Later Ian said he saw us take off to the left once the doors opened and wondered where the heck we were going together. He had an amazing variety this year. Jessica bought a green "100 Points When Lit" cap to give as a gift and I ended up buying two, one vintage Space Invaders cap and one yellow "10 Points When Lit" cap. I simply couldn't pass up the Space Invaders one and the other is currently illuminating the light switch in our bathroom. When there is light in the room a sensor shuts the night light off and when the room goes dark the night light turns back on.



Additionally a collector had an "arcade garage sale" with tons of parts and accessories from years of collecting and operating arcade games. When he was setting up I bought a DJ Boy marquee and then later in the day bought a Sly Spy marquee as well. Late on Sunday when he was selling through more of his inventory I spotted a Sly Spy bezel and bought that as well. I purchased a Sly Spy PCB a few weeks previously so finding a marquee and bezel was really nice. Finally the reproduction artisans at ThisOldGame.com had their usual table, including an awesome TRON themed rework of Video Pinball. Along with shirts, artwork and other assorted gaming goodness they were selling coasters made from old arcade marquees that I simply couldn't pass up. In case they happen to read this article, thank you again for letting me mix and match coasters from different marquees! I ended up getting a coaster from Q\*bert, Arkanoid, Ms. Pac-Man, and Gyruss. I have a bottle of Jolt Cola resting on the Gyruss coaster as I write this - no more condensation rings on my cocktail table.

Thank you again to the Extreme Team for an incredible show. Thanks also to everyone that brought games and attended the show. I don't know how I missed so many years of this incredible gathering of entertainment. Since attending my first CAX in 2008 I couldn't imagine not going to the show every year, it's such a huge part of what I look forward to when vacation time rolls around. The date has already been announced for CAX 2011, July 9th and 10th, once again at the Hyatt Regency in Santa Clara. The only bad thing about California Extreme is the weekend simply flies by before you know it. As I've said at the end of the show each year I've attended, I simply cannot wait to do it again next year. Oh, and in case anyone is keeping track, I choked at the end of Super Don Quix-ote so that will have to wait until next year as well.

"InsaneDavid" also covers all types of video gaming at <http://www.classicplastic.net/dvqi>



*"Many owners of Tandy products realize better ones exist, but they also feel they have a good product at a generally reasonable price."*  
- Chat message on a TRS-80 BBS in 1988

Radio Shack is on the endangered brands list for 2011, along with other household names like Blockbuster and Kia. Sadly, it doesn't seem like many people will miss it.

It usually takes a while for love to evolve to resentment and then indifference, and it seems Radio Shack loyalists long ago gave up hope after many years of disappointments. I've written much about Color Computer owners feeling scorned by the corporate cowboys at Tandy, but it turns out owners of most of the company's machines shared similar complaints.

It's the story of a company with a few monumental steps forward followed by many, many tiny ones into the abyss. (In my usual disclaimer of not being a Tandy hater, keep in mind other companies' screw-ups were often far worse. Those who could care less about the subject can skip ahead to the game reviews at the end of the column.)

The all-in-one \$599 Model I, sort of a late 1970s iMac at a time when home computers were mostly owned by hobbyists building them from parts, was an immediate runaway success. Along with its successors (the Model III and 4), it kept the Radio Shack in the game for a decade, much as the Apple II and Atari 400/800 did for those companies. By then Tandy had introduced the 1000 MS-DOS machines, another wildly popular everything-included line that weren't the most powerful things around, but a blessed relief to consumers frightened at trying to get the right processor/controller/case/memory/power supply/graphics/sound/disk/etc. without forgetting any necessary components. In between came the Model 100, arguably the first practical notebook computer, along with its virtual twin, the NEC PC-8201.

Tandy also scored technical, albeit commercially spurned, accomplishments such as the Tandy 2000, which was mighty in power but lacking compatibility with software people were actually using. And, of course, Radio Shack was the place to go for cables, components and other gizmos for hardware geeks of all brands.

One of the biggest selling points was a public largely unfamiliar with computers could find help and service at any of the Radio Shacks that were to be found even in the most remote of towns. Some customers undoubtedly felt Ataris and Commodores were marginally better and/or cheaper, but the prospect of getting help from Sears or Kmart wasn't reassuring.

Supporters made pie-in-the-sky predictions at times. Some felt the Color Computer with its unconventional but superior-in-power 6809 processor could knock the Apple II from the education throne. Others felt Tandy's refusal to follow certain market trends – such as slashing prices to the point of selling computers at a loss to maintain market share – would allow it endure where others failed.



"I will be surprised if these firms (Commodore/Texas Instruments/Atari/etc.) don't knock each other out in a year," wrote Wayne Greene, publisher of *80 Micro* and numerous other computer magazines, in a 1983 column commending Tandy's decision not to engage in the competitors' all-out TV ad war.

But paying premium prices for second-rate goods wasn't endearing to customers on a long-term basis, especially since machine owners found themselves starved for quality software and accessories as Tandy went to great lengths to spurn third-party developers. Company executives also made fundamental and sometimes bizarre assessments of the market.

"No one is going to blow the market away with a new piece of hardware at this point," Garland Asher, Tandy's director of financial planning, said in a 1983 interview with *The Wall Street Journal*. Despite seeing gains turn into a stiff loss in market share, he said the company had no plans to cut prices.

As for offering better programs, then-CEO John Roach said in late 1984 that "we'd love to get out of the software business." The frustration was understandable, coming after a deluge of complaints when a key new operating system arrived six months late and was filled with horrific bugs – including one that increased dates by one.

By November of 1985 Tandy machines were owned by 10 percent of home users, but only 3 percent of potential buyers were thinking of purchasing one, compared to 32 percent for Apple, 26 percent for IBM and 19 percent for Commodore. About 3 percent of businesses were considering Tandy machines, compared to 72 percent leaning toward IBM.

"The company has all but ceased to be a viable alternative to the majority of potential buyers in both the home and business markets...If Tandy's position erodes much more, the company will find itself selling computers exclusively to Tandy owners," wrote Eric Maloney in a column in *80 Micro*.

Of course that prediction wasn't ironclad either – the same issue featured another article titled "Microsoft's MS-Windows: Too Little, Too Late?" Tandy did remerge with its 1000 series, which lasted in various incarnations until 1993, when the company succumbed and started selling models by Compaq and others. Meanwhile, owners of every other Tandy model were voicing complaints similar to those about the CoCo detailed at length in past columns here.

"Tandy never intended to fully support the Model 4 line for any length of time," wrote one chat forum user in 1987. "Tandy seemed to purposely keep the price high enough to inhibit further sales of the 4 and thereby phase it out completely."

There were also rumors Tandy was sitting on huge cache of unreleased software, perhaps because the company went through "six different buyers in four years, none of whom could be called a Model 4 enthusiast," according to a January 1987 article in *80 Micro*.

Tandy's missteps during the 20 years following their personal computer offerings are also glaring, but not as a relevant from a retrogaming perspective. Among the recent examples are its ever-increasing focus on cell phones while ignoring its former core business plan, aggravating employees and customers alike by implementing highly aggressive sales tactics. Price markups on the components it still carries are borderline insane compared to retailers like Fry's and internet vendors. And Tandy gained infamy during the holidays last year when employees, obviously feeling corporate pressure, tacked donations for a charity drive onto customer's bills without permission. The company's response was it would give refunds to anyone who didn't want to support the fight against cancer.

This pre-postmortem, if it can be called that, isn't meant to diminish the significance of Tandy's accomplishments. It's merely an inglorious end to a pioneer and a misfortune modern-day companies don't seem to be learning much from it. I've been a Mac user since the day I stopped writing college essays on my CoCo, for instance, but more from habit than affection lately as Apple's pricey and increasingly controlling mentality has planted more than a seed of resentment. Windows remains an abhorrent nonentity, but in the meantime I'm not rushing out to buy an iPad or other new gear from a company that once urged us to "think different."

On to happier rants, as the review of games for the Color Computer 3 continues. This month is an all-around grab bag of good and bad from a multitude of sources, along with the usual tidbits of trivia and politics behind their development.

### Cave Walker (B)

This platform game starring Mario's unauthorized clone is the sequel to the highly acclaimed *Download*, one of my all-time CoCo favorites. I'd always been under the impression it was one of Tandy's hybrid CoCo 1/2/3 games where the CoCo 3 version would be at least notably enhanced visibly, but that turns out not to be the case. It's still worth a review since it's an entertaining diversion and has a couple of unusual CoCo 3 features worth pointing out. The game's cave consists of 25 caverns and, like *Downland* (which has 10), there's far more involved than simply completing all the levels in a linear fashion. You need to collect keys to open doors, which allowing moving back and forth between levels and accessing sealed off areas. The ultimate goal is to find and unlock a secret treasure box, which requires completing a series of puzzles. You need to collect gold bags and lock keys (which differ from door keys), which are then used to collect three spell books that reveal part of the magic key. There's a number of other objects with RPG traits, such as bread that boost your energy, umbrellas to save you if you fall from a ledge and flasks that prevent damage from some adverse situations. The caverns are filled with aids and hazards such as springs, lifts, fireball-spewing volcanoes and cannons. Also, if you take too long in a cavern a bat appears which will quickly track you down and drain half your maximum strength. The controls are a bit weird, but actually make good use of the CoCo's analogue joysticks when you get used to them. The more the stick is moved to the right or left, the farther you jump and the more energy you use. Some places can only be accessed with small jumps, so a precise touch is frequently necessary. Given all this, the inclusion of a save-game feature is most welcome. The game looks and sounds about average for a quality CoCo title, but the CoCo 3 option turns out to be nothing more than an option allowing the right colors to be seen on different types of monitors (at the original CoCo's resolution). It's also one of a handful of games with instructions for transferring it to a hard disk, something no more than a handful of CoCo owners had. Nobody playing *Super Mario Bros.* back in 1986 would ditch it for this title, but in the sealed-off world of Tandy it's still one of the company's better late CoCo releases.



### Flags (D)

This gets a review because I was un-ambitious on a rainy Saturday afternoon and thought a game of Risk actually sounded like a good idea, not having played this classic war game tutorial (how I always thought of it) in a very long time. There were also a few more practical reasons. Tandy claimed the GIME graphics chip in the CoCo 3 gave it an effective speed of up to four times that of earlier models, so it was a chance to see if a program written in BASIC could run at a decent speed. Also, the idea of this being sold as commercial software at a time when plenty of heavyweight software was still coming out raises questions about marketability and where the CoCo market was going. First, of

course, an assessment of the game is in order. Risk isn't an overly complex game to program and this version gets kudos for a user-friendly menu system that makes it possible to play with minimal help from the printed instructions. The graphics are no more than functional, but following a global map without confusion wasn't something you could always take for granted back then. It allows one to six players and, while having computer-controlled opponents is a plus, that's also where the problems begin popping up. Once you've completed your turn, you have to sit and watch for a long time as four CPU players compete their moves. Also, there are some unwelcome tweaks to the rules, such as deploying new armies only after your turn and only receiving three of them (six if you've conquered one or more countries) no matter how much turf you occupy. You can save games, but I had absolutely no interest in doing so. Way back then this would have been a quality type-in magazine program, and I'd have endured the wait just to get some reward from my hours of hunting and pecking. Nowadays, no chance, although true nostalgics can always use an emulator and speed things to a blazing pace. It's hard to think programmer Rick Cooper expected to make much money competing with titles like Kings Quest 3, Rogue and Tetris, although he ran a software company offering several other less-than-premium titles for a while. But it was indicative of a two-tier lineup of CoCo 3 software – premium and fledgling – with the latter becoming more prominent as the machine neared the end of its life. By the end there were ads for things like Yahtzee clones and solitaire, a rather sad regression to the first days of the original CoCo a decade earlier. Cooper, however, is far more than a bedroom programmer with an overinflated sense of ability and/or desire to get quick bucks from a starving market. The Kentucky teacher is one of four co-founders of the Color Computer Preservation Society along with other stalwarts such as Steve Bjork. Cooper also wrote an NIB graphics compression format that was a standard for a time and was the editor of the long-running CoCo Friends Disk Magazine (the archive at [www.vavasour.ca/cfdm](http://www.vavasour.ca/cfdm) has 71 issues from 1992 to 2000). There's a certain amount of "in-the-family" pleasure playing something by someone you know as a great guy, but those outside that circle are likely to wave the white flag on this one very quickly.



### Jeweled (B)

This 2008 unauthorized Bejeweled clone by Robert Taylor is among a handful of modern commercial offerings, although he notes only about 30 copies were sold to "elite CoCo gamers" during its first year of release. It's not great compared to the infinite clones on modern-day computers, and I nearly gave this a lower grade since I'm in the midst of reviewing a number of such releases for the iPhone. But I caught myself, realizing that if released back around the same time as Tandy's version of Tetris plenty of gamers would have considered Jeweled the superior title (although the 512K and floppy disk requirements would have been too steep for most owners). Presumably the "match-three" genre is familiar to most readers; for those that aren't, the basic objective is to swap tiles on a checkerboard-like grid so that three or more like items are lined up, causing them to vanish. The formula has become lavish, with modern games like PuzzleQuest turning the seemingly simple concept into full-fledged RPG quests. Jeweled, on the other hand, lacks even some fundamentals such as a timer to match a certain number of tiles within. The board looks rather grainy – surely this could be better even by CoCo standards – and a third of the screen merely displays the title and some basic instructions. Overall, it feels like something to demonstrate the concept is possible on a CoCo without giving it much polish. That said, there's a lot to be impressed with in the foundation of this program. The animation is appropriately quick, which is never a given on this machine. What makes that much more impressive is the sound effects and background music, which to this day are nearly non-existent on any CoCo title due to machine's lack of a separate sound chip (as noted many times, this typically means all other functions come to a halt when the computer's unimpressive built-in sound is played). Getting beyond background bleeps and blips meant using digitalized sounds, which back then were AM radio quality at best and took up large amounts of available memory. One other thing that enhances playability is a puzzle mode, where all tiles must be removed from the board by matching them in a specific order. It starts easy and gets tougher at a fair pace, with a limited number of undo's available for missteps. A repetitive game like this can't rank with the best games offering more variety and depth, but it certainly would have been an "all ages" hit back then, at least for those with CoCos capable of running it.



### Mind-Roll (C)

As a Marble Madness fanatic it ought to take a stick to beat me away from this hybrid CoCo 1/2/3 cartridge, but every time I boot it up I quickly end up hovering between indifference and frustration. This game by Epyx, originally released for the Commodore 64 under the name Quedex and ported to a few other machines, involves rolling an 8-ball around 10 different "planes" with varying goals. Goals include collecting all the keys in a proper order, filling a puzzle with tiled squares, jumping a series of platforms and other tasks. All have to be completed before a timer runs out and on some there are limits to the number of jumps you can make. Getting in the way are things such as energy draining grids and time-stealing blocks. The variety of the game is commendable and it earned generally good, if not laudatory, reviews on other platforms. For those reasons it gets an average grade, simply because the persistent will find a decent amount of play value, but for me there's too many negatives to deal with. First, the marble theme is a myth since there's no inclines or gravity like Marble Madness – it could just as easily be Mario or another character running and jumping around the playfields. Second, the goals on some levels are vague, or even incomprehensible. I've played the first level many times, which seems to involve nothing more than rolling down a straight plank, and have yet to reach the end or achieve anything at all during the 90 seconds it lasts. Luckily you can select any of the levels, but you ultimately need to complete all 10 (and the manual says unplayed levels get tougher after the level you're playing is completed). Next, the graphics for the CoCo version are awful, even with the "enhanced" CoCo 3 display, making some elements of the game hard to distinguish. Finally, this game was released in 1989, two years after the C64 version, which to cynics like me suggests Tandy snagged the rights to a ho-hum title at a bargain price (and sold it for a premium). Or maybe it was just crummy judgment, since other Epyx games like Pitstop II and Rogue make the transition just fine.



### Predator (C)

One of the claims diehard CoCoists loved to make with the CoCo 3 was the Big Software Companies were finally jumping aboard in recognize of the machine's awesome abilities. It was a rather laughable watching them list a half-dozen or so companies, since many seemed to be dumping lousy and/or old titles at inflated prices on a starving market. Activision is a prime example. Their Super Pitfall, rated one of the worst NES games ever, was ported only to the CoCo 3. Then there's



Predator, which released on a bunch of computers due to the Schwarzenegger movie tie-in, but most reviewers agreed it was every bit as ghastly (a common ailment for the rushed-to-market movie adaptations back then). It's a simplistic side scroller with poor controls, illogical enemies and limp weapons. Maybe worst of all on the CoCo version is the graphics. Look at the screenshot. Maybe picking out Our Hero isn't too tough, but figuring out the number of bad guys is like playing Where's Waldo? The difficulty curve before you even reach a weapon is too high. Trying to make precise and/or well-timed jumps is a crapshoot due to the controls and some lousy player-movement physics. And many of the enemies, such as jellyfish, have nothing at all to do with the game. Neither does the plot, or rather the total absence of one in lieu of a lot of repetitive shooting. Reviewers for every other computer and console murdered this game, but of course the CoCo-oriented *The Rainbow* called it "an addictive arcade/action game." One might question if such reviews were to please advertisers or just the result of reviewers sheltered from the gaming world at large; after re-reading all the back issues a few times I've concluded it was some of both.



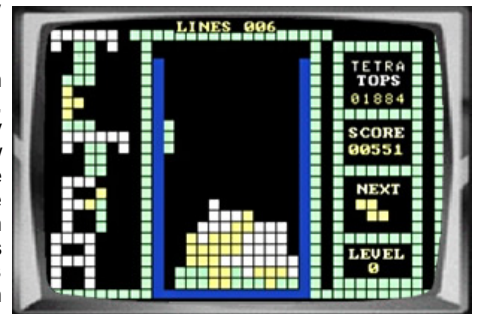
### The Quest For Thelda (B+)

"Know any games that will stop my kid from demanding a Nintendo?" That's a rather amusing topic in old CoCo chat forums, since kids aren't exactly stupid when it comes to video games. At best, such parents might get a brief reprieve of resentful silence while the substitute title is scrutinized. Tandy didn't help matters with catalogue ads touting the ability to play Nintendo titles on the CoCo which, while theoretically accurate, meant a few really crummy titles were ported over. For the maybe 10 percent of CoCo owners who bought third-party titles there were bolder efforts such as *The Quest For Thelda*, an unauthorized knock-off of *The Legend Of Zelda*. This release by Sundog Systems, probably the best twilight-era CoCo software company, plays exactly like what it is: a second-rate imitator on a second-rate machine. But on the sliding scale of CoCo grades it fares very well. For starters, it runs on a base 128K machine, putting it within reach of most CoCo owners (although a disk drive is required). It has plenty of depth and gameplay is roughly similar to *Zelda*, albeit with uglier graphics (the color choices are abysmal) and no background music. The basic objective is collecting the six pieces of the Life Force from scattered locations, which allows you to rescue Princess Thelda. According to the instructions, you've decided this is worthy without having seen her which, given the graphics, is definitely a leap of faith. You collect better weapons, magic items, coins and the like, buying stuff and getting healed from the right people when necessary. Two things are seriously annoying: You start with a sword capable only tiny thrusts (instead of being able to "throw" it as on the NES) and players using the keyboard instead of a joystick will discover you can't really move and attack at the same time. This ramps up the difficult curve significantly and not in a good way – and is likely to further frustrate those whiny kids you're hoping to repress. The cure is obtaining the official hint book, easily found as a PDF on the 'net these days, which contains maps, clues and a short type-in program that creates customized characters. Programmer Eric Wolf, who progressed from magazine type-in programs to this during a couple of years, had his own amusing question in a chat forum when he wondered where all the great software Tandy was promising for the CoCo 3 was after a couple of years. Among the things he said he wanted was a professional desktop publisher – despite being the author of *The CoCo Newsroom* which, while severely limited and clumsy even for home newsletters, was about the best one could hope for on a machine of that horsepower. So he probably was well aware *Thelda* could never hope to match *Zelda*, but his title still manages to deliver most of what a person with reasonable expectations would want.



### Tetra (D+)

An uninspired Tetris clone getting a brief spin just to see if 1) it has any merit being a third-party release compared to the official version sold by Tandy (interest in which stems from *Jeweled*, above) and 2) because this looked like the most commercially viable offering from Rick Cooper (see *Flags*, above). This machine language program is above type-in magazine quality (or would rank high on the all-time list of CoCo type-ins), but still falters as a commercial product. The action is fast enough, there's a pause button and graphics are acceptable on a screenshot level, but beyond that it's mostly problems. The pieces flicker maddeningly as they descend, making headaches more likely than a few minutes of relaxation. The straight pieces are only three blocks long for some reason. There's nine speed levels, but you have to start on level one every time. Needless to say, the CoCo's miserable sound capabilities means you can forget about background music. Everybody was trying to cash in on this craze back then, so it's hard to fault Cooper for trying to sell a version for considerably less than Tandy's product (a solid conversion worth a grade of B-). But considering retroprogrammers these days are cranking out imitators in as little as 250 bytes of code it's hard to have much appreciation for this one.



### The Homebrew Sleuth: Battle Kid - Fortress Of Peril

by [Collin Pierce](#)



SYSTEM: NES  
AUTHOR: SIVAK GAMES  
YEAR OF RELEASE: 2010

Once in a while, a homebrew comes along that redefines for me what I think homebrewers are capable of. For me, I felt that most homebrews would be on pre-NES systems, nice and simple games, that while not pushing the envelope as far homebrews in general go, would at least add some new vitality to Atari, Coleco, etc. As far as I knew, anything after that era would be mostly tech demos.

But then out of left field comes Battle Kid, by Sivak Games. Battle Kid is the first brand-new platformer/shoot 'em up on the good ol' Nintendo since the system's cancelation in 1994. Oh, there had been homebrews for the NES before Battle Kid, but none have captured my interest like this. It is truly a masterpiece not just by homebrew standards, but in my opinion stands proud among the great NES classics.

Battle Kid is based upon the cult-classic PC game, I Wanna Be The Guy (IWBGTG), which is probably the most ridiculously hard game ever made. IWBGTG seems made to purposely piss you off while making you laugh hysterically at all the insanity happening around you. The character sprite of BK is even modeled after IWBGTG's. However, while BK is hard as hell, it is not nearly as in your face about it as IWBGTG.

Now, let's take a look...

#### Graphics: A-

While Battle Kid isn't exactly pushing the system's graphical power to the limit, it certainly is easy on the eyes for a NES game. All the characters and locations have a unique look to them, making it simple and easy to know what is happening on the screen at any given time. However, the bosses are quite impressive, with some of them taking up half of the screen. There are even cut scenes! Nothing mind-blowing, mind you, but the effort is definitely there to be seen throughout the game, and the graphics have a distinct charm that feels quite unique.

#### Gameplay: A+

This game is what is now commonly referred to as a "MetroidVania" after the gameplay style of Metroid and post-Symphony of the Night CastleVania games, where you explore a huge area, collecting items that give you new powers that allow you to progress further, all the while fighting enemies in real-time. There is one major difference in this game, though...

You die in one hit, no matter what.

I can hear people now: "WTF!? How am I supposed to beat a game like this without getting hit!?"

My answer: Practice.

Luckily, there are continue points, scattered around the world map, just far enough apart to be aggravating, but not so far as to make the game unplayable.

There are several difficulty levels to choose from: Easy, which gives you unlimited continues, passwords, and a power-up that makes your gun do double damage; Normal, where you start without the Damage Amplifier; Hard, which allows you to continue only 50 times and there are no passwords; Super Hard, which only gives you 20 continues; and for the truly masochistic, there's Unfair, which forces you to attempt to beat the game in one attempt. No passwords, no continues, no mercy.

As you progress through the game, you'll come across a few power-ups, like Double Jump, Feather Fall, etc.; a few keys which allow you to open locked doors, a TON of different enemy types, bosses, obstacles, and lots of other fun stuff that make these kinds of games great. The game has several different areas to explore, each with their own characteristics, music, and enemies. You can even find teleporters to warp you to any other previously found warp point. At the beginning of the game, you'll find a computer that will give you hints on what to do next if you're stumped.

It's amazing to think that Battle Kid is mostly the work of one person. It is truly remarkable how much there is to see and do in this game.

#### Controls: A+

Your character, Timmy, is quite easily controlled. Left and right move him in the appropriate direction, holding up during a jump activates Feather Fall (if you have it), A jumps, B shoots, Start pauses. Timmy moves at a brisk pace and the controls are tight as a vice, a must for a game of this difficulty. I had no problems playing the game (except for dying over and over again, due to my own suckiness, of course).

#### Sound: A+

As you start the game, you might think that the music isn't particularly great. That is, until you enter the first area and the music suddenly rivals Capcom's greatest NES work! The soundtrack of this game blew my mind with it's awesomeness. The aforementioned first area tune is one of the best NES songs of all time, and that's saying something. The NES era spawned some of the greatest songs in video game history, and to think that Sivak has recaptured the feeling and tone of such work makes my brain hurt. How did he do it!? The soundtrack of Battle Kid is by far the best of any NES homebrew made so far, and I dare say even the harshest of critics would have trouble telling it apart from the music of games released during the system's prime.

The sound effects do their job, but are not the best I've heard from the system. Still, the music more than makes up for this.

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

Considering how soul-crushingly hard this game is, I'll warn you that your mileage will most likely vary, but I'll just take the non-wimp route and say that this game rocks. Everything about it is full of quality, and if you are somewhat resembling a REAL gamer, I have a distinct feeling you'll really enjoy it.

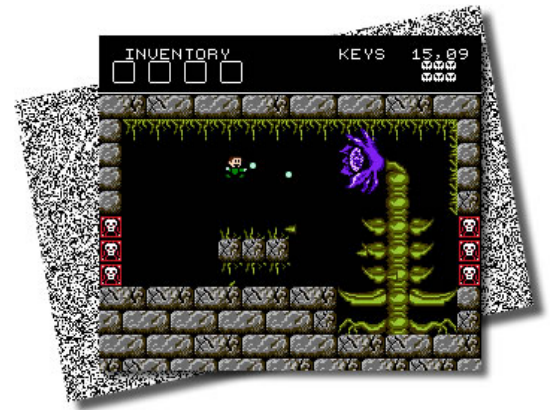
#### Overall: A

This game has been repeatedly sold out to the point where I questioned whether I'd ever get a copy. I can understand the excitement. This game is not only the first homebrew on a level where I could imagine it being released during the console's heyday, but it is so much fun that the question isn't should you get it, but rather, why haven't you gotten it YET? It's been so successful that Sivak is apparently already working on a sequel!

Just remember, this is a game for pros.



Battle Kid - Fortress of Peril is available at RetroZone (<http://www.retrousb.com/>).



Hello Pixelated fans. "Pixelated Paul" is here to let you know about some of the retroware highlights for the month of July. Sadly, it was another slow month for retroware goodies, especially on the WiiWare side; and only 1 Virtual Console game: Aero the Acrobat for the SNES, which was Sunsoft's answer to the mascot craze at the time.

**DS<sup>i</sup>Ware**

**QuickPick Farmer** ([Click here to see a video for the game](#))

**Soul of Darkness** ([Click here to see a video for the game](#))

**SteamWorld Tower Defense** (Video to the right)

**WiiWare**

**Balloon Pop Festival** (Video to the right)

Here's a colorful puzzle game that is similar to Bejeweled and Puyo Puyo. You hold the wiimote in the "retro" position, so no motion control movements are involved. With fun graphics and music, 4 single-player modes plus 2 two-player modes, any puzzle fan of any age should love this. But, don't let the candy coating fool you, the game gets hard... fast.

**Toribash** ([Click here to see a video for the game](#))





*Note: most of the videos for the games below are of the originals (meaning they not being played on the Wii). This is because the Virtual Console is emulating the original system and therefore they are identical.*

**Aero the Acrobat (SNES)** (Video to the right)

I will see you next month for hopefully some more retroware goodies!



■ [Retro Games Collector](#)

■ [Game Gavel](#)

■ [Retro Gaming RoundUp](#)



That pretty much wraps it up for this issue. Looks like for next month I'll have to be on my game and get those reminders out to everyone. Don't worry, Donald Lee will be back along with the others. No reason to panic, they are all still with us. Anyway, maybe this little "summer vacation" will be beneficial for them! See you next month!

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

© 2010 Retrogaming Times Monthly. All Related Copyrights And Trademarks Are Acknowledged.

RETROGAMING  
TIMES  
*monthly*