



Printing Help



Retrogaming Times Monthly #85 - June 2011



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# Press Fire To Begin

by Bryan Roppolo



The smell of suntan lotion and BBQ's fill the air. The sound of kids splashing in water surround you everywhere you go. That can only mean one thing...Summer has finally arrived, along with the June issue of Retrogaming Times Monthly. While I write this intro, Paul Zimmerman is currently competing in GameDay 2011 trying to set some new high score records while at the same time raising money for the International Video Game Hall of Fame & Museum. To read more on GameDay 2011, visit their site [here](#).

In terms of the RTM article Index that I have been mentioning recently as being a work in progress, I have not yet gotten to indexing the original Retrogaming Times issues (1997-2004), since I do not have them all on-line yet. Some of these back issues are a little more tricky to get formatted correctly so it is taking a little longer to get them on-line, but I expect to have everything up and hopefully indexed by the time the July issue rolls around, if not it will not be any later than August. I wish I could go faster and get these things indexed sooner, but in the end regardless of how fast I do it, it will get done and be nice to search the RTM issues instead of having to browse through each one to find that article you remember appearing sometime back in 2000.

I hope everyone had a great Memorial Day weekend, and wish everyone a lot of fun in the sun for the next 3 months. Enjoy this month's issue which is hot off the grill!



## Retrogaming News

### [Atari Party The 3rd](#)

Saturday, June 11, 2011 (Davis, CA)

The third annual Atari Party brings four decades of Atari history to the Davis public library, from 12pm to 5pm on Saturday, June 11th. Hundreds of games on dozens of various Atari computers and systems -- from the collections of volunteers from near and far -- will be available to play. Learn about the early years of home computing and video games with various displays, books and presentations.

Attendees will have the chance to win a variety of prizes during a free give-away drawing: t-shirts, video games, books, and even complete working Atari computer and game systems.

During the event, the documentary file "Once Upon Atari" will be screened; and at the end of the event the 1984 spy thriller "Cloak & Dagger" will be shown.

This event is completely free and open to the public. Children are welcome, but must be accompanied by an adult.

For more information, visit the Atari Party website above.

### [Cleveland's Classic Console & Arcade Gaming Show](#)

Saturday June 18, 2011 12:00 PM - 8:00 PM (Fairview Park, OH)

Here at Cleveland's Classic Console & Arcade Gaming Show you will find all games from past to present with an emphasis on the classics, when gaming was at its best. Explore a wide variety of vendors and collectors, games, systems, and accessories in the large main hall.

Play some awesome vintage arcade games in the FREE PLAY Mini Arcade. Challenge yourself in one of the console tournament events for a chance at some amazing prizes. Our legendary Chinese Auction offers many rare, valuable, and unique prizes not to be missed. See [CCAGShow.com](http://CCAGShow.com) site for updates.

This show's tournament games are the XBOX 360 - Mortal Kombat, Super Nintendo – Campus Challenge 1992, and the Nintendo NES – You decide! Some ideas so far: Mappy and Donkey Kong Cement Factory Version. As for the prizes, Video Game Connection donated a NEW Sealed XBOX 360 Kinect Sensor w/Kinect Adventures - Retail value is \$150.00, Osmodiar Games donated "The CCAG Mystery Cart #4 " - Retail value is \$35.00 (actually priceless. There is only 1), Hyperkin donated the "Retron 3 Video Game System" - Retail Value 70.00, Aetherbyte Studios donated an "Insanity Game for the PC Engine" - Retail Value 25.00, and a nameless donor donated an XBOX Gold Membership - Retail value \$59.99.

The show is being held at the American Legion Hall--Clifton Post in Fairview Park, OH. Admission is only \$3.00, and kids age 12 and under are admitted free. All vendors and attendees will receive 3 Chinese Auction coupons. Hope to see you all there!

### [OVGE 2011](#)

Saturday June 18, 2011 (Tulsa, OK)

The Oklahoma Video Game Exhibition is a gathering of classic gaming collectors displaying, playing, buying, selling, and trading video games and systems with many exhibitors and vendors present. Lots of video game systems both classic and modern will be on display for show and hands-on play with gaming tournaments and prize drawings

throughout the day!

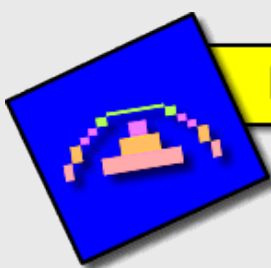
The 8th annual OVGE will be held in the South Banquet Ballroom at the Spirit Bank Event Center in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The location is easily accessed from major expressways and is located ideally in the South Tulsa area. We are proud to host the only video gaming show of this kind in the mid-America/south region where gamers and collectors from Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Texas and even further come to attend.

Admission is \$5.00 for the general public. Children 7 and under are FREE.

The following tournaments are planned for this year's OVGE: **OVGE Classic** - 3 games on 3 classic systems for 3 minutes each or until you lose all your lives. Highest combined score takes the prize! **Bad Game Beatdown** - Hosted by Greg Little will be a selection of some of the most notorious video game titles ever created on some of the greatest classic systems ever created!

This year will be our largest arcade display and collection yet as we plan to have the following classic upright arcades setup and ready for play on Free Play! - PENGU, GORF, Gaplus, Gimme A Break, Tank II, Ladybug cocktail, Joust cocktail, Frogger, G-Loc, Donkey Kong Jr, Donkey Kong, Super Street Fighter II Turbo, Pac-Man, Neo-Geo MVS with multiple games, possibly a few pinball machines such as The Addams Family, Star Trek: The Next Generation, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Elvira & The Party Monsters, and Super Mario Bros! You do not want to miss this rare chance at being able to play on these; the most classic of arcade games!

If you would like to have your event featured in Retrogaming Times Monthly, just send an e-mail to Bryan Roppolo at [bryan@retrogamingtimes.com](mailto:bryan@retrogamingtimes.com) and he'll make sure to announce it in a future issue.



# Defending His Bases

by Catherine DeSpira



## Paul Zimmerman Breaks Atlantis World Record...And Then Some

Discipline is the soul of an army.

This concept was proven, on May 27, when Paul Zimmerman defended his bases against the *Gorgons*, scoring 7,352,737, a new World Record on Atlantis for Atari 2600, during Game Day, a fund raiser for *The International Video Game Hall of Fame*.

For hours, Paul Zimmerman battled to preserve the last defenses of the City of Atlantis against the Gorgon invaders, in a game that demonstrated his incredible prowess with oriented orchestration, point of convergence and timeworn patience.

But what is remarkable, and cannot go without saying, is that after many hours, he was still going strong, an irrefutable indication that if he had wanted to he could have continued much longer. No doubt the Gorgons were relieved.

Zimmerman's unusual aptitude and stamina kept me glued to the screen, hour after hour, watching him avert wave after wave of incoming attacks. At one point I was struck by the realization that he was no longer a single entity with a controller in his hand, but a conceptual amalgam of man and machine; half heartbeat, half electronic pulse.

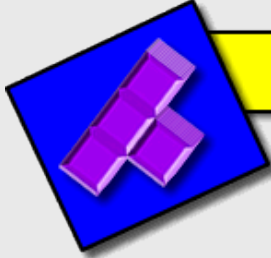
No doubt it was this embodiment of coalescing self control that empowered him to set multiple Atari 2600 World Records over Memorial Day weekend merely one day after his World Record on Atlantis was set:

Space Invaders 13,755  
Tron Deadly Discs 44,085  
Funky Fish 19,410  
Pleiades 8,390  
Circus Atari 8,625  
Defender 157,500  
Demon Attack 45,730  
Donkey Kong 88,200  
Missile Command 45,580  
Phoenix 165,650  
Astroblast 13,775  
Centipede 65,744  
Space Invaders 13,755

And, as an added bonus to an already stellar weekend, Zimmerman delivered yet another surprising World Record, May 29, on Laser Blast for the Atari 2600 with the maximum score of 1,000,000 a.k.a. "!!!!!!!" (at 1,000,000 the game stops and the score changes to 6 exclamation points).

Paul Zimmerman: Living proof that energy and persistence conquer all things.





# Gaming Tetralogies

by Jeff Wittenhagen



## The Contra Series

Gaming Tetralogies covers four of the best games from any single game series on any platform. The games will not be listed in any particular preference order but by release date and will be more of a must have list for each series. Feel free to comment on any games in the series you feel should have been included. This month we will be taking a look at Contra, which was released for multiple platforms over many years.



### Contra (1988) - Nintendo Entertainment System

The original Contra is still one of the greatest games of all time. The first level game music still gets my blood pumping to this day! The Giger inspired art is dark, brooding, and amazing. But best of all is the spot on tight and amazing controls.



### Super C (1990) - Nintendo Entertainment System

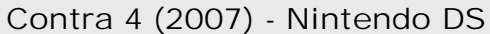
The true NES sequel to Contra that just gives us more of what we want. The great controls are back, the music is classic, and the graphics are once again solid. If you enjoy the first game then the follow-up is a no-brainer.



### Contra III: Alien Wars (1992) - Super Nintendo

The SuperNES was known for overhauling a game series and bringing it into the 16-bit era and Contra III is no exception. The side scrolling levels have a new level of polish on them and look fantastic! The overhead levels do have a bit of a learning curve, but can also be entertaining. Another solid addition to the series.





After many failed attempts, finally Konami does the series right with Contra 4. The action goes back to its roots and feels like a direct sequel to Alien Wars, which is likely why it's numbered part four. The controls are again perfect and all the classics you would expect from a Contra game are included.



# Commodore Du Jour

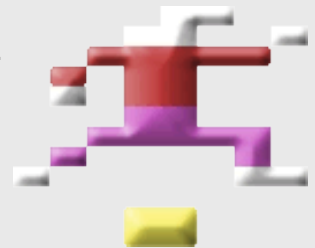
by Marc Douglas



## Jumpman

Before I begin, I'd like to thank Bryan for keeping RTM going and for giving me the opportunity to give the Commodore 64 and Amiga a spot in RTM. I was deciding what my first review should be. Mail Order Monsters was mentioned a while back, but I'm going to review that at a later date. I settled on a game that is still one of my favorites today and can be given the label, "classic" and not have too many people disagree.

I'll be looking back at the Epyx game, "Jumpman" from 1983 designed by Randy Glover who would also do the sequel Jumpman Junior and be involved with Summer Games while at Epyx. Jumpman is a game that is very easy to "Jump" into and it offers challenging platforming gaming that is still satisfying almost 30 years later. Heck, I still remember buying this from Wall to Wall Sound at the mall back in 1984.



The plot of the game is to diffuse the bombs on the planet Jupiter that terrorists have littered about the games' 30 levels that can be played in ten level chunks (1 - 10 beginner, 11 - 18 intermediate and 19 - 30 advanced) You can play each section separately, as one big 30 level marathon called the grand loop, or use the randomizer option which will throw any of the possible levels at you.

The first few levels are deceptively easy but they introduce the various elements of the game and prepare you for the more challenging later levels. The elements you will see on most levels are

- Bombs - Some levels have only one to diffuse, others up to 20.
- Ladders - Jumpman can go up and down these freely and jump off if needed.
- Green Up Ropes - Jumpman can only go up these ropes or jump off them if he has to.
- Blue Down Ropes - Same as green, but Jumpman can go down only.
- Moving Platforms - You have to make sure you know the direction they are going as you can fall off if not careful.
- Bullets - Dangerous things. They start out moving very slow, but if they pass you in a random compass direction, they will suddenly fire, changing direction and head at you at a fast rate of speed. You will get caught a couple of times at the edges of the screen, hear the gunshot and watch as the bullet hits Jumpman and all you can do is mumble as he bounces to his death.



There are also level specific items such as dragons, chickens, robots, UFOs, moving bombs, disappearing girders, ropes that appear and then vanish along with parts of the ladders, and a few other surprises that I will leave for you to find out (which is my subtle recommendation to play this game if you haven't yet!).

Gameplay is with the basic joystick controller and is very tight. You will not find yourself getting stuck on a ladder or a rope. As you play you will see that Jumpman is very nimble and if he can reach a girder above him, he can pull himself up which can be a lifesaver when you are faced with multiple bullets whizzing at you. You can choose a speed level from 1 to 8 with 1 being the fastest. I prefer speed 2 as it gives you the best balance of gameplay and speed. If you like, you can change the speed before any level by pressing the appropriate key on the C-64 as the level loads. I should also mention that load speeds for the game are not bad. If you have a fast load cartridge it does make a difference and I'm sure that jiffydos helps as well.



What makes the game so addicting is that the first level is simple bomb collecting with a single bullet. It introduces the basic elements and allows you to complete the level with a minimum of frustration. Another nice motivation that is common in most platformers is the faster you complete the level, the higher your bonus score, which starts at 1500 and counts down by 100 point increments as you work to complete the level. You'll be surprised how vital that bonus becomes when you see your beginning reserve of 7 Jumpmen quickly dwindle down to one. But don't fear, every 10,000 points will net you an extra Jumpman.

As far as graphics and sound go, Jumpman impresses with a colorful title screen that hides an Easter Egg I will mention at the end and graphics that are only okay, but do the job. Jumpman is multicolored, the girders, ladders, ropes, bombs and bullets are easy to distinguish. The various robots, chickens and dragons are well animated and again fit the bill nicely. The bonus treasures on the Grand Puzzle levels are nicely detailed and add a nice bit of flair to the game.

Sounds are also well done, nothing spectacular, but most of the major game events have a separate sound effect (collecting a bomb, jumping, throwing a spear, bullet shot, explosions, etc.) There is no background music, but when you complete each level, you get a nice little victory theme that changes each level, but repeats rather quickly.

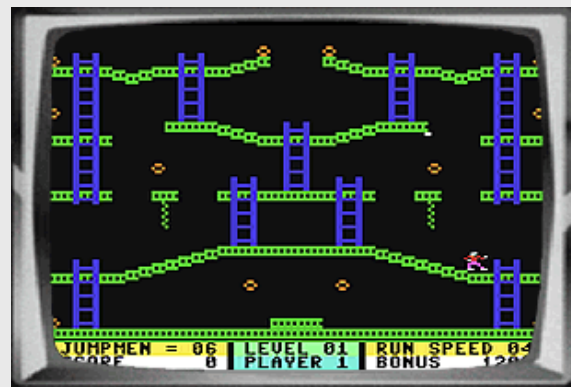
One of the neatest things about Jumpman, especially back in 1983, was the fact that it recorded your high score and your high bonus score to the disk. Back in 1983 we expected arcade machines to keep high scores, but now home games could do it as well. Most gamers when they see a high score will always try to put in one more game to try to top it. Jumpman is no different and that just adds to its timelessness.

To conclude, if you haven't played Jumpman, find a copy and load it up. The best version is on the C-64 with the Atari coming in second. The PC and Apple versions I felt were lacking, but the PC makes up for it by hosting all the remakes that would come out over the next couple of decades. Yes, even though it was influenced by the original Jumpman, Mario, I can see myself playing this game for another 30 years. Sad, but true.

Ah yes, the Easter egg I mentioned. I think this was on the C-64 only. After the game loads and you see the title screen with the blank ropes, Jumpman will run from left to right and grab a letter from the right side of the screen and then bring it back, he will then slide down the ropes and spell the word Jumpman. Well, if you push the joystick to the right and hold it, Jumpman will fall off the girder and die. The letter J will make it to the bottom of the first rope, but then the spelling stops. After this, you can start the game normally.

I would like to thank all of you for giving me the opportunity to begin a Commodore column in RTM. If anyone has a suggestion, drop me a line, as it's always nice to hear from fellow classic gamers!

For next month, a possible early RPG that to this day I feel has one of the best endings in RPG history.





# Standalone Spew

by Mark Sabbatini

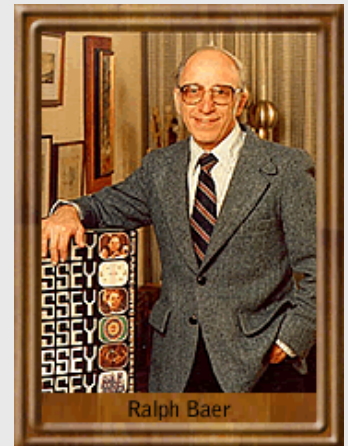


## The Me-Decade Brainiacs Whose Games Begat Generation X

Call it the revenge of Ralph.

The real Founding Father of video gaming tends to get screwed out of his proper due thanks to a renegade carnival huckster who inflicted Chuck E. Cheese pizza on society. Hardcore gamers, of course, know how Ralph Baer's electronic paddle-and-ball invention became known to the world as Pong, commonly credited as the brainchild of Atari co-founded Nolan Bushnell.

Baer never fully recovered, largely vanishing from the public's collective consciousness in the early '80s as the Atari 2600 gave his company's Odyssey 2 the battering it admittedly deserved. Not many people know or care he invented an incredible number of other things such as the light gun and instant replay for gaming, changeable record players, a parachute dereefing system, and a weight-sensitive talking doormat. But he did strike a huge blow of vengeance with a device credited for triggering the generation gap by no less than *Smithsonian* magazine (exceeding even moments such as Jack Weinberg's "don't trust anyone over 30" and the Beatles' "When I'm Sixty-Four.")



"The great divide can be traced to May 15, 1978, and Studio 54, a once notable New York City nightclub," wrote Owen Edwards in a 2006 article. "There, just after midnight, the Milton Bradley Company, in a quirky promotional stunt, introduced an electronic game called Simon."

Generation X, as their pridefully or mockingly referred to, is characterized "as being an era rampant with child neglect, as shown by such phenomenon as latchkey kids," according to "real journalists don't use" Wikipedia. "This period lies between the family-oriented 1950s and 1960s and the "Baby on Board" parenting-focused era of the late 1980s to the present."

Simon, for the Clueless Generation, is of course the circular four-button "repeat-after-me" music toy that became one of the best-selling battery-operated games in history. Baer "borrowed" the concept from his good friend Bushnell after seeing Atari's Touch Me arcade game at a trade show in 1976.

"Nice gameplay," Baer said. "Terrible execution. Visually boring. Miserable, rasping sounds."

Baer designed a small and improved prototype home version refined by his company, giving it the imaginative title Follow Me. He sold the device to Milton Bradley, which renamed it Simon and proceeded to make a mint. Atari, meanwhile, got ridiculed as a me-too imitator when it introduced a portable Touch Me a few months later.



I got one at about the age of 10 and played it incessantly, at least for a few days until I mastered the 31-tone limit on level four and barely touched it again. (I later smashed it to pieces in a psychotic rage. Sadly, it's far from my most disturbing moment, which might be celebrating my 21st birthday at the aforementioned Chuck E. Cheese.)

Simon might seem so primitive today as to only be fit for tots, but franchises like Guitar Hero and Dance Dance Revolution aren't much more than dressed-up expansions of the imitate-my-tone concept. Not to mention "in the

MMORPG World of Warcraft, a pair of quests in Blade's Edge Mountains require you to play a life-size version of the game through six and eight sequences, respectively," as Wikipedia puts it. "Wrong answers are shockingly painful."

The first generation of electronic handheld games in the late 1970s consisted largely of modified calculator chips and flashing LEDs, but many were the invention of some amazing minds. Among them was a 1978 gizmo even more popular than Simon that its creator shrugs off as trifling.

"There was nothing new in the games," said Bob Doyle, in a *Boston* magazine interview four years after the device took the world by storm. "We just added an array of lights and sounds."

Doyle was a pioneer in other minor things like desktop publishing in the 80s, desktop video in the '90s and podcasts in the new millennium. A pocket-size online-capable computer invented in the early 80s had geeks salivating 25 years before the iPhone allowed such things. These days, according to his blog (<http://bobdoyleblog.com/>) "I now focus on philosophy and cosmology seen from the perspective of information creation and communication. I call this information philosophy."

His best-known invention plays tic-tac-toe.

It does more, of course. It plays a miserable game of blackjack, plus a repeat-my-tune challenge that's horribly inferior and discordant compared to Simon. And, as noted, it has considerably more appeal than its "generation-defining" brethren.

Merlin, resembling a red phone with flashing LEDs in the keypad numbers, also offered a couple of other games with far more lasting value, plus a musical note recorder than made it "one of the earliest sequencers as well as an early consumer-level electronic synthesizer," according to Wikipedia. The last bit is a bit lofty sounding, but to my knowledge it's the first handheld electronic toy to offer distinctly different games.

Despite making fun of tic-tac-toe, I always seemed to play a couple games of it first every time I turned it on. I did the same thing when testing a few emulated remakes for this column, if nothing else depriving me of the right to say I'm not stupid. The appeal, I suspect, is it's the first game in the lineup and probably the easiest to play, and it's something of a memory exercise making sure to remember which of the computer's initial moves guarantees you a victory and which ensures a tie (presuming you go first; anything other than a tie if you let the computer go first is shameful).

Blackjack's flaws are numerous and not uncommon in computer versions of the era. The game is to 13 instead of 21 (dealer stands on 10 or higher), with "cards" from one to nine. There is "betting" one chip at a time, starting with a miserly five chips, but no doubling down, splitting of pairs, etc. Even at the age of 10 I was a fan of the real thing and knew enough to consider Merlin's version incredibly lame – I doubt I've played it enough times in my entire life to go through that initial pile of chips.

The problem with Echo, the Simon imitator, is it's limited to a maximum "song" length of nine notes (the player can select a length from one to nine). The difficulty is ramped up by having 10 different tones available, but from the start I always thought of it as memorizing a phone number and thus the challenge was practically nil.

Music Machine allows the player to record songs of up to 48 notes, including rests, using a whole-step major scale. The manual includes 20 songs of the type you expect in a children's toy and seeing if any of them are any good occupies at least some time. But you can't control the length of the notes and if you enter an errant one the only option is to start from scratch. Hard to expect better, but that doesn't make it any more enjoyable.

As for the good stuff, Magic Square requires the player to form a lit square of lights around the center "5" light (which must be off). Pressing each key affects that light and the lights around it in various ways that aren't too hard to



Watch out for this Merlin/Simon master

figure out. Even the manual says you'll figure it out after a few games. Still, I enjoy it (maybe more than some) because it's basically a greatly simplified concept of the ubiquitous Game of Life (John Conway's version), which I find not only addicting on real computers but a great programming exercise.

The other game, which has the most long-term value, is Mind Bender, which is a version of Mastermind with a number up to nine digits long. Pick a two- or three-digit number and the kiddies tired of tic-tac-toe will have something else to do; pick a nine-digit number and you have something that will challenge John Conway. Again, maybe I rate this higher than most because I was one of those geeks who actually liked Mastermind. I got the official electronic handheld version not long after it came out and played it for a long, long time.

The story about that game and the rather large assortment of other "edutainment" handhelds that were part of the first-generation '70s class will be part of next month's column. As will some real games like the Mattel Football imitators and the first handheld to use exchangeable cartridges.

### Emulator/remake options for Simon and Merlin

Normally I'd break this down and test a range of options, but so many versions of both games are so widely available – usually free – on almost every platform still functioning only a latchkey key won't be able to find a perfect virtual clone within 10 seconds using Google. For a quickie, a browser version of Simon at [www.thepcmanwebsite.com/media/simon](http://www.thepcmanwebsite.com/media/simon) and one of Merlin at [www.theelectronicwizard.com](http://www.theelectronicwizard.com) are what I found with my 10 seconds. Plenty of more advanced takes on Simon are out there, such as more notes or varieties where you have to play the tune backwards, without colors and/or distinguishable notes, and so on.

Alas, the same can't be said for Merlin. In particular, I'm unable to find emulated versions of Master Merlin and Merlin: The 10th Quest, which were nine-game updates released in 1982 and 1995, respectively. Master Merlin features games with straightforward titles like Hit or Miss (Battleship) and Hot Potato (a multiplayer avoid-the-wrong-number game) that suggest immensely improved long-term value. Games for Merlin: The 10th Quest are even more captivatingly titled (Swords and Shields, Dragon Dance, Seek the Grail) and an LCD screen has been added above the number pad, vastly expanding display possibilities. Judging from the instructions, some are expanded versions of games on the original Merlin such as Magic Square, with a handful of new brainbusters and those from Master Merlin thrown in. Used versions of both sell for roughly \$20 to \$40 at places like eBay and, temping as both sound, there's already too many handheld gadgets in my life to think I'd get enough play from them to justify the cost.







# Dual Perspective

by James Sorge



## Donkey Kong

Hello, and this is James Sorge back with Dual Perspective, the column that reviews games from both the playing and the world record perspectives. This month, the victim is "Donkey Kong", the game at the heart of the controversy of the movie "King of Kong", and has notable players such as Billy Mitchell, Steve Wiebe, and Vincent Lemay.

Graphics: 9/10

For 1981, these graphics were out of this world, and people still find the graphics recognizable today. They have been improved on the NES some bit, but in general, the nostalgic sense has kept its appeal over the years.

Sound: 1/10

Maybe this is my personal opinion, but I think Donkey Kong is very shallow in the sound department, with sound that breaks the tradition of good games usually needing a good soundtrack to survive. Granted, it was 1981 and that plays into it, but still, playing it on MAME myself I find it poor.

Difficulty: 9/10 (to kill screen)

While the game is somewhat hard and the randomness can throw you, this isn't the hardest game ever to play. With some diligent practice and a good dedicated effort, you can reasonably reach a kill screen without a marathon session. While I personally am not very good at this, it's mostly due to lack of practice and I think it's still outclassed by Battletoads, Ninja Gaiden, Pokemon Mystery Dungeon Red and Blue, and other well-known video games. Don't kid yourself though: It's an arcade game, it's still hard!

Replay Factor: 10/10

Just enough to make you mad and come back to it. It's also very feasible to speed run. Just put earplugs in to block the awful repetitive sounds.



The World Record Perspective:

As the old line goes, "anything's beatable", but this game is starting to get into the land of no return and is starting to reach its max potential. It was overblown in "King of Kong" and a lot of people made fame before it hit this point, but now it's going to take you probably at least a year of solid practice just to get that good at this game alone. And to make matters worse, the MAME score is higher than the arcade score! If you didn't know already:

- **Arcade:** Hank Chien, 1,090,400 points
- **MAME:** Dean Saglio, 1,153,000 points

Other notable DK challenges:

- **No Hammer Challenge:** Jeff Willms, 597,400 points, MAME
- **1-1 Challenge:** Vincent Lemay, 13,300 points, MAME

And it's fair to say we want to see a solid speed run of this game done!

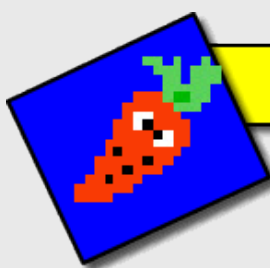




The Penguin Says:

"A fun game that'll keep you occupied for a while. And from the World Record standpoint, it's still hot despite it getting close to max potential, and it will net you a lot of fun and maybe some decent cash while at it. If you're willing to put the time into this one, it's worth it. Just be ready for some competition. Overall I give this a 9/10 with a world record potential of 2/10."





# Mutated Output

by Mark Sabbatini



## The Many Faces Of The BBC Micro - Part 2

First things first: Yes, the previous "Many Faces Of" column was an April Fool's joke.

It takes about ten seconds on Google to learn Parker Brothers never released any games for the BBC Micro. The technical information about British vs. U.S. televisions is accurate, but hopefully nobody believes the scan-line rate of the TV affects the speed of the computer. And if you bought the upside-down display due to the "reverse" graphing system used by some British computers you probably believe Brits eat burgers topped with brussels sprouts (actually that one is true, proving again truth is stranger than any fiction I can make up).

Getting back to the real MFO comparison for the Beeb, readers of previous reviews may recall I've generally lamented the quality of games relative to the computer's horsepower. I also have issues with the MFO scoring system since lousy games gets scores far too high for their relative worth. The scale is from one to 10, but in reality seems to resemble school grades where 70 is average and anything below 60 a failure. The official MFO scores for Defender, for instance, are 38 for the last-place Atari 2600 and 46 for the Gold Medal Atari 8-bit. To say the 2600's dreadful port is 83 percent as good as the 8-bit's is lunacy. By mentioning both of these issues now, hopefully rants can be avoided in the reviews below.

One other thing mentioned is the incredible number of games released with official titles that obviously aren't official ports, while some games with differing titles actually have connections to the licensee. Accordingly, some leniency is given when selecting Beeb titles to compare, a rule-bender I figure I can indulge in since nothing here is part of the official record anyhow.

(Rambling sidetrack: The proliferation of non-licensed titles with official names seemed to reflect the largely apathetic view a lot of U.S. companies had about British machines and gamers, which I figured could never happen today. But, as with so many things, I seem to be wrong on a large scale as I'm constantly seeing "officially unofficial" retro titles for my iPhone. I figured an unauthorized clone of Enduro, for instance, wouldn't survive Activision's lawyers for more than a few hours. But it's not only still in the App Store more than a month after its release, but it's been updated. FWIW, it seems to be a flawless conversion.)

On to the reviews. For the uninitiated, the letter grades are for the game's relative quality on the BBC Micro scale, while the medal scores are where the title deserves to finish among the versions for other platforms.

Defender (B+); Silver (45, tied with Commodore 64 and Atari 8-bit)

Disclaimer: I strained to find a way to downgrade this because I dislike knocking any medal winner from their platform (or being forced to share it) since I consider them sacred for reasons having nothing to do with logic. But it'd be remiss to do so because, even overcompensating in an attempt to be objective, this is as good a version for the early generation of machines as I've played despite some flaws. The first few seconds with this official Atarisoft port (although not exactly, details to be revealed) are astounding. A pixel-perfect display of the arcade game's test pattern and "Initial Tests Indicate – Unit OK" message appear on the screen. Which is almost too bad because heightened expectations are let down by what's a very good, but not



perfect, game. One example of comparative MFO supremacy is sound (10) which, while a mixture of perfectly replicated and compromised elements, still surpasses all other versions (the top-scoring of which got a nine). Graphics (9) are equal to any, with nearly everything closely resembling the arcade in screenshots and early waves. But they suffer when things get faster and more crowded, with the quicker enemies "jumping" quite a few pixels at a time. That also affects gameplay (9), since it makes mutants, baiters, swarms, etc. unfairly hard to hit, but every other version suffers similar and/or other flaws that aren't any worse. Two things get nicked a point apiece, keeping the Beeb version from tying or surpassing the Atari 8-bit version for the Gold. One is addictiveness (8), because the game lacks any configuration options for multiple players or difficulty. Second is the controls (9) since keyboard users will find some of the non-configurable choices in unexpected places (spacebar for reverse and tab for smart bombs, the wrongness of which shouldn't be hard to discern). Overall it's hard to believe Atari could do such an impressive job for an obscure machine by U.S. standards, except for one thing: It's actually a tweaked version of an unofficial "Defender" released by the British company Acornsoft, which renamed it Planetoid before cooperating with Atarisoft on an official port. I can't say for sure, but it sounds a lot like what happened with General Computer Corp. when Atari decided GCC's games for the 2600 were so superior to Atari's efforts they decided hiring the programmers was better than suing them. Acornsoft later released Super Defender which, much to my disappointment, was not a port of Stargate. It does add configurable options to the original Defender, which would be enough to elevate its MFO medal status.

Donkey Kong Jr. (B-); Bronze (42)

Having awarded the Beeb its first unofficial MFO medal, it seems appropriate to continue the streak with another winner. Again, this was released with the unofficial title Killer Gorilla 2, but there's some connections between the programmer and Atarisoft with an official version (they appear to be the same game). I didn't expect much because Killer Gorilla, a Donkey Kong port, looked good in screenshots but played horribly. KG2 is a pleasant surprise with a couple of modestly significant flaws. Graphics (9) are smooth with all the small details of individual characters preserved. Sound (7), on the other hand, is a train wreck with a not-very-catchy ditty looping endlessly in lieu of the actions taking place on the screen. The only reason it gets this score is because it's theoretically better than the bottom-finishing Atari 2600's score of six. Controls (8) don't always respond quite as fast as I'd like, but they're at least as good as the Intellivision's which got the same score. Gameplay (9) is almost perfect except for one notable flaw: the timer counts down too fast. More than a few minor pauses or missteps and you'll run out even on the early levels. I'm also lumping in the fact there's no apparent customization options. But both have to be offset by the fact all four levels are included, which only the gold medal Atari 7800/8-bit versions can claim. Addictiveness (9) would be perfect if not for that blasted music, since in general it's a fulfilling stand-in for being at the arcade, which wasn't the case with the much-played Colecovision version I had which snagged the official Bronze with a score of 41.



And, sadly, that's it for this month due to the anvil of deadline. But that's not all bad since my notes indicate there's few medal contenders in the current batch of games I'm testing and this offers the exceedingly rare opportunity to turn in a review column not containing at least raging tirade about some piece of dreck whose programmer(s) deserve to spend eternity mining virtual World of Warcraft gold for unleashing it on the masses. (Last sentence, for the unaware, is my gesture of sympathy/outrage for the Chinese prisoners actually being forced to do this in 12-hour shifts or face beatings from the guards.)



# Apple II Incider

by Donald Lee



## Championship Baseball

Happy June everyone! Summertime is here and baseball pennant races are starting to heat up. Our two local teams, the Oakland Athletics and San Francisco Giants, played in an interleague series last weekend with the Giants sweeping the Athletics. The Giants have warmed up after a slow start and are in first place in the National League West. The Athletics are under .500 at 26-29 but only two games out of first place in the American League West.

With baseball as the backdrop, it's a good time to take a look at an old favorite of mine, Championship Baseball. The game was developed by Gamestar and published by Activision. According to information on the Internet, Championship Baseball was published sometime in 1984 though I'm not sure about the Apple II version. If the date holds true, Championship Baseball predates Accolade's popular Hardball by about a year.

If someone played both Championship Baseball and Hardball, they will notice some lineage between the games. Both Hardball and Championship Baseball are action oriented games and feature fictional teams. As a player, you control both the pitching, fielding, and hitting for your team.



There are a few differences between Championship Baseball and Hardball. One is that there are no managerial options that I could find in Championship Baseball. You get to set a lineup and select a starting pitcher but there is no way to pinch hit or switch pitchers. To be fair, I didn't have a manual and had trouble figuring out how to do certain features so the managerial options may well exist and I may have missed it.

Secondly, Championship Baseball adopts a split screen approach whereas Hardball does not. The split screen works against Championship Baseball as there is no room to show the types of pitches or hitting zones that Hardball has on its screens.

There are some positives in Championship Baseball though. Like other sports games from Gamestar, Championship Baseball allows you to create a custom team or play one of the fictional teams on the disk. You can also play an exhibition game or in a league season. The league season, like Championship Basketball, is one of the best features of the game.

In replaying Championship Baseball again for the first time in years, I have to admit that it was more playable than I remembered. It took me a little while to figure out the controls, but once I got the hang of things, the game played very smoothly.



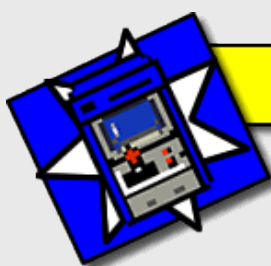
The graphics are serviceable and do a reasonable job of showing the action on screen. Like most Apple II games, there isn't a ton of sound though there is some music during the intro screen.

Overall, Championship Baseball is a good '80s variation of an action oriented baseball game. While Hardball would improve on some aspects of a year later, it wouldn't be until 1987 when Earl Weaver Baseball took computer baseball games to the next level. It's interesting that Earl Weaver Baseball would take the split screen approach. If Earl Weaver

Baseball is ever put up on the Virtual Apple II site, I'll review it sometime in the future.

For now, Championship Baseball is a solid entry for those interested in an action oriented baseball game. Having the ability to play in a league season is a bonus. It's worth checking out.





# MAME Reviews

by Mark Sabbatini



## Escape From The Planet Of The Robot Monsters

The century-old theory of a "Planet X" influencing the orbit of planets in our solar system was ridiculed in the summer of 1989 by NASA scientists relying on data sent by a spacecraft that was the offspring of V'Ger. At roughly the same time, the landing of a UFO in Voronezh was reported by the Soviet Union's official news agency and the U.S. space shuttle Columbia blasted off on "a secret five-day military mission."

There's no proof, but it's possible militant arcaders experienced that mission while those brave souls were launched into space.

Inquiring minds have to wonder if the coin-op game *Escape from the Planet of the Robot Monsters* is actually a replica of an ultra-secret space rescue rather than, as Atari claims, a tribute to sci-fi camp movies from the '50s. This is the company that used *Battlezone* to teach our troops how to operate tanks. It's not unreasonable to think some grateful soldier might have leaked the code for a "Planet X" mission to the geeks in Los Gatos.

EPROM (which came first, the name or the acronym?) is basically a campy galactic Gauntlet with a bit of *Robotron*, viewed from the overhead 3D perspective in *Zaxxon*. There's a twisted plot that will be revealed shortly, but the bullet points are:

- You shoot and blow up just about everything in sight except for humans you rescue by touching them.
- A wee bit of brain power is necessary to do things like get around some large scrolling levels.
- It's a lot more fun now as an illegal MAME freebie than when it aggressively vacuumed all the change from you (Kibo help any mortal that accidentally swallowed a quarter).

The operator's manual, in an obscure section between dozens of mundane pages of assembly instructions, explains the plot as thus: Jake and Duke are trying to rescue humans on the industrial Planet X that have been enslaved into making robots to attack Earth. One or both heroes must search the factories for Professor Sarah Bellum ("a voluptuous young lady famous for her knowledge of cybernetics") freeing other hostages along the way.

There are "innumerable" robots and reptilians to conquer, "each with its own unique comic book-style appearance, action and level of computerized intelligence." In the player(s) favor are food lockers, bomb lockers, special weapons, bonus points for destroying computers and furniture, and bonus lives at the end of each level based on the number of humans rescued.



Each floor of a level has a switch that must be activated to start the "electro stairs" to the next floor. Complete all the floors in a level and the player journeys to the next by piloting a cybersled through a "canal zone maze." Do it right and the player gets to pick one of three paths in the next factory. Crash and the computer picks one.

If the game was a simulation of a mission the Pentagon brass wanted kept secret, they did a fair job as ERPOM was less than a runaway success at a time beat-em-ups were beginning their assimilation of arcades. This game ranks 18 on a scale out of 100 (100 = most often seen, 1=least common) in popularity based on census ownership records at the Killer List of Video Games, putting it not far above games in Japanese that never made it to the U.S. It fared better on home computers – by then capable of near-perfect ports – with versions for the Atari ST, Commodore Amiga, MS-DOS, Commodore 64, ZX Spectrum, Amstrad CPC and SAM Coupé.

Those now using MAME to play the arcade version at home can find two ROM sets floating around the 'net. I went with Set 1 because it's larger (728K vs. 270k) and I'm assuming there's content missing in the latter version. A joystick or other game controller is recommended since all movement is diagonal, unless you're skilled at continuously pressing two movement buttons at once. There's also three in-game action buttons and you'll need to press all three at once at times, for whatever that's worth when configuring the controls.

The arcade version's attract mode is fairly elaborate with a mix of comic book storyline panels and game demos. It may make the game seem a bit hard to learn, but novices will find they can make their first games last at least a few minutes just by running around and shooting things. Progressing farther requires a mastery of the controls – and lots of quarters.

Game options, set via an on-screen menu using the player controls rather than DIP switches, include (defaults indicated with an asterisk):

- Starting lives (3\*-5).
- Extra lives (every 100,000, 200,000\* or 400,000 lives, or none).
- Difficulty level (easy, medium\*, hard).
- Difficulty ramping (yes\*/no, based on time elapsed since the last coin was inserted).
- Continuations allowed (8, 10\*, 15 or unlimited). Restricting these was another of Atari's "features" to increase dealer profits ("continues can be limited 'to increase longevity of player interest...only players who have become skilled at game play are allowed to see the end,' as the manual explains).

There's also a few attract screen options, including toggling the FBI "winners don't use drugs" message commonly seen back when powerful/rich people actually thought "just say no" would work. A real bastard of an operator can also rig the game to charge up to 24 coins per credit.

The first floor is about as (non-)challenging as the first wave of Robotron, with a few helpful prompts (i.e. "Don't shoot the slaves!") as you progress. I found myself running into quite a few enemy bullets and off the edges of a few floors when playing with a keyboard instead of my X-Arcade stick. The three buttons used to fire, duck and jump (all three detonate bombs you set) aren't too complex, especially in comparison to the "secret move" nightmares of those beat-em-ups.

The difficulty curve does ramp up quickly, however, and newbies will probably find the end comes swiftly since action resumes at the spot you bit the dust. Reserve men may barely outlive their brief immunity and continuing a game in such a situation ensures things won't get off to a good start.





That's the primary reason I find EPROM far more entertaining with MAME than I ever would have in the arcade. Perhaps it's a shorter attention span due to a vastly larger range of games to play, or maybe a general distaste I developed for coin-op games with a definitive conclusion. Crashing a supposedly unlimited-play game due to a "kill screen" bug is an achievement of pride, but deliberate limits feel chintzy (Dragon's Lair being the only exception I can recall).

At home, though, armed with an avalanche of virtual quarters and unlimited continues, it's possible to enjoy exploring the range of robots and eccentric moments without focusing on your brainpower on mere survival. Also, lacking a friend to play with most of the time ("double the firepower," the coin-hungry machine coaxes) means a lot more time trying to get through a genre of game I was never good at to begin with.

It's a long way from the most thrilling, funny or innovative game I've played in arcades – it'd never have torn me away from my Super Mario Bros./Rad Action/other favorites at the time – but worth trying out if only as a study of how Atari was trying to expand its reliable game forms of the time.

Extremely short take on the home conversions, based on a few minutes with them in emulators, is the Amiga and Atari ST versions rock, the Amstrad CPC is solid, ZX Spectrum good for that machine aside from a lot of monochrome graphics, and the Commodore 64 a pixelated letdown. The MS-DOS version looks decent, and it offers a mobile option for iPhone/iPod/iPad owners using the free iDOS app and iPhoneExplorer Windows/Mac desktop application.

As for that UFO landing in the Soviet Union, it's worth noting 1989 was also the year the Iron Curtain began losing its grip on a bunch of countries, so perhaps it was a counterstrike by robots armed with bad intelligence. Before heaving a sigh of thanks, keep in mind that if they'd hit the right target we'd never have to endure "Star Trek V: The Final Frontier." Seems like a wash.



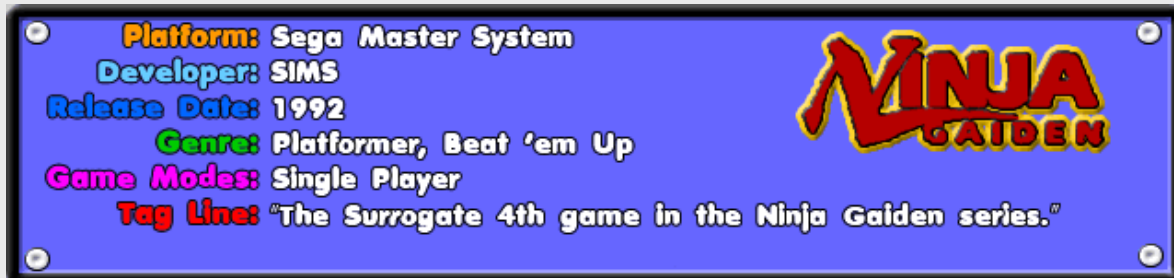


# The Pixelated Mage

by Jeff Wittenhagen



## Ninja Gaiden



### Synopsis

Ninja Gaiden is an action packed series that was predominately released on Nintendo systems in the 8-bit era. The largely unknown Sega Master System version was released after the Nintendo Entertainment System Trilogy and is the surrogate 4th game in the series. Though it features Ryu Hayabusa as the main protagonist, the story is not associated with any of the other Ninja Gaiden games. Another tidbit is that the SMS version was the only 8-bit Ninja Gaiden game to be not be released in PAL territories as Shadow Warriors, making it the only named Ninja Gaiden title to be released in the area at the time.

The story of Ninja Gaiden revolves around Ryu Hayabusa, a member of the Dragon Ninja clan, the protectors of Japan for generations. What happens is that all but one of the village members of his hometown, the Dragon Village, have been brutally murdered. In his dying breath, the lone survivor tells Ryu that the sacred Bushido scroll has been taken. It is legend that the owner of this scroll will have the power to control the world. As the last remaining member of the Dragon Ninja clan, Ryu must begin a quest to get back the sacred Bushido scroll from the evil Shogun of Darkness and his minions.



### Gameplay

The gameplay in Ninja Gaiden has the same controls as its Nintendo Entertainment System counterparts. All of the movements, attacks, and jumps are spot on and special attacks are performed by doing the familiar up and attack method. Some of the techniques from the NES games are modified, such as the clinging to walls being replaced by being able to bounce off walls. This allows for the flow of the game to be less sludgy and keeps a much better pace throughout.

### Graphics and Sound

Due to the Master System's more powerful hardware compared to the Nintendo Entertainment System, this version of Ninja Gaiden has far superior graphics and much faster gameplay. The details in the sprites are magnificent and the backgrounds are highly detailed. There is a shine to the graphics in Ninja Gaiden that just feels more polished than any of the NES versions.



The sound department is usually where the Master System dwindles due to the sloppy ports of Game Gear games. Ninja Gaiden sets a standard that most Master Systems games lack and not only has tolerable music but it is above and beyond what you would hope to hear. The sound effects are standard and what you would expect from a Ninja

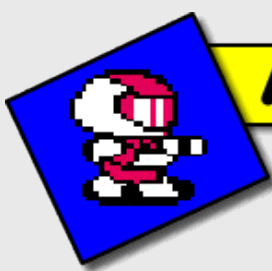
Gaiden game, with nothing that impedes your experience.

### Why It's Rare

Due to the dwindling sales of the Sega Master System, Ninja Gaiden was only released in PAL territories. This has made Ninja Gaiden exceptionally rare when you compare it to other Master System titles. It can be found online for roughly \$50 shipped on select gaming websites, but the game doesn't consistently pop up on auction sites. Also there are actually two versions of the game that exist, one tells the story in detail through Ryu's eyes and the second is narrated from an overseer, so obsessive collectors have a bonus hunt! If you are a fan of the brutally difficult Ninja Gaiden games then this 4th game in the series is a no-brainer and reason enough to own a Sega Master System.

Rating = 5 Pixelated Ninja Mages out of 5





# A Pixelated 21st Century

by Paul Zimmerman



Hello Pixelated fans. May was a great month to be a Pixelated fan; three Super Nintendo games, a bunch of titles for DsiWare, and MDK2 for WiiWare(!). Here are some of the retroware highlights for the month of May:

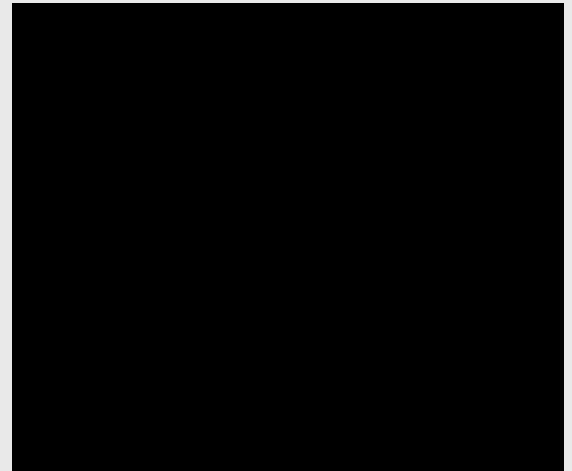


MDK2 (Video to the right)

A Playstation 2 port from 2001 with Wii controls! Even though the graphics are not very "retroware" I thought it was important to mention it here since it is a "classic" game. Actually, I don't really like the Wii controls, but it is playable. A blast from the past!

Overflow ([Click here to see a video of the game](#))

Looks like a fun puzzle game. 30 warped levels.



99Bullets ([Click here to see a video of the game](#))

A retroware shmup with a 99 bullet (or is that luftballons) limit? Sounds and looks interesting.

Anonymous Notes Chapter 2 From The Abyss ([Click here to see a video of the game](#))

More of the same real-time action, dungeon crawler, RPG.

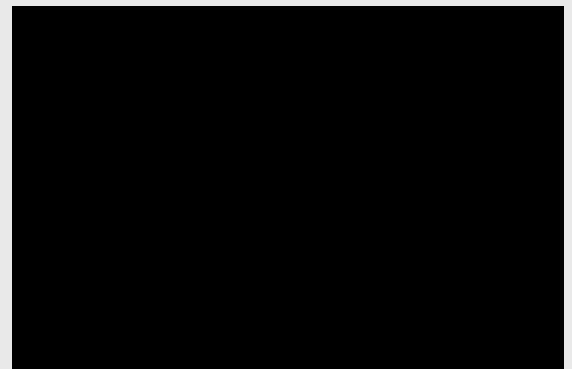
Go Series Tower of Deus ([Click here to see a video of the game](#))

Run, jump and fly to the top of the tower before time runs out! 40 levels.

Ikibago ([Click here to see a video of the game](#))

Puzzle and action all in the same game! Wow! Match three barrels. 121 missions!

Mighty Milky Way ([Click here to see a video of the game](#))



Luna needs your help! Help Luna solve puzzles beyond this universe. From the mighty developers Wayforward, the makers of Mighty Flip Champs, A Boy and His Blob, and Contra 4. Over 40 action puzzles. Looks great! Most likely a must-buy!

Puzzle Quest: Challenge of the Warlords ([Click here to see a video of the game](#))

I love this series! Classic puzzle action with a story and RPG elements. More than 150 quests! Great game! Buy it now!

Valet Parking 1989 (Video to the right)

I love 1989, especially games from 1989! Park and deliver cars in this time management puzzle game. Awesome!



*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.*

Chrono Trigger (SNES) ([Click here to see a video of the game](#))

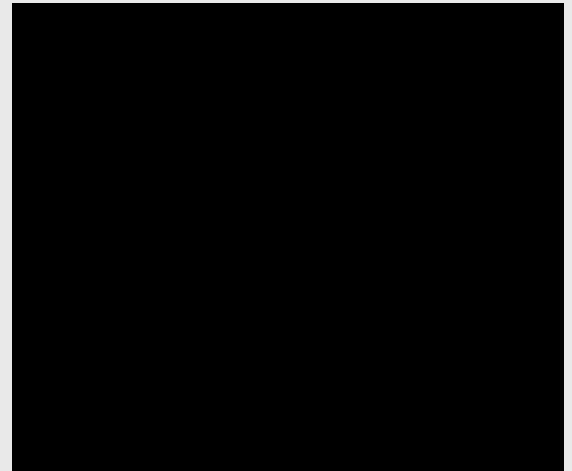
A masterpiece. Can be a little confusing, but such a great RPG. Excellent character design. Excellent music.

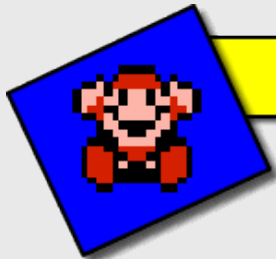
Super Adventure Island (SNES) (Video to the right)

The 4th Adventure Island in the series, the 1st for Super Nintendo. Back to the original basics – 2 weapons, skateboard, 1 hit kills. Good game. Even better music!

As always, send me an email and let me know if you purchased any of these games and what your thoughts are about them. Also, let me know your thoughts about any games I did not list.

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





# Game Over

by Bryan Roppolo



The next time I see you guys, it will be July and fireworks will be shooting off here in the U.S. Hopefully I can provide you all with some fireworks of my own, meaning that I can get all the articles indexed by then. Wish me luck. One of the interesting things I found when going through and indexing these back issues are what some of the popular back columns were in the magazine, some of which are no longer with us today. Also, seeing authors that wrote for RTM years ago but have never been seen since is another interesting thing that I have run across. Maybe someday we'll have to have an RTM staff reunion where all the past columnists come back and update us on what they are currently doing. That will have to wait until I finish the index though, so that we can all see what columns each person wrote. But it would be fun to see some type of reunion. Anyway, I hope to see you guys next month when we all break out our fireworks and enjoy the long hot lazy days of summer and hopefully have some talks of holding a reunion!