



Printing Help



Retrogaming Times Monthly #86 - July 2011



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## Press Fire To Begin

by Bryan Roppolo

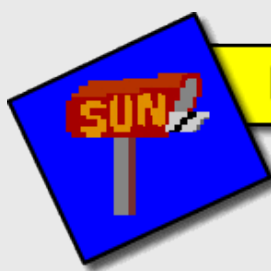


Bang! It's the month of July and that can only mean that 4th of July celebrations are going to be getting underway soon, complete with fireworks and summer heat. While you guys are out there enjoying the celebrations, be sure to bring along this issue of RTM to add even more sizzle to your celebration. Even though there are no real 4th of July themed articles this month, there are still the usual fun-packed articles found in every issue.

In other news, I was recently contacted by David Schroeder who programmed Dino Eggs and Crisis Mountain back in the '80s. He is actually looking to get back into game programming and is looking for, "serious programmers/studios who have a love for the classic games -- but also have the contemporary smarts to build apps for iOS, Android, Facebook, etc." He feels the current market might be able to support games like the ones he designed back in the day. It's exciting to find a classic game programmer that wants to start developing again. Considering a number of our RTM readers have backgrounds in game development, consider sending a message to David at [david@olympus.net](mailto:david@olympus.net) if you are one of those people. It can't get any better than game development with a classic game programmer!

In terms of the article index that I have been working on, that is finally starting to move again and I plan on getting all the back issues finally on-line sometime this month with them all hopefully indexed either later in July or August. It's moving along, albeit slowly. But once those back issues are finally all on-line, it will be a breeze to get them all indexed.

On a final note, if anyone knows of any place that sells fireworks that explode into classic video game characters, let me know!



# Retrogaming News

The Retrocade ColecoVision Summer Showdown  
Sunday July 3 12:00pm - Monday July 18, 2011 3:00am (Internet)

The Retrocade will be hosting a ColecoVision Summer Showdown beginning Sunday, July 3, 2011 at noon EDT and concluding Monday, July 18 at 3AM EDT.

There will be seven games in this tournament:

Cosmic Avenger  
Donkey Kong  
Galaxian  
Miner 2049er  
Squish 'Em Sam  
SubRoc  
Turbo

Game settings will be announced by mid-week.

Players must be registered with the Forums on [retrocadeweb.webs.com](http://retrocadeweb.webs.com) where the competition will be hosted.

Games can be played on either console hardware or through emulation using the documented game settings.

Screenshots/photos are mandatory.

Submissions should include Game, Score, Player's Name & a screenshot/photo of the score.

Tournament overall scoring will be the average of the player's percentage score across all seven titles. All titles must be played to qualify in the tournament overall standings. Tournament results will be published in the first issue of Retrocade Magazine this fall.

## [Game Play](#)

Friday July 8 - Sunday July 31, 2011 (Brooklyn, NY)

The Brick Theater, Inc. presents the third annual Game Play.

A Celebration of Video Game Performance Art. The New York Times calls us, "the most ambitious effort I know of to fuse the techniques and live presentation of theater with the themes, structures and technology of interactive electronic entertainment."

Performances will be from July 8 through July 31 at The Brick, 575 Metropolitan Avenue, Williamsburg, Brooklyn, NY. Tickets available at [www.bricktheater.com](http://www.bricktheater.com) or Theatermania (212-352-3101). This year's performances include BRAINEXPLODE!, RED CLOUD RISING, SON OF PONG, ROMEOO & JULIETET, MASTERMIND, and MODAL KOMBAT, plus some special events.

## [California Extreme 15](#)

Saturday July 9 - Sunday July 10, 2011 (Santa Clara, CA)

California Extreme is the "Classic Arcade Games Show". It's an annual celebration of coin operated pinball machines, video games and other novelties you once found in game arcades. All games on display are set for free play, so leave your quarters in the ash tray in your car. You won't need 'em.

The 15th Annual California Extreme Arcade Game and Pinball Celebration will once again be held at the beautiful Hyatt Regency Santa Clara. The show will be open Saturday July 9th from 11am until 2am the next morning, and Sunday July 10th from 11am until 9pm. The show features hundreds of arcade games and pinball machines on free play, including many rare and prototype games. Speakers, vendors, competitions, and a raffle with the grand prize being a choice of a full size pinball or arcade machine. Come share in the fun of one of the coolest hobbies on the planet!

Pre-registration is closed at this time but tickets will still be available at the door, check [caextreme.org](http://caextreme.org) for all the details!

The show is always an awesome time, hope to see you there!

### [ADAMCon 23](#)

Thursday July 14 - Sunday July 17, 2011 (Grand Rapids, MI)

ADAMCon 23 will take place in Grand Rapids, MI from Thursday evening July 14th thru Sunday evening July 17th. We hope that you all will take the opportunity to come to an ADAM convention and experience it first hand with us. Click on the link below for the ADAMCON 23 registration form, hotel links, and other information on ADAMCON 23.

<http://ann.hollowdreams.com/ac23register.doc>.

### CORGS CON 2011

Saturday July 16, 9:00am to 6:00pm (Columbus, OH)

They've pulled out all of the stops this year! Stores selling, collectors selling, rare stuff to see, rare stuff to play, LAN gaming, nicer venue, awkward conversations, that one guy with poor hygiene. You know. It'll be a video game show! Buying, Selling, Playing, Contests, good times for all.

And did I mention...TWO COOL TABLES STARRING ME! Yes, you can come to my table, and play my video games with me, Blur2040. Fun! I'll be running high score contests on various arcade and Neo Geo games. I'll also probably give away prizes or something! I have entirely too many duplicate consoles... Might be time to get rid of a Colecovision or a Sega Genesis...or a N64...or something.

ALSO, LIVE AND IN PERSON: At least 2 guys named Gary, and, making a very special appearance, if he doesn't have anything better to do: My friend, Alan. He can make a noise that sounds just like Predator from the movies AND is really good at juggling. AMAZING! Come on down to 3795 South High Street, Columbus OH, 43207 on July 16th to be part of the action.

### [2011 Video Game Summit](#)

Saturday July 16, 2011 11:00am (Lombard, IL)

Remember how much fun you used to have playing Atari, Nintendo and all kinds of games on your computer? Well, you will have the rare opportunity to play these great games again at the Video Game Summit, Chicago's premier video game trade show. In fact, dealers in retro games will be on hand offering games, controllers, systems and memorabilia and will be prepared to buy or trade for the games you have held onto since you were a kid. Who knows, you might just have an Atari cartridge worth \$1000 or more collecting dust in your attic.

The date of the show will be July 16th, 2011 from 11am to 6pm at The Heron Point Convention Center, 665 West North Avenue, Lombard, IL (adjacent from the Fairfield Inn and Suites hotel) Admission is \$3.00 per person (children 12 and under with an Adult are Free).

For more information visit our website above.

## [22nd Annual KansasFest](#)

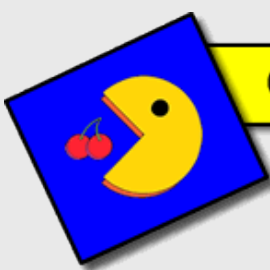
Tuesday July 19, 2011 - Sunday July 24, 2011 (Kansas City, MO)

Users, programmers, hobbyists, and retrocomputing enthusiasts are invited to Rockhurst University in Kansas City, Missouri, from Tuesday, July 19, 2011, through Sunday July 24, for six days and five nights of sessions, demos, announcements, contests, and camaraderie.

The week kicks off with keynote speaker Bob Bishop, co-founder of Apple's R&D lab alongside Steve Wozniak and creator of many popular Apple II programs and articles. Several sessions and workshops are scheduled throughout the rest of the week, including but not limited to:

- Ivan Drucker's tutorial for putting your Apple II on a LAN
- Build your own Apple II MP3 expansion card workshop by Vince Briel
- A look at the Apple III's technical aspects and modern accessories, by Mike Maginnis
- A live-action text adventure, hosted by Ken Gagne
- A behind-the-scenes look at the Open Apple podcast
- The latest on Apple's iOS mobile devices by Rob Walch of the Today in iPhone podcast
- A vendor fair that includes an exhibit hall for attendees to show off and play with new or unusual hardware and software
- HackFest, an annual programming challenge open to coders of all skill levels

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.



# Chomping At The 8-Bit

by Mark Sabbatini



## The World's Biggest Pac-Man

I despise the endless attempts to cash in on my beloved Pac-Man as much as the next fan, but this may well be the yellow guy's coolest game ever.

Even better, it's free, with the only monetary element being a small icon to make a donation to earthquake relief efforts in Japan. The only hitch is needing to hook up via Facebook to use all of its features, but any time spent dealing with the nuisance of spam and unwanted messages will probably be minuscule compared to the hours you'll spend playing and contributing to the project. (Mac users are locked out of those extras for now, so they can save themselves the aggravation and just enjoy the game).

Anyone with even a symptom of Pac Fever should immediately direct their browser to [www.worldsbiggestpacman.com](http://www.worldsbiggestpacman.com) (and of course come back and finish reading this when they're ready to take a break).

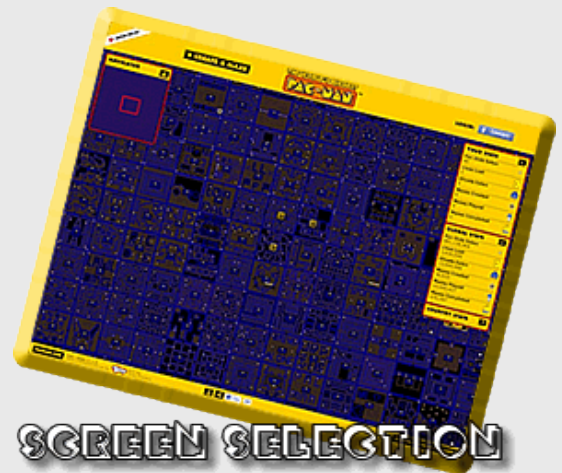
The World's Biggest Pac-Man is a pretty self-explanatory title, but the impressiveness of this browser-based dot-eater featuring thousands of user-created mazes connected into one is hard to overstate, both as a game and marketing device. You can easily set aside the marketing thing and just spend hours (and hours and hours) playing it. Those wanting to design and contribute mazes, however, will need to fork over their Facebook data and submit themselves to the will of that all-encompassing evil known as Microsoft.

The project, released in April and authored by the Australian company Soap Creative in cooperation with Namco, is meant to be a promotional vehicle for Internet Explorer 9 and HTML 5. I haven't been a fan of Explorer since they maliciously helped Netscape Navigator commit suicide – and I'm mostly a Mac user – so I'm grateful it's mostly playable using other browsers such as Firefox and Safari. I doubt anyone will miss any mazes I might be inspired to create (Arctic themes probably, given my proximity to the North Pole), although I'll likely cave in and use my Windows laptop at some point in the near future.

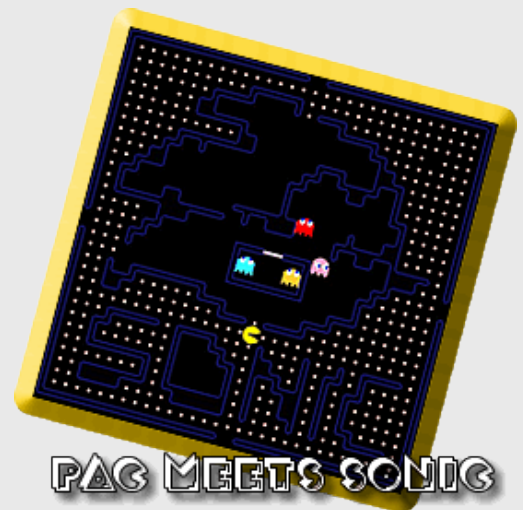
It's worth noting I did run into some minor hitches playing this in alternate browsers, including getting lost in No Man's Land trying to use the navigator feature to peruse all of the mazes, but I can't say how much of this is my fault instead of the browser's. It's probable I simply wandered into a vast part of the grid where mazes haven't been created, but a "home" button re-centers things quickly.

Playing the game is as simple as would be expected. A screen full of mazes are displayed in miniature on the home screen and you start a game by selecting a maze and clicking on it. Control of your Pac-Man is with the arrow keys, but sadly there appears to be no way to pause a game, which seems like a necessity for anyone wanting to engage in a marathon session. Something that might make a difference is an extra Pac-Man is awarded every 10,000 points, so a true pro might accumulate enough for a bathroom or snack break.

The original arcade maze is at what may or may not be the center of all the



SCREEN SELECTION



PAC MEETS SONIC



screens, but it becomes immediately clear not all of the arcade's ghost AI is implemented (their general behaviors do appear to be the same). That doesn't matter a lot since another more significant deviation occurs as soon as you use any of the side exits (which for the original maze appear in the usual side locations, plus the top and bottom edges of the screen). This scrolls you to the adjacent maze, although the configuration of dots and monsters remains intact if you return to a maze later (wow, just how much memory does that consume?).

Beyond the original maze is a hodge-podge of clever, novel and lousy designs, with some occasionally obscene ones sneaking their way in until the site watchdogs remove them.

"We're happy that the 'penis to non-penis levels' ratio is well below 1:100 (the standard for user generated campaigns)," Soap Creative notes on its blog. "We've been watching the moderation closely, so every penis has a short life."

A quick scan found layouts of everything from other retrogame screens to highly impressive multimaze "meta levels" joining to form a single complex image. There's also, of course, a high percentage of egocentric mazes with people's names or self-portraits.

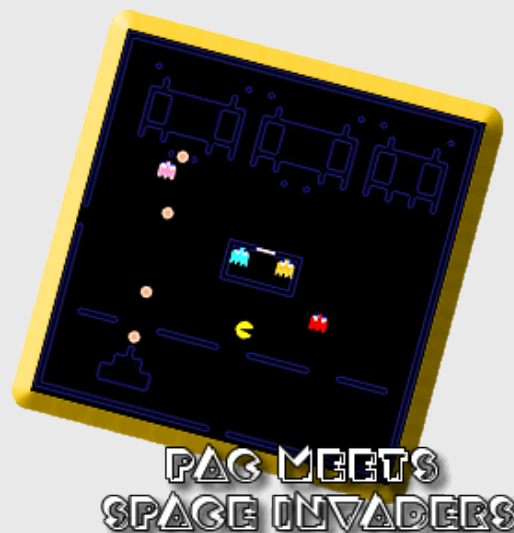
Statistical tallies for your games, global users and individual countries are displayed in closable windows at the upper-right corner of the screen. Global stats as of this writing include nearly 982 million Pac-Dots eaten, more than 5.6 million lives lost, about 13.6 million ghosts eaten, 36,624 mazes created, 10.4 million mazes played and 970,742 mazes completed. The U.S. is the most active country with nearly 364 million (presumably) dots eaten, while Japan is a somewhat surprising 10th with 26.6 million (my home country of Norway is a pitiful 42nd with 2.3 million).

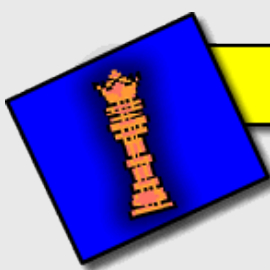
One stat invented entirely on my own is a (very) rough guess of how long it would take to reach the "kill screen" by completing all 36,624 mazes 255 times. Assuming it takes four minutes to clear each maze (it's doubtful anyone going's to have the time-saving benefits of patterns), that equates to 625,050 hours, or nearly 71.4 years. God help you (literally, I guess) if you lose your last Pac-Man trying to clear the final maze.

Of course, I don't know if Soap Creative actually included the code to progress through that many levels (or even more than one) and I didn't get a chance to contact them with the short time I had to write this.

The only negative I encountered in gameplay is occasional slowdowns, which I'm not sure is the result of the network's activity (the company says trying to keep up with all the users is a chore) or my computer doing too many other tasks at the same time.

Soap Creative's Ashley Ringrose, in an interview quoted at various websites, said The World's Biggest Pac-Man was written in six weeks and allows for the creation of 16 million mazes on a 4,000-by-4,000 grid. I can't say for certain that would make this the first video game that can't be completed in a human lifetime (more than 400 of them, actually), but good luck finding another game that takes longer.





# Move 1 Space Forward

by Jonathan Imberl



## Ms. Pac-Man The Board Game

From the front of the box:

"As much fun as the action-packed arcade game. Be the first player to gobble up all the dots in your color area of the maze. Ages 7-14, for 2 to 4 players."

From the back of the box:

"Hi! I'm Ms. Pac-Man....The star of the most exciting maze game around. Inky, Blinky and Pinky are in it too, and there's even a new ghost called Sue. We chase each other through a special maze that's divided into four different colored areas with lots of walls to maneuver around, four handy exits to help me make my getaway from those pesky ghosts and plenty of delicious dots for me to munch on. It's great fun and you're invited to play. Just choose one of the four available colors. Move your color ghost around the maze by die roll. If your ghost can catch me, you get the chance to control me and munch a bunch of dots. All you have to do is gobble up all those silly dots in your color area of the maze (with my help) and you'll win the game. So good luck, have fun and catch me if you can (I dare you)!"



Contents of the game:

- 1 Plastic Ms. Pac-Man Spinner
- 4 Plastic Ghost Pawns
- 1 Special Die
- 68 Plastic Dots
- 1 Gameboard
- 1 Label Sheet
- 1 Instruction Booklet

Rules of the game:

[Click to view the Instructions \(in PDF format\)](#)

Review:

After getting the board game assembled it is easy to see that unlike the Pac-Man board game there are only a few noticeable elements from the arcade classic of the same name. The traditional maze is gone in favor of a more four square approach allowing for four player game play. The yellow and white marbles that made the Pac-Man version come to life are also missing in favor of a bingo style method of pellet decor.

Ms. Pac-Man is present looking stunning as usual although in a very 2D kind of way. They chose to mold the Ms. Pac-Man piece in classic Pac-Man yellow, but with the inclusion of a spinner. The piece actually doubles as the spinning device used to move the piece. Unique? Maybe, but I already miss the chomping action. There is only one Ms. Pac-Man piece as the other players will play as the pesky ghosts.



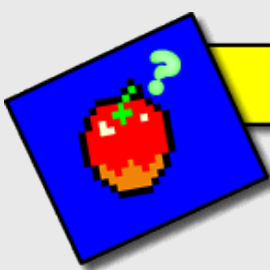


There are four ghost pieces included with the game also molded in yellow. The ghosts are two sided and have colored decals that coordinate with the four squares on the board game: red, blue, green and purple. Each side has its own decal depicting either a strong or weak side to the ghost. This is an element from the game which was nice to see transformed into a playable boardgame format.

Game play really does not follow the arcade game because of how the board is laid out. However, the use of only one Ms. Pac-Man on the board is much more realistic and still allows for alternate play. Players take turns spinning Ms. Pac-Man's spinner to see who plays as Ms. Pac-Man first. The player playing as Ms. Pac-Man uses the built in spinner to move the piece. The other players will roll the die to move their ghost. Movement on the board has the same rules as the arcade in that you cannot cross a divider line and cannot leave the board, with the exception of the exits. The object of the game is to collect as many pellets as possible from your colored quadrant of the board. If a Ms. Pac-Man encounters a ghost, the player who was controlling the attacking ghost now controls Ms. Pac-Man. There is one exception to this: if the ghost player had rolled an F2 (replaces 1 on the six sided die) he must turn over his weak side and if encountered in that state by Ms. Pac-Man he must return home. There are also four Power Squares on the board which also have the yellow bingo chips. Ms. Pac-Man can collect one of these chips to turn all of the ghosts to their weak side and they will remain that way for one more turn.

Although I think Milton Bradley may have missed the mark on capturing the thrill of the arcade game, I will admit that making the game too similar to their Pac-Man board game would also have been a mistake. That being said, I think they did a good job creating a completely different game with the familiar faces of the arcade classic. The game does have replay potential, but sadly not the same nostalgic appeal their Pac-Man title created.

Nothing's more fun than playing with Ms. Pac-Man! Wocka! Wocka!



# Food For Thought

by Catherine DeSpira



## Classic Arcade Competitive Gaming

As I hide in shadows, planning my siege, the din of approaching gunfire sends me running for the alleyway, down a passage and into a courtyard. *Tat-tat-tat-tat!* I run smack into my enemy opponent, firing like crazy. I step back, engage him, kill him, and run off into a building to wait for the inevitable hell and hilarity that is going to break loose when Jeff, my *Call of Duty* buddy, spawns and hunts me for friendly vengeance. I elude him for over ten minutes but I don't stand a chance when he finds me running along a rooftop. He takes me out quickly and cleanly with a single shot. We laugh across the distance, three thousand miles between us, two kid-like adults playing a very dark and brutal game...for fun.

*Repeat: for fun.*

Like many people reared on Classic Arcade Games, our advent into the modern console was an inevitable event. Sort of like a tricycle is to many who graduate to a bike and then a motorcycle. Not everyone, of course, learns to ride a motorcycle. But you'd be hard pressed to find anyone from our generation who didn't enjoy that summertime bond of riding your bikes in a pack with your friends. I did, and I still reminiscence those memories with a deep degree of warm reflection. All of us knew who was the fastest, the boldest and who could take the biggest jumps. But there was no competition between us or greater value based on comparison, even between sexes. We all rode BMX bikes. And that was enough.

Those rules of play do not transfer easily to Classic Competitive Gaming.

In the Classic Arcade World simply playing a Classic Game is not enough to bind together a group whose interests are based on far less than the common ground of similarities. Divisions are drawn, for whatever reasons, and forums are filled with the vitriol of many a disgruntled and over competitive player and his supporters. For many, competition in Classic Arcade Gaming has resulted in becoming something akin to a back alley fight, where the supporters of the two fighters gather on either side, cheering the battle on. For the most part groups like this are relatively small compared to the competitors who actually support each other. But like a scene in an old Western, where one man throws a punch and a brawl ensues, it's only a matter of time before the whole room jumps in.

This has me thinking lately why I have more fun playing a modern console rather than the Classics that crowd my home. The reason is, there is less pressure to perform and I can easily find someone else who doesn't care about stats, world records or forums. Of course, modern console games have their own brand of stat enthusiasts, players who stop short at nothing to keep their stats as high as possible. But with so many more players than ones playing the Classics, finding people who play for fun is as easy to find as shells on a beach.

Due to the underground success of *The King of Kong*, Classic Arcade Gaming Competitive Culture has become so ingrained in the hobby that achieving a world record is no longer something someone might shrug their shoulders at and say "maybe". It's something that is almost expected. It is, after all, the Star Players who everyone seems so curious about and whose exploits comprise over 65 percent of forum content, a form of second person self-promotion, if you will that continues to create controversy wherever it is found.

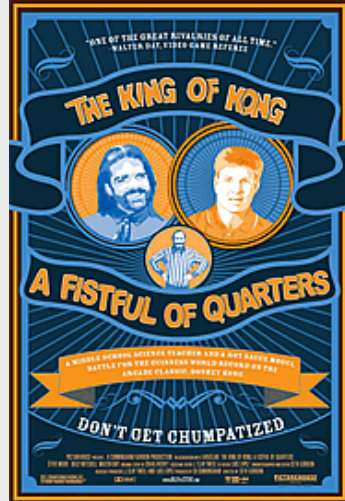
Before *The King of Kong*, I wasn't even aware of Billy Mitchell or Steve Weibe. Walter Day



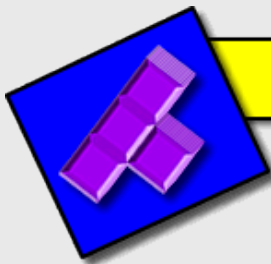
was as unknown to me as Ben Gold, Steve Sanders and Twin Galaxies were. Upon learning the history via the film, I was astonished to learn of the vast empire Walter Day created if only on myth alone. I think of the days prior to seeing the film as a sort of halcyon days, where a player's worth wasn't determined by killscreens or number of world records, but by his or her own ability to engage in team activity, playing *with* instead of *against* each other.

I am glad to see a resurgence of that spirit rejuvenated in the actions of *The International Video Game Hall of Fame*, who instituted Game Day as a way to unite gamers across the nation to play for fun and raise money for a cause that borrows from the heir of positivity rather than the benefactor of greed.

At the present, I am enjoying again one of the many Classics I have in my home, spending my time with *Paperboy* instead of *Call of Duty*. As I grip the handle bars, for a moment, I see those BMX kids of my childhood, tearing up the track, and am glad I remember what truly being in a group meant and what play was really about: friendship, acceptance without competition and good old fashioned fun.



King of Kong Movie Poster



# Gaming Tetrologies

by Jeff Wittenhagen



## The Mortal Kombat Series

Gaming Tetrologies covers 4 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 is the over the top, oh so gory Mortal Kombat series.



Mortal Kombat II (1993) - Super Nintendo/Sega Genesis Part 2 took everything that made the original popular and turned it up a notch. The fatalities are more brutal, the roster is boosted up, and the graphics are crisper. This was also uncensored on both the SNES and Genesis unlike its predecessor.



Mortal Kombat Trilogy (1996) - Sony Playstation/Sega Saturn/Nintendo 64

Attempting to refine the greatness that is Part 2 is no easy task but Mortal Kombat Trilogy does a pretty damn good job. Upping the roster size even further to 36 (31 on the Nintendo 64) and increasing the number of finishing maneuvers was expected by this point, this was essentially the third iteration of Mortal Kombat 3.



Mortal Kombat: Armageddon (2007) -Nintendo Wii

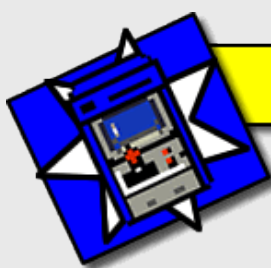
The best of what I like to call the Weapons Trilogy, the optimal Wii version of Armageddon boasts 63 characters to choose from! A majority of these characters were forgettable or added to try and be funny which in some cases, such as Mocap and Meat, they failed. The multiple martial arts disciplines and weapons, combined with a focus on combos, and a create-a-fatality feature might not feel like the classic Mortal Kombat games, but it had its own kind of charm.



Mortal Kombat (2011) -Xbox 360/Playstation 3

Quite possibly the best Mortal Kombat to come out period. This version takes the series back to its roots with the focus back on special moves and unique fatalities. Combine this with tons of modes including tag team matches and hordes of unlockables to keep you coming back and you have yourself a must own for fighting fans.





# MAME Reviews

by Mark Sabbatini



## Gee Bee

A pinball/breakout hybrid. Even today it seems like promising concept, at least as a mobile or Virtual Console game.

Not terribly an original pitch, perhaps, but few games these days are. A major company already invested in the concept, of course, since I'm not clever enough to think of it and writing about hypothetical arcade coin-ops would make this a very short column.

Most people almost certainly haven't heard of it since this month's column was motivated by a search for what an arcade game database classifies as its rarest games. With scores of one on a scale of 100, this is as rare as it gets.

But it's entirely possible that without this game – written reluctantly by a designer not into video games – the multi-billion industry spawning from a subsequent game known as Pac-Man might not exist.

Tōru Iwatani, a Tokyo designer with no formal training, got a job with his hometown company of Namco in 1977 at the age of 22, according to a bio at the Pac-Man Museum. Namco at the time was mostly making "projection-based amusement rides and light gun shooting galleries," so Iwatani "was initially disappointed that he would instead have to work on these strange, clinical 'video-games' instead."

"By way of compromise, Gee Bee (1978) was a heavily pinball-inspired paddle game, as were his next two designs (presumably developed by modifying Gee Bee), Bomb Bee and Cutie Q (both 1979)," the bio notes.

The bio also notes one other characteristic of Gee Bee that became an unmistakable element of the Pac-Man franchise.

"Iwatani wished to create a game that would target women and couples; his goal was for game centers to shed their somewhat sinister image for a lighter atmosphere, and he believed that the key to doing that was to get girls to come in."

Despite his soon-to-be legendary status, Gee Bee is ranked as the rarest of arcade games among collectors, according to The Killer List of Video Games. I'd have thought there'd have been some kind of retroactive clamor for all of his efforts after Pac-Man, but even today I'm not aware of any remakes or other attempts to revive his first game.

But a modern re-release might not be a runaway success since, truth be told, Gee Bee is a very simple game with some flaws. It's more fun as a brief diversion than something spent hours mastering and, as will be seen, it takes some time to make any progress.

The mechanics of the game are about as simple as it gets, with an analogue paddle and serve button being the only controls. One or two players start with three or five balls depending on the generosity of the operator (who also sets one other cool element to be revealed). The rules of the game are a little more complex, but not much since the virtual



pinball table is rather sparse. It's knocking out the bricks on three sides of the screen that takes a frustratingly long time.

Three-deep fields of bricks are at the top of the screen and along both sides. There's also two sets of five "pocket blocks" in narrow walled-off side alleys fairly low on the screen. The standard bricks are worth 20, 50 and 100 points based on their row, with 1,000-point bonus each time an entire row is knocked out. The pocket bricks, exceeding difficult to hit, are worth 100, 300, 500, 700 and 900 points.

The pinball table dominates the middle of the screen. Two bumpers toward the top are worth 10 points each. Centered immediately below them is a spinner which is affected by the ball's speed – it spins twice at slow, four times at medium and six times at fast. Each spin is worth 10 points unless all of the top blocks have been erased, upon which the spinner turns from grey to white and each rotation is worth 100 points.

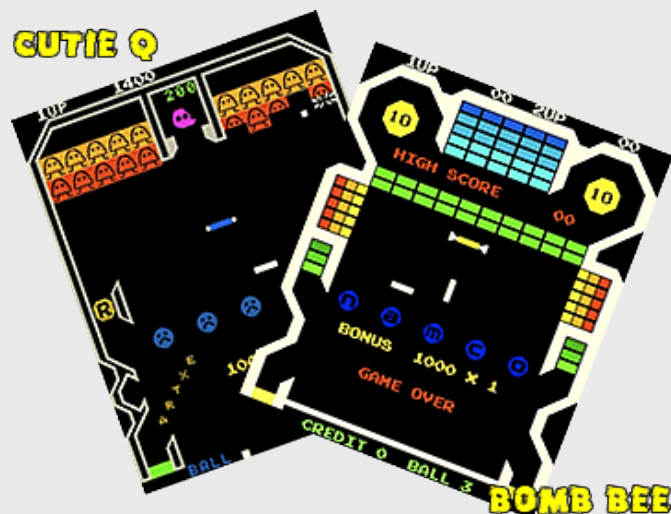
Just below the spinner is a simple inverse-T that merely acts as a ricochet. Finally, along the bottom third of the screen is a row of circular rollovers spelling NAMCO. Each changes from grey to white, or vice-versa, when the ball passes over it, with the bonus multiplier increasing to 2X and double points for all other scores awarded for the rest of the ball in play.

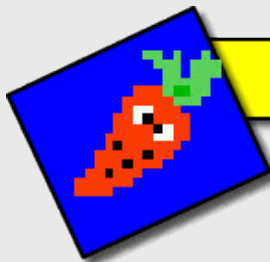
There's two playfield exits at the bottom right and left corners of the screen, but they're so narrow I almost never actually lost a ball through them. That's not entirely a good thing, as is about to be seen.

The game gets monotonous pretty fast, not to mention the ball speedup virtually ensures nobody except a breakout expert has a prayer of knocking out even one screen full of bricks. In fact, if you can knock out a full screen you ARE an expert who can play the game indefinitely (see next paragraph). But, like any good pinball game, it turns out there's a few surprises that can be earned and this may have provided some incentive to arcade players if they were detailed on the cabinet instructions (MAME players aren't as lucky unless they find a rare source of instructions such as the operator's manual, which exists as a PDF at the KLVG).

Knocking out all of the normal bricks on a side activate a ball saver for the exit alley on the same side. Eliminating all of the pocket blocks along a side lights up an "extra ball chance" message in the side exit below, bestowing said ball if the player can actually get the current one down that miserably narrow passage (if the safety gate is in place you get an actual extra ball, otherwise it's just a shoot-again opportunity). Finally, a huge and nearly unheard-of bonus for a video game is the free credit, achieved if all of the pocket blocks on both sides are eliminated or if the player exceeds a score selectable by the operator (40,000 to 150,000 points, or never).

Gee Bee is one of those games that's definitely worth a spin for the historical value, but those intrigued by the concept while wanting something more playable will find the sequels Bomb Bee and Cutie Q capable of absorbing a fair amount of time. Both offer more complex playfields and a lower difficulty level than Gee Bee without losing the original's simple mechanics. Cutie Q also has the distinction of being released in official and unofficial home versions. Pinball Spectacular for the VIC-20 and Commodore 64 are almost exact unauthorized clones, while Namco includes Gee Bee as part of Namco Museum 2 for the PlayStation (hidden and non-functional on U.S. discs) and Namco Museum Remix for the Wii.





# Mutated Output

by Mark Sabbatini



## The Many Faces Of The BBC Micro - Part 3

"It's better than the arcade version" is one of the most inane fanboy rants I see in reviews of home conversions for computers and consoles of the eight-bit era.

It happens more often than you'd think, although something usually suggests the writer didn't like or didn't know much about the coin-op version. Or they were so obsessed with the idea their machine could do no wrong they literally turned a blind eye to its shortcomings (a common idiocy is Sinclair ZX Spectrum idols saying their version was better despite monochrome or oddly colored graphics). Then there's folks who didn't like the features and/or challenge of the original.

"The (BBC Micro) conversions are WAY better than the original arcade versions!" one person wrote in an online fan forum. "I'm pretty sure it isn't nostalgia – they are just more playable ... the originals were made for arcade with difficulty levels to keep playing times down."

I've been ranting in previous columns about how BBC Micro programmers didn't seem to have much exposure to hit arcade games of the early 1980s since the quality of their conversions is far below the machine's potential. The forum comment, by no means atypical, suggests plenty of Beeb gamers weren't much more experienced or demanding. They did dominate some killer games developed in the U.K. such as Elite and Lords of Midnight – and don't even get me started on their average superiority at tinkering with their computers – so I'm not down on them for their lame-ass Robotron skills (their idea of breakfast, on the other hand...).

Another oft-mentioned quirk is the pliable notion of copyright many programmers and companies had, which corporate heavies in the U.S. like Atari paid attention to with glaring inconsistency. The cross-pollination of glitchy unofficial ports bearing coin-op names and unofficial versions later getting the corporate gurus' blessing has made figuring out which program should be the "official" BBC version a challenge at times in this series evaluating how the machine's arcade games fare against those in the Many Faces Of contests from previous RTM editions.

So this month's column, to throw off both the confusion and inferiority of certain ports, is casting the quest for "official" versions to the wind and going strictly with the best version of a given title. Yes, it's easy to argue this isn't fair, but there still aren't many medal winners in this month's batch and if you're going to be trying out games on the machine via an emulator or otherwise you might as well get maximum entertainment value for your time.

My standard disclaimer for this series: I consider the official MFO scores flawed in that there's far too little difference between the worst and best games. Instead of a one to 10 scale, scores are more like academic grades where six is a "D-minus" and anything lower is an outright failure. My scores are assigned accordingly, with a separate letter grade for how fun the game is compared to other BBC Micro titles.

Centipede (a.k.a. Bug Blaster): Have Not (39); [D+](#)

I won't call the numerous Beeb versions of Centipede the most collectively inept effort among arcade titles, but they'd definitely be in the running if not for this unofficial port. It was released by the relatively little-known software company Alligata, which had a few decent surprises in a mostly mediocre catalogue. But Bug Blaster isn't winning any medals in a crowded MFO competition where nearly all of the participants bring a lot of game. This score puts in into a three-way tie for last place along with the Intellivision and Apple II, both of which were deemed fun to play but with significant flaws. That's about the right way to describe Bug Blaster since it offers a passable Centipede experience for those with no machine but a Beeb to play it on. The amazing and appalling thing is Bug Blaster was one of the earliest clones released and numerous subsequent efforts, some written years later, couldn't surpass replicating what's not a terribly complex arcade game. The Atari 2600 version, for instance, is a personal sentimental all-time favorite due to the substance-over-style decision to throw graphics over the side to preserve authentic gameplay). Bug Blaster deserves the 2600's score for Gameplay (7) since the former can handle more objects on the screen at once, but the playfield is smaller (it's probably tied with the Vic-20 for the smallest, in fact). There's also some minor deviations, including scorpions showing up beginning with the first wave. Addictiveness (9) is solid and, since only eights and nines are awarded in the official MFO rankings, it's fair to compare them with some other versions with the same score. Graphics (7) are OK at the screenshot level, but not as smooth as I'd like. Sound (7) is plentiful and close enough in concept to cue players into what's happening, but often in annoying timbre. Controls (9) do everything they need to, even with a keyboard, but anything less than a trackball obviously can't earn a perfect score.



Joust (a.k.a. Skirmish): Has Not (43); [B](#)

This started out with the official title and got changed due to a dispute with Atarisoft, who released an official version appearing virtually the same at a glance, but is notably inferior in strange and annoying ways. So Skirmish gets the nod here, especially the "official" version would also finish in the same slot (score of 41). The official MFO medals for Joust are gold for the Atari 7800 (47), silver for Atari 8-bit (46) and bronze for Atari 5200 (44), followed by the Atari 2600 (40). I'll note for the record I consider the Atari 2600 score much too high, but agree it's better than the massively flawed versions for the remaining contenders. I've played versions on additional machines not in the MFO rankings, none of which would get medals, but the best of which are close to Skirmish in overall quality. The bottom line of all this preamble is to establish Skirmish as clearly above average but, like all the Has Nots, it doesn't convincingly replicate the full arcade experience like the winning Atari trio. The Graphics (8) are a good example: more colorful than the Atari 5200's that gets the same score, but more pixelated and not as precise in size. Sound (7) is a stumbling block for every non-medal version and such is the case with Skirmish – other than the wing flaps it's a sparse set of typical '80s computer blips – but it surely is at least equal to the Atari 2600's with the same score. Gameplay (8) is solid with all the arcade elements correctly replicated, but there's minor deviations of various things such as gravity and enemy AI (very common in all home versions, so not a big penalty). It's certainly far above the Atari 2600 (7) while clearly short of the Atari 5200 (9), hence the default score. Addictiveness (9) is very good, but can't match the top-ranking versions since it's lacking the multiple skill levels they offer. Controls (10) are dead-on





using joysticks or the keyboard, with the latter offering flexibility for when two players are trying to crowd around it at the same time. The official AtariSoft version gets dinged one point for gameplay due to some strange shortcomings, including the absence of text for special waves (they all advance without pause, for which I'd dock more than a point except it's still superior to the Atari 2600). Another point is lost for the controls, which feature some awkward placements for those using the keyboard (the up/down arrows controlling left/right movements?).

Frogger (a.k.a. Hopper): Have Not (38); [D-](#)

This is one of the best conversions of an arcade game across all computer/console platforms as a whole. Even the official version for the Sinclair ZX81 (the only officially licensed arcade title for the machine) is a blast despite being in black-and-white and soundless, with the action split into two screens because the computer's graphics resolution is so low. So what the *hell* is the matter with the programmers who wrote various versions for the Beeb, a machine whose specs suggest a perfect arcade clone or something close to it is possible? Some versions have the official title, although most seem to be from fledgling developers, but Hopper gets the nod as the least terrible translation. Getting the worst thing out of the way first is Gameplay (6), which I hesitate to equate with the bottom-ranking



Odyssey 2 except there's one insurmountable problem: the timer is so short you'll run out if you do more than blink, especially for those slots on the left side of the screen. That means no time to scan the screen to get a sense of the flow of things or plan moves, which is made more problematic by a high difficulty level from the start. One example of many is the second-to-last road lane – which in the arcade starts with one slow car and eventually becomes the high-speed racers' favorite – begins with two high-speed cars. Another is the lady frog is depicted as a sword here (which I'd put in the graphics category except it may be an intentional minor "unofficial" deviation or really badly drawn). The road in general seems packed compared to most versions and the only offsetting factor is it's more lenient than the overly sensitive collision detection of the arcade game (if departure from the standard can be called a good thing). All this obviously kills the Addictiveness (6) which again ties with the O2 for the lowest score. The Graphics (8) aren't very good given the Beeb's hardware, but the score reflects what some competitors who don't exactly shine in this category received. Sound (8) is important for this game and the Beeb holds its own with somewhat beepish music (I find it ironic the Brit programmer(s) made "Yankee Doodle Dandy" the first song). Controls (10) are fine, but wouldn't get a perfect score if competitors like the TI-99 ("some delay that will take some getting used to") didn't as well. As for the Beeb's "official title" Frogger games, Superior Software seems to be the biggest developer with one and it would get docked in nearly every category. Bad as Hopper's gameplay is, "Frogger" has serious control response and/or frog speed issues (to the point I couldn't figure out which was the culprit) and getting past a single lane of overcrowded traffic requires almost a pixel-perfect squeeze. Almost everything else would be downgraded as well. It's bizarre to think my ZX81 version tops both of these without resorting to a grade curve, especially since that's another Brit machine, but at least there's some pleasure seeing the littlest guy come away with a win.

Mr. Do (a.k.a. Mr. EE): Silver (44, tie with Atari 8 bit); [A-](#)

Sweet! I'm a big fan of the arcade game and this, in my opinion, is the best conversion on any eight-bit home machine based purely on gameplay. There are two reasons it doesn't equal or surpass the Commodore 64's score of 45 for the Gold: 1) Mr. EE lacks two-player and some other options offered by the competition, and 2) the graphics are more pixelated, which is an unnecessary shame since it's capable of better graphics than the C64 and Atari. Aside from Mr. EE's somewhat more horizontal screen ratio, virtually everything makes a perfect transition from the arcade. Gameplay (10) is missing nothing, with the screen layouts from the arcade and every character behavior I can detect. I didn't go so far as to do thing like use a stopwatch to time





the increasingly long "recharge" time for your power ball, but when you're at that level of scrutiny it says nothing but good things. Sound (10) is so accurate you could probably fool a decent percentage of Mr. Do fans in a blind listening test, which makes me (again) question why so many Beeb programmers didn't take better advantage of the fantastic audio chip inside the machine. Controls (9) are also flawless, but I have to score it a notch below the C64 and Atari since they offer an intriguing option where left-handers can rotate the joystick 90 degrees for more natural-feeling control. Graphics (7) are, as I mentioned, are where Mr. EE struggles. They're more colorful and accurate than the Colecovision's, which received the same score, but I can't justify nudging it up a point since they're obviously short of the Atari which received an eight. Addictiveness (8) gets dinged a point from the C64 and Atari since there's no options other than "press start to play," although a pause feature is offered. Mr. EE is programmed by Adrian Stephens, author of the "nice screenshot, but horrible gameplay" Donkey Kong clone Killer Gorilla, and I was stunned by his unauthorized port of Mr. Do the first time I played it. But the reason for the difference in quality became clearer after reading a 2009 interview with him at The BBC Games Archive, where he says he "wrote Killer Gorilla after I bought a magazine that had screenshots of the four levels of Donkey Kong. It looked like an interesting challenge to do something similar, but I had no commercial intentions at the time." Mr. EE, on the other hand, was written "because I thought Mr. Do was the most interesting and clever game design I had ever seen," Stephens said. "I played it every night in the arcades in Felixstowe during the summer college break."

A one-paragraph side note, since we're dealing with versions left out of the official MFO (and copyright quirks): Official MFO author Alan Hewston notes the TRS-80 Color Computer version (an unofficial port titled Mr. Dig) is described by CoCo owners as "one of the best games on that system up to that point in time." I'd question that at face value, but one aspect of the program reduces it to a level of PURE EVIL that is shared with a handful of the most despicable software releases of all time. The copyright protection examines the disc in the first floppy drive and, unless it gets a perfect result, destroys the disc in that drive and leaves a screenful of "BUY YOUR OWN!!!" messages in its wake. So if you're doing your taxes or master's thesis with a program in the first drive and try to take a break by playing Mr. Dig using the second drive, say bye-bye to your potentially life-altering work and high-priced application software. Nothing short of a lawsuit that forced the company out of business because of the damages owed to affected users would have resolved that travesty to my satisfaction. I've mentioned this before and probably will again anytime Mr. Do is part of an article to warn away anyone thinking of trying Mr. Dig for comparative or other reasons.

Q\*bert (a.k.a. Bouncer): Have Not (36); [D+](#)

(Note: Score reflects a tweak of the official rankings due to a major factual flaw. The Atari 8 bit and 2600 both received a score of 34, with the Bronze awarded only to the 2600 for some reason. But Alan's 8 bit score is due to Atari 5200's horrible controls and he writes "without having the cart, I am assuming that the superior Atari 8-bit (having no controller problems) would have easily outscored the 2600 for the Bronze, but not too much higher." Having tested the Atari 800 version, for this review I'm arbitrarily giving it score of 38 and the Bronze, two points below the Colecovision which earned the Silver with a score of 40.)



The Beeb has a game named Qbert from the major company Superior Software, but after trying to play it I was dumbfounded at the thought of it possibly being an official release. I actually downloaded the disk file from a few different Web sites to make sure it really was Superior's game and not some hack trying to make a quick buck by putting a Qbert/Superior label on the discs containing the abysmal piece of crap. A quick bit of Google research suggests there is no official release, but most of the me-too imitators aren't a whole lot better. Bouncer is the best of the lot, simply because it doesn't suffer from blatant shortcomings such as the "blinking" of objects from place to place that Atari 2600 owners may remember with that version. Gameplay (8) is more accurate than many versions with bad guys such as Ugh and Wrong Way included, but not as crisp and some of those details are inexactly implemented (those side-hugging characters first show up in wave three as they ought to, but so do the red balls and such minor deviations occur throughout). Graphics (8) also get a pass as decent although, as with other games mentioned here, the screenshots are more than the pixelated and somewhat

jerkier appearance they have in motion. Sound (6) lacks the charming whimsy of the coin-op and borders on the edge of annoying. Controls (7) are pretty good, but I wonder if some of that less-than-precise gameplay is due to minor lags. Addictiveness (7) essentially reflects a sum of the parts, with enough replay value to keep addicts busy for a while when they need a fix, but not enough to hold the attention of casual or more demanding gamers.

Zaxxon (a.k.a. Fortress): Have Not (32); [D](#)

Unlike Frogger, this is an arcade game programmers struggled to convert to home machines. The fact the TRS-80 Color Computer version would have been a medal contender had it been officially considered (several impartial magazine reviewers called it superior to the silver-medal Colecovision's) is adequate proof of that. The Beeb never got an official Zaxxon, but Fortress is talked up quite a bit by fans and the screenshots are decent so I gave it a spin (there are, to my knowledge, no other unofficial versions). To make a long story short, if not for the overall weakness of the field I'm not even sure I'd bother to rate this as a contender. But considering the horribly flawed 2D Atari 2600 version is officially ranked fourth with a score of 31, Fortress meets the obviously dubious entry requirements. First on the list of all-around weaknesses is Gameplay (6, tied for last with several other versions), which is far too hard and fast. Your fuel supply depletes in a matter of seconds and, while plenty of tanks are available to shoot in the fortress, this massively affects strategy. Also, there's no height bar, adding guesswork to an already too-tough challenge. There's a number of other minor to modest flaws, which will go unmentioned since this game deserves only a limited number of words and your reading time. It's tough to feel much Addictiveness (5) for a game when there's little hope of making it through even the first level. Graphics (6) are a hard call. Much of the playfield looks OK despite a little flicker, but there's occasional oddities in the layout that seem like laziness and/or bugs, and the programmer's ego-obsessive "Mat" on every sidewall panel is grating (I'm not giving him the gratification of having his full name printed here). The generic blips and beeps used for Sound (6) probably aren't equal to the Atari 800 which got the same score, but they still top the Atari 2600 which received a five. Controls (9) generally work well and the keyboard option is configurable, but there's still the occasional quirk/bug. If you move all the way up and then right to clear the opening gap, for instance, you'll crash because apparently your ship isn't high enough. An up-right-up sequence is necessary which, while possibly explainable as a 3D thing, feels disorienting. I never realized how spoiled I was to spend my early teen years playing Steve Bjork's CoCo version of Zaxxon, thinking it was pretty tame compared to the arcade experience, but I'm increasingly appreciative of how even CoCo haters generally rave about his effort.





# Commodore Du Jour

by Marc Douglas



## Bandits

Welcome back to another month of Commodore Du Jour (Thanks for the column name Bryan!) I was going to jump into my personal favorite Commodore 64 RPG, but the end of the school year put the kibosh on that so I thought I would go and revisit one of my favorite games that I played the hell out of back when I was about 14 years old. The designer of this game is, Tony Ngo.

The game I went back to was, "Bandits" by Sirius software from 1983 and though not considered a classic, it was a shooter that held my interest for many hours back in the mid 1980s.

The game borrows from many others from that period. You'll see elements of Activision's, Spider Fighter, Mattel's Astrosmash and Space Armada, Atari's Centipede and a helping of Bally's Galaga. This is not to say that you can't find any originality in the game, you'll just have to dig beneath the surface.

After loading, you are treated to a nice animated sequence showing your ship blasting off into space and getting ready for battle. A press of the fire button gets you into the game proper. Your ship is on the bottom of the screen right above your shield display. To your left you will see the alien mothership that spawns the attacking aliens. To your right, the five pieces of fruit that you have sworn to protect with your life. A nice touch is the starfield that scrolls horizontally behind you as you play. This background becomes a game play element as you can easily mistake an enemy bomb for a star and get caught with your shield down which as we all know is never a good thing.

After hitting the joystick button to start the game, you will see the mothership spawn the current levels' aliens and then, they start to attack. At first they go in formations of three, dropping bombs on you while they make their way to the fruit. One of the early things you'll notice is that your ship moves very slow. It makes dealing with the very speedy aliens a challenge but not a game breaker. You can fire three shots at a time which feels fair. Fortunately though the aliens are fast, they don't carpet-bomb like Nixon in the '70s. They do have a knack of trapping you in the corners which is always dangerous.

But you do have a shield (activated by pushing up on the stick) with a more than ample power supply. You can see how much power you have left by looking at the bar at the bottom of the screen. If you successfully clear a level, you get a partial recharge, usually one section of the bar.

As the game progresses, the fruit will change from grapes to (if you make it far enough in the game) floppy disks (don't worry they're 5 1/4, very easy on the teeth). Well if the fruit changes, the enemies must as well. There are six enemy types (Phalanx I & II, Menace, Torrent, Carrier, and finally, the Nuisant). The Phalanx are your Galaga type enemies. The Carrier will break into Nuisants when shot which then bounce towards you (using the shield wipes them out quickly). The Menace is a Kamikaze type enemy that rushes down the screen towards you dropping bombs but never actually coming into contact with your ship. It also has the knack of avoiding your shots but can be caught with a well placed burst. Finally, the Torrents come at you in a Centipede-like formation. These little cuties are holding larger bombs that if dropped have a large blast radius that is deadly to you if you come into its range.



Separately, these nasties don't pose much trouble, but when you get to the later waves where they can all attack you at once, the action gets intense and you can rest assured that you'll lose a few lives along with some fruit.

So, what do I think? Well, if you play the Atari or Apple versions you'll see differences. The Apple controls are very stiff, your ship almost stutters. The Atari has a nicer opening sequence and better controls but is similar to the Apple in terms of sounds.

The Commodore version isn't quite sure what it wants to do. The silent opening sequence is disappointing, as are the very sluggish controls. Your ship moves very slow (the Apple and Atari ships move faster), but its missile graphics are nicer than both the Apple and Atari. The graphics are a bit more refined on the 64 with slightly larger aliens. The in-game sound effects are far improved and not as grating from the earlier versions and you even get a little music at the end of each wave as your fruit is tallied. What really stands out though is that there is no slowdown when the screen is filled to the brim with nasties.



In the end, if you were just picking up this game today you would probably get bored with it rather quickly, but we retro-gamers are different and I recommend that you give it a shot (bad pun intended) to see what kept us glued to our TV screens almost 30 years ago. I can't recommend the Apple version at all and this time, the Commodore version just squeaks by the Atari version due to the gameplay being better even with the ship problems.

I'm going to start ending the column with a ranking score from 1 - 10 with 10 being the best.

**SCORE,** I give Bandits a 7.5 with the childhood memory curve. Without, it would rate a 6.

Thank you for reading this month's Commodore Du Jour.

Next month, the RPG I promised this month.

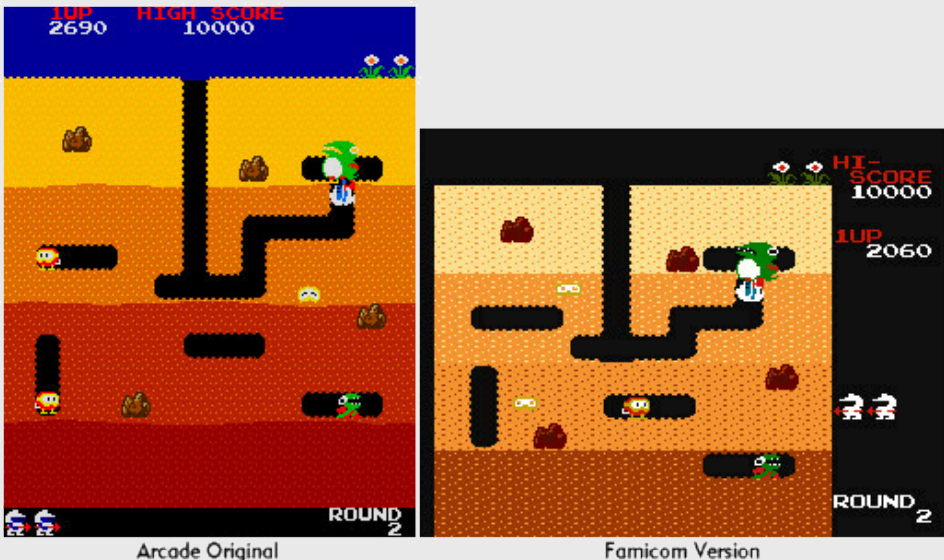




## Dig-Dug

In the early days of the Famicom, before third party developers were making original titles for the hardware, it was common to see already established properties migrate to the home system. Namco was easily one of the hottest arcade developers of the era with colorful, well designed, and addictive arcade titles that continue to be popular to this day. After starting out on the Famicom with Galaxian, they would release ports of Pac-Man, Xevious, Mappy, Galaga, and Dig Dug. While the Famicom versions of some of these games would later be released on the NES, many never made the jump, Dig Dug being one of these titles. While it makes sense that older or more obscure games like Warpman or Battle City (which was a sequel to 1980's Tank Battalion) wouldn't be good import candidates on the NES, Dig Dug was almost always regarded as one of the classics of Namco's catalog.

Dig Dug drops the player into the mining suit of the titular character with the objective to rid the underground of subterranean monsters. These monsters come in the form of two enemies which would later become instantly recognizable as mascots of Namco - Pooka and Frygar. Pookas resemble a large red orb wearing a pair of yellow diving goggles, with a small white tail. Their only offense is that of touching Dig Dug, which causes instant death. Frygars on the other hand are much more dangerous, being green dragons by design, they can breathe fire. Unsurprisingly Dig Dug isn't very resilient to a Frygar's fiery breath, and as with a Pooka, their touch is deadly. Dig Dug is far from defenseless against the dangers below the surface however. In addition to being able to tunnel anywhere underground, he can harpoon Pookas and Frygars with a special air pump. Once the pump is attached, Dig Dug pumps the monster full of air until they explode. The air pump also works as a defense mechanism; if a monster is only partially inflated it will become stunned and unable to hurt Dig Dug until deflating completely. This tactic can be used to thin out a herd of monsters in hot pursuit. Additionally large rocks are littered about underground and can be mined free by digging directly beneath them. A falling rock crushes anything in its path until bottoming out at the end of the shaft it's falling down, including our hero if he doesn't get out of the way fast enough. Crushing multiple monsters with a falling rock is the key to racking up big scores. After only a single monster remains on a stage, it will attempt to flee the screen to the upper left. After it is either defeated or allowed to run away the stage ends and the next one begins. As the stages roll on, the number of monsters on each stage will increase, as will their speed. Additionally the game likes to stack more and more monsters atop one another to start, making it far easier to become overwhelmed.



A simple concept with simple, yet colorful graphics seems like a perfect fit for the early days of the Famicom and that's



exactly what we get here. If you imagine taking the arcade display of Dig Dug and smashing it down to fit on the horizontal orientation of a television screen, that's basically Famicom Dig Dug. Even with the aspect change, nearly the entire game board makes the translation over. Vertically the game area is four rows smaller on the Famicom and is less wide by two columns. This means the game board is a little tighter which makes the Famicom version a little more difficult in terms of corralling monsters. Even with this concession, the starting layout of each stage is still represented within reason, everything is just a little closer together. Graphically the game is a decent recreation for this era of the Famicom. Dig Dug, Pooka and Frygar look good with slightly lower resolution and color differences compared to their arcade counterparts. The use of flowers on the surface as stage markers is carried over as a nice touch but Dig Dug's adventures on the Famicom must take place at night since the blue skies of the arcade version are absent. Possibly this was deemed too difficult during the programming of the Famicom version, instead opting to just keep the entire background black throughout, or Namco didn't think anyone would care.

Audio is a very nice recreation of all the tunes and effects of the arcade. As with the original, music only plays when Dig Dug is walking and the tempo changes based upon the phase of the game. Falling rocks make the same cartoony squish sound once they reach the end of their descent and the sound of Dig Dug's air pump is right on key as well. Scoring seems to be in line with the arcade version, giving more points for riskier monster elimination. As with the arcade, dropping a pair of rocks will cause a bonus item to appear at the center of the screen. Control is very fast with next to no graphic flicker or stutter, lending itself to a very arcade-like experience. The only problem really comes from the smaller overall size of the playfield, which can make the game very unforgiving after the first couple boards. Dig Dug was always a fairly fast paced game but having less space to maneuver makes it more difficult to set up multiple monsters under a falling rock. The dirt colors also get a little obnoxious as they change during each series of stages.

Do I think Dig Dug could have made it as an NES game? Absolutely, since Galaga sold relatively well and there were least three different yet identical releases of Pac-Man on the NES (Tengen licensed, Tengen unlicensed, Namco licensed). It's a shame that Namco or another publisher didn't pick up the rights for an NES release of the game. Galaxian may have been old hat by the time the NES was becoming an American gaming powerhouse but Dig Dug was still a common sight in most arcades. Bandai actually would publish the sequel, Dig Dug II, on the NES one year after its 1985 arcade release. However, that will have to wait until next month. If you're a fan of Dig Dug, the Famicom version is worth checking out as it's an extremely competent port of an arcade classic that would continue to have sequels and spin-offs for years to come. Even the character Dig Dug himself would later take on a life of his own, his official name later revealed to be Taizo Hori, "Hero of the Dig Dug Incident." Taizo would eventually be romantically linked to the main character of Baraduke, Masuyo "Kissy" Toby, later being married and divorced. One of their children, Susumu Hori, would become the main character of the spin-off Mr. Driller series.

Next month NES'cade will follow Taizo Hori's exploits as he adds "Hero of the South Island Incident" to his long list of achievements, with the NES port of Dig Dug II.

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

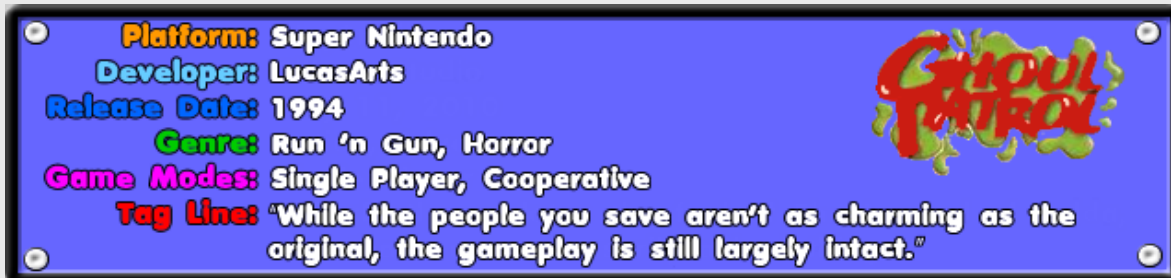


# The Pixelated Mage

by Jeff Wittenhagen



## Ghoul Patrol



### Synopsis

Ghoul Patrol is the virtually unknown followup to Zombies Ate My Neighbors. Ghoul Patrol, just like its predecessor, is a fun game, but it follows so closely to the original that it comes off as just more of the same. This lack of originality isn't necessarily a bad thing, as Zombies Ate My Neighbors has amazing gameplay.

The plot in Ghoul Patrol is a bit weak but at least it's there. Zeke and Julie, the original protagonists from Zombies Ate My Neighbors, decide to recite an incantation from the Necronomicon. Doing this unleashes hellish beasts upon the world at various points in time. Now it's up to Zeke and Julie to fix their folly by traveling through time to stop the monsters before they destroy everything in existence. There are four worlds in Ghoul Patrol each with four levels followed by a final two level battle in Hell.



### Gameplay

The gameplay in Ghoul Patrol is largely unchanged from Zombies Ate My Neighbors. You basically save ten people throughout each level while fighting off monsters and collecting weapons, power-ups and items. Instead of getting a radar like the in original game, Ghoul Patrol only provides you with "Help" bubbles that you will see on screen. You must follow these bubbles in order to find the people in the level. This brings in a bit of strategy as figuring out exactly where someone is can be tricky with walls and puzzles. Once you find all ten people in the level, the exit will pop up with a bubble which also must be hunted down.

The people in Ghoul Patrol behave just like they did in Zombies Ate My Neighbors, by just waiting around for you to touch them (a.k.a. save them). The problem is that these people aren't as funny as the ones from the previous game. This kind of detracts from the overall feel and makes Ghoul Patrol less charming. The weapons are also scaled back in

both quantity and quality. Gone are the hilarious weed whackers and tomatoes and in their places is a small amount of projectile weaponry. The crossbow has unlimited ammunition, but some of the time it feels like the gun from Fester's Quest seemingly doing no damage to the hordes of enemies in front of you. The monsters seem more standard than in the original with typical eyeballs and giant snails replacing the Chucky Dolls and hedge-maze Jason/Leatherface killers.

## Graphics and Sound

Ghoul Patrol is a graphically dark game which gives it a somber tone. The colors really give it a great atmosphere and make it seem like you are in a horror movie. Zeke and Julie have real clothes on this time around and it is a noticeable upgrade for them. The character sprites are rendered nicely and the overall quality is very solid. Pretty much everything in Ghoul Patrol has a nice feel to it.

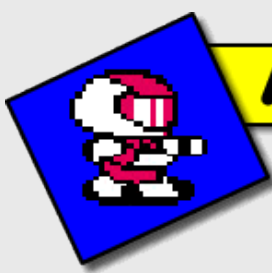
The sound effects are nice and suitable with some familiar explosions from *Zombies Ate My Neighbors*. The music in Ghoul Patrol adds so much to the atmosphere that if you mute the game, it feels completely different. More great scores in gaming is never a bad thing.

## Why You Should Play It

While Ghoul Patrol doesn't have the same comical gruesomeness factor to it as *Zombies Ate My Neighbors*, don't let that deter you from giving it a go. Ghoul Patrol is what you would expect a game sequel to be as it does change the formula a bit. It isn't so much of a step forward, as it is a step sideways. The difficulty in Ghoul Patrol can get a bit ludicrous but it's nothing you can't overcome through experience. In order to play Ghoul Patrol on its proper system you are going to need to shell out at least \$30 online, but the price is well worth it if you are a huge fan of the original.

Rating = 3 Pixelated Ghost Mages out of 5





# A Pixelated 21st Century

by Paul Zimmerman



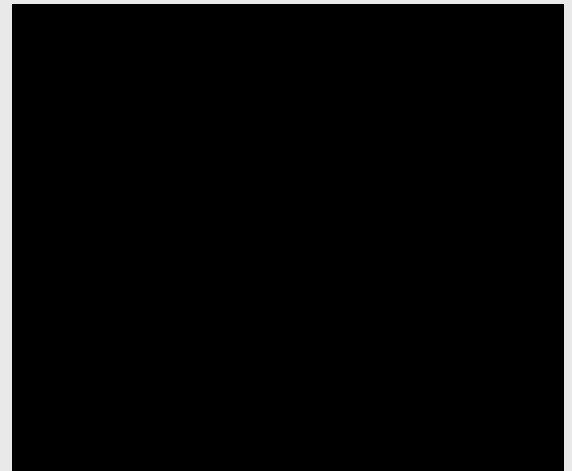
I want to start out this month's Pixelated by saying that soon after this is published my dear friend, Catherine DeSpira, will still be in Washington's Desert. I hope Catherine is having fun and is safe. I know she is having a great time in nature, away from the modern world. It is good to escape video games and everything and to be with nature.

Well, June was a great month to be a Pixelated fan. Lots of board games and puzzle games, but also the eShop was added to the new 3DS and it will have its own Virtual Console games, including games for the Game Boy and Game Boy Color handhelds. Some of the games will now also be included in Pixelated. Here are some of the retroware highlights for the month of June:



Ubongo (Video to the right)

A board game that is very popular in Europe. Collect gems of the same color, up to four players. This was also released for DsiWare.



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

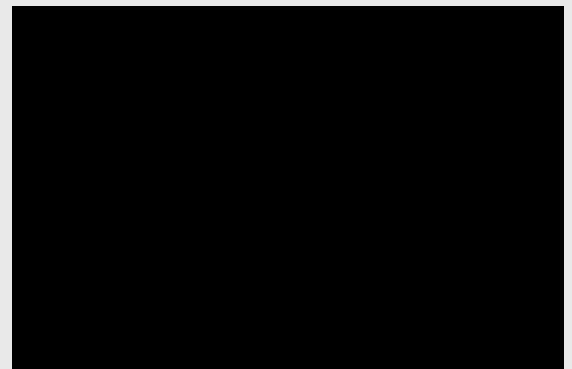
A shooting-puzzle game; shoot the same color orbs.

Dreamwalker (Video to the right)

An action-puzzle game; make it through the maze with 40 levels.

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

A match 3 colors puzzle game. Remove the coins before time runs out.



Pro Jumper Guilty Gear Tangent ([Click here to see a video of the game](#))

Not a puzzle game or a board game! Chimaki from Guilty Gear 2 stars in this platformer. Use your towel to attack. Collect apples. Reach the hot spring at the end of each stage. This game looks great!

Stratego Next Edition ([Click here to see a video of the game](#))

Based on the classic board game; Stratego on the go!



*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.*

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

A block-breaking game which is more similar to Breakout than Arkanoid. There are no power-ups and special blocks. There are 24 stages.

Donkey Kong (Gameboy) ([Click here to see a video of the game](#))

The true sequel to the arcade classic, Donkey Kong. Mario must rescue Pauline from Donkey Kong. Grab the keys to unlock doors; 10 stages with over 100 levels. Donkey Kong is a GameBoy classic.

Final Fantasy 3 (SNES) (Video to the right)

The greatest Final Fantasy game of all time. The greatest Super Nintendo game of all time. The greatest RPG of all time. Buy it now!

Kirby's Dream Land (Gameboy) ([Click here to see a video of the game](#))

The very first Kirby game. In this one when you suck enemies you do not gain their power; but, still a classic.

Mega Man 5 (NES) ([Click here to see a video of the game](#))

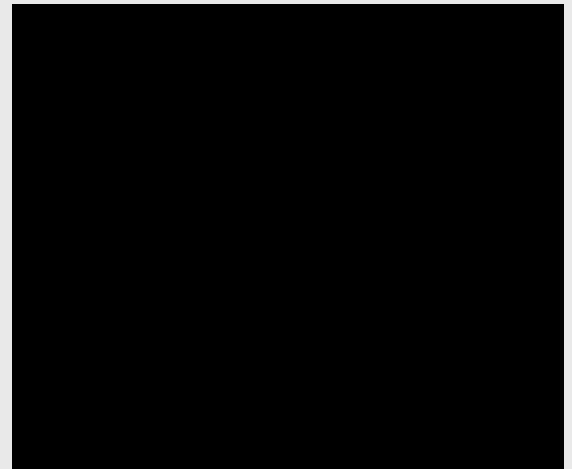
Defeat Protoman's 8 evil robots then defeat Protoman and rescue Dr. Light. Brother against brother; 13 stages. This game is great!

Radar Mission (Gameboy) ([Click here to see a video of the game](#))

Sink your enemy before your enemy sinks you. A fun little game.

Super Mario Land (Gameboy) ([Click here to see a video of the game](#))

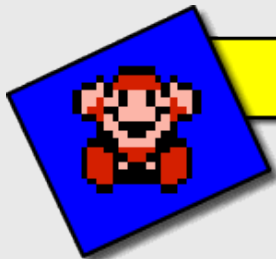
Mario must rescue Princess Daisy. Ancient ruins, giant crabs and aliens!? This is a different Mario game. Short and sweet.





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



Well, I hope you all have a great 4th of July holiday and I also hope you all come back next month for more fun-filled reading. One thing to look forward to is that David Schroeder mentioned he could do an article for RTM or allow us to interview him at some point. That would be fun, since it's always interesting to hear it from the programmers themselves on what the gaming industry was like back then. Also, if any of you guys do indeed take up a job with David, be sure to let me know how it goes.

Thanks for tuning in to RTM this month, see you guys in August!