Printing Help

Retrogaming Times Monthly #88 - September 2011

- Press Fire To Begin
- Retrogaming News

- Apple II Incider - Steve Jobs: The End Of An Era
- Retro Collecting 101 - Hunting Treasures In A Foreign Land
- Gaming Tetralogies - The Legend Of Zelda Series

- Standalone Spew - The Battle For Football's Second-Best
- MAME Reviews - Radar Scope
- Commodore Du Jour - Heart Of Africa
- NES'cade - Dig-Dug II
- Dual Perspective - Double Dragon III: The Sacred Stones
- The Pixelated Mage - Jet Grind Radio
- A Pixelated 21st Century

- Game Over

Consider this our End of Summer issue. I hope that everyone out there had a good summer and was able to keep cool while reading RTM. I have been keeping my ear close to the latest events in the classic gaming community, but don't have much news to report. The only thing that comes to mind is that an ad for Red Sea Crossing for the Atari 2600 has been found, which is a title that was heard about, but no proof was ever seen that it was coming out for the system. It's a Christian-themed game and has been causing quite a stir over on the AtariAge forums, as people are always interested in hearing more about games that are a mystery.

I finally will have time this month to do more on the back issues that I've been putting off all summer. After getting some e-mails from people asking where they are, I figured I better get back to work on putting those on-line right away. In the meantime, I'd love to hear your comments as to what you would like to read more of in future issues of this magazine, since we now have a number of new people that are looking for good ideas on what to write about. Thanks for stopping by and I hope you have a great fall!

Retrogaming News

Vintage Computer Festival Midwest 6.0

Saturday September 24 8:00am - Sunday September 25 4:00pm (Lombard, IL)

VCFMW 6.0 is a free and open exposition of classic computing hardware, software and memorabilia. Presented this year in conjunction with the sixth annual Chicagoland Commodore Expo. Two great shows, one great non-price!

This year the event is being held at the Heron Point Building and will feature speakers David Greelish and Martin Goldberg. There will be many exhibits and vendors to see just as in years past. To find out more on the event, visit our website at http://vcfmw.org/.

2011 Portland Retro Gaming Expo

Saturday September 24 - Sunday September 25 10:00am-5:00pm (Portland, OR)

The 2011 Portland Retro Gaming Expo will be held on the weekend of September 24-25, 2011 at the Doubletree Hotel in Portland, Oregon! What's different from last year? Our 6th annual show will enjoy the following enhancements:

- New venue. The 2011 PRGE will be held in the Exhibit Hall of the Portland Doubletree Hotel located in Portland's Lloyd District. The Doubletree is located just steps from the Lloyd Center MAX Light Rail station and just across the street from Holladay Park.
- More space. While we enjoyed a strong relationship with the Portland Crowne Plaza, our show has simply outgrown their facilities. In 2010 we used over 8,500 square feet of floor space spread across two rooms at the Crowne Plaza. Our decision to move to the Exhibit Hall at the Doubletree gives us access to 17,000 square feet in one contiguous room.
- More games. In 2010 our Freeplay Arcade featured more consoles and full-size arcade cabinets than ever before. Due to the immense popularity of the arcade and tournaments we have allotted even more floor space for games in 2011. PRGE is currently working with some local arcade and pinball collector groups to help us secure even more game donations. Stay tuned for more details as we firm up these plans.

A very special thank you to Recycled Gamer who has redesigned our website for us! Come check for updates at www.retrogamingexpo.com.

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 and he'll make sure to announce it in a future issue.

Apple II Incider

by Donald Lee

Steve Jobs: The End Of An Era

Welcome to the September issue of Retrogaming Times Monthly and this month's Apple II Incider column. Believe it or not, the summer is just about over. As I live in the San Francisco Bay Area, it's a little harder to tell from looking at the weather. However, seeing the kids shopping for supplies and clothes at the mall told me that Fall was definitely here.

As I was driving home tonight, I was debating what to write about. As Bryan mentioned, I've had some personal things going on recently and playing games was not on the top of my priority list. Alas, it looks like Steve Jobs just saved me from having to figure out which game to play.

By the time the readers see this issue of RTM, everyone will have known that Steve Jobs stepped down as CEO of Apple tonight (Wednesday, August 24th, 2011). In a quote from the letter, Jobs said:

"I have always said if there ever came a day when I could no longer meet my duties and expectations as Apple's CEO, I would be the first to let you know. Unfortunately, that day has come."

As a long time user of the Apple IIe computer and a current user of the iPhone, iMac, and iPad, this is a sad day and the end of an era.

When I first started using the Apple IIe in my youth, I didn't know the history of the computers and the company. However, as I grew older and started reading more magazines and books, I realized that Apple (along with Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak) had a rich history.

However, if you asked Apple II users, most of them might not have warm memories of Jobs. The reason was that Jobs had a vision for a graphical user interface for computers in the early 80's, which eventually led to the launch of the first Macintosh computer in January of 1984.

Apple 1984 Commercial

The Macintosh was initially launched to compete with the IBM PC in the business market with the Apple II line remaining a school and home computer. However, as Apple Computer entered the 1990's, they decided that the Macintosh was the future of the company. The Apple II line of computers would stop production in the mid 1990's.

I personally remember playing with the early Macintosh computers. Unfortunately, I don't quite remember if using the mouse to point/click was confusing. I'm pretty sure I didn't get it right away. However, I do remember playing some early games on the Mac. The games that come to mind are Déjà vu, Shufflepuck, and the Ancient Art of War.

As an Apple II user through the 1990's, I never wanted to buy a Macintosh. I was loyal to my Apple IIe and the computer could still do what I wanted to do (play games, do homework, etc).

As I mentioned many times in previous columns, I eventually joined the Windows world around 1995 when I entered college. That was a tough time for Apple as Windows took over the computer market and the Macintosh languished.

Steve Jobs would later return to Apple around 1996 when they purchased the NeXT software. Eventually, Apple Computer would slowly make its return to prominence with the releases of the iMac and the iPod. Of course, we can't leave out the iPhone and iPads.

My personal return to the Apple world was around 2007 or so when I purchased an iPod Nano, though I would lose it a couple of years later. I remained a Windows users going from Windows 95, Windows 98 and then Windows XP. However, to replace our aging PC, my dad picked up an iMac which I have learned to love. These days, I have added an iPhone and an iPad to my collection as well.

Apple's current products such as the iPhone and iPad are seen as the current "cool thing" with the younger generation. However, the younger generation may not realize that Apple Computer (Apple Inc. now) has a long history. A lot of this has to be attributed to Steve Job's vision and leadership. It was his vision of a graphical user interface that has allowed the Macintosh line to remain in production for nearly 30 years. It was Job's vision that led the iPod, iPhone and iPad to revolutionize the market and become a leader in the music, smartphone and tablet markets.

While many Apple II users may not have the best memories of Steve Jobs, everyone in the technology industry should tip their caps to him. His long history of innovations and two stints at Apple proved he was one of the biggest innovators in Silicon Valley history. While it is a sad day to see Jobs step down, let's all hope he can take care of health problems. While he may no longer be involved in Apple's day to day operations, perhaps he still has an idea or two up his sleeve that will surprise the world just as the iPod, iPhone and iPad did.

Retro Collecting 101

by Jeff Wittenhagen

Hunting Treasures In A Foreign Land

I recently have been out and about on vacation with my wife. As per the norm, we went on an adventure to find all the treasures that we collect. From video games to horror to retro treats and everything in between, we look for it all. When you are out of your element and in a land that is foreign to you, there are a few things you need to keep in mind.

1. Use all the resources available - If you know people in the area, ask them what's around. Since they live out there their knowledge is invaluable. Also, when you go to a "mom and pop" type of place, ask the workers there if they know of any other stores like theirs. Usually the workers are also interested in what they are selling, like video games, and have no problem telling you of more places up your alley. Just make sure it's not the owner as they might get upset about you wanting to go to their competition.

2. Know the culture and demographic - Is this a rich or poor area? Are the people of the area interested in what you are looking for? If you know these simple things, it will tell you the quality of goods you will find at a Goodwill or if more people will be selling their items at a pawn shop/used game store. Also if the area is "richer" the quality of items that will be found at garage/yard sales will go up, however, so will the prices.

3. Google Maps is your friend - You wouldn't believe how many times I've found a random place just by searching it in Google. The fact that we can have a portable computer in the form of a phone with us at all times is amazing and we should use that to our advantage.

4. Don't be afraid to travel out of your comfort zone - When looking for the almighty deal, don't be afraid to venture out a little. Sometimes just driving a few extra miles will bring you to another area or town that may have exactly the place you are looking for. Of course checking Google Maps will also help focus your journey to avoid wasted travel to a near abandoned ghost town.

5. Make sure you have your collections documented and organized - When you have a massive collection, it is very useful to have everything listed out. In this digital age, Google Docs is a great resource that allows you to have the basics of Microsoft Office and can be accessed on any computer, even your handy dandy portable phone. I go as far as not only documenting my collection, but also what I am looking for as well as the estimated online price. That way I know if the store is in the ballpark without having to look each item up on eBay or Amazon while I am out and about.

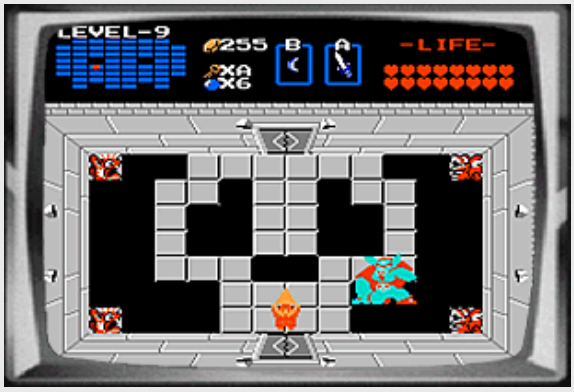
These few simple things will help you focus your collecting activities when you are on your trip into the vast wild and allow you to better concentrate and enjoy the hunt. This list can be applied to any type of collecting that you might do, not just video games. These things aren't law they are just a guideline. If there's anything that you think I missed, post it down in the comments.

Gaming Tetralogies

by Jeff Wittenhagen

The Legend Of Zelda 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.



The Legend of Zelda (1987) - Nintendo Entertainment System

The original Legend of Zelda is the game that basically created the Action RPG genre. Although it did away with any leveling up system, the epic adventure instead rewarded exploration with new equipment and weaponry. The music in The Legend of Zelda is some of the most memorable in all of gaming. The characters and story were ubiquitous to the point that an entire lore has been created off of them.

The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past (1992) - Super Nintendo

In all biased of the bias, A Link to the Past is my favorite game of all time. It's a game I could play a million times and not get tired of it. A Link to the Past took the original Zelda formula and multiplied it by 16. The graphics have that "Super Nintendo shine" to them, the music is much more midi orchestrated yet beautiful, and the story is something of a perfected legend. The Light World / Dark World concept is an amazing one and no game to this day has done it better than this game.

The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening (1993) - Nintendo Game Boy

Taking its console based stable of games and porting them to their portable systems is something that Nintendo is known for nowadays. However, back in the early 90s it was a bit hit-or-miss with the original monochrome Game Boy. With Link's Awakening Nintendo proved that they could not only make a great port of their beloved franchise, but they could add in new gameplay aspects, story, and not even have it be in the familiar land of Hyrule!

The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time 3D (2011) - Nintendo 3DS

The Ocarina of Time is considered by many as THE definitive Zelda game. The remake of Ocarina on the Nintendo 3DS brings everything into 3D with great controls, amazing music, another perfect story, and a dual world concept revolving around time travel. I've chosen the 3D version of the game due to the crazy amount of polish and shine that Nintendo gave this game compared to the original, now visually dated, Nintendo 64 version. Nintendo also saw it fit to modify of a few control-based annoyances that were seemingly unavoidable on the N64. The inclusion of the mirrored Master Quest that is available once you complete the game is just an outstanding bonus that makes this game an even more complete package.

Standalone Spew

by Mark Sabbatini

The Battle For Football's Second-Best

Maybe it's the just the insane ramblings of a guy caught in an August snowstorm while Las Vegas bakes in 46-degree heat (we're on that "other" system), but I sort of like rigged sports competitions.

We're talking legitimate sports, not vapid sideshows like pro wrestling. And I hate the damage fixed games do to the integrity of a sport, but it's fascinating to see what kind of schemes people think can work and - especially in retrospect - watch the games to see if there's any obvious indicators somebody's trying to throw the game.

Some are convinced, for example, Denver Broncos Quarterback Craig Morton threw Super Bowl XII with a 4-for-15 with four interceptions performance (one of many debates about that is at www.orangemane.com/BB/showthread.php?t=65526). Plenty of other high-profile scandals are so notorious they are part of the loved legacy of a sport.

So, despite not getting any money or other perks, I'm throwing this contest before it starts.

Football titles are easily among the most popular genre of handheld LED/LCD games and the obvious pick for reviewing now the NFL strike is over. But anyone who's read my earlier handheld columns knows I've already declared Mattel's Football 2 the gold standard so the best the others can hope for is runner-up - with the very slight possibility of a tie for first since I generally consider such verdicts a cop-out.

Unlike the college executive dolts I consider a playoff system a good thing so there's two categories being considered, with the winner of each competing for the silver. The games this month are the first wave of games introduced up until 1980, which generally have the advantage of LED rather than LCD displays and less convoluted gameplay.

Those arriving after 1980 often have more features and depth, but not always implemented in good ways, and some are definitely just chintzy knockoffs by companies looking for a quick buck. Lest anyone detect a bias in either category, I'll say as I begin this I have no idea which will provide the eventual winner, which will be revealed when the second batch of games is considered next month.

Electronic Quarterback (B-)

Coleco was the second company to field a football handheld with this 1978 hit which, along with its many imitators, is probably the type of game most people are familiar with after Mattel's. It's biggest enhancement over Mattel's original Football, of course, is passing as well as running plays. This is done by selecting a play type before the snap (run/kick or pass), which determines if you are controlling the quarterback or receiver. Selecting a run reveals the other major addition - blockers. Two of them appear one yard in front and to the side of your quarterback, moving in tandem with him until encountering a defender, which wipes both off the screen. Obviously this wouldn't work well on the three "unit" wide field Mattel pioneered and many others replicate, so Coleco widened it to four units which adds a nice dose of playability. The QB/RB start two yards behind line of scrimmage, so losing yards and safeties are possible. Selecting a pass play changes one of the blockers to a receiver, who is moved downfield by the player until (hopefully) there is a line between himself and the QB (who automatically moves in tandem) free of the two computer-controlled pass defenders capable of intercepting a pass. The linemen rushing the QB and deep safety that is added on the Pro setting can't intercept passes. Kicking is "automatic," meaning a field goal if it reaches the end zone and a punt if it falls short. Safeties are also scored if you're tackled in your own end zone. If I

had any readers, someone would probably notice Mattel's original Football gets the same grade and wonder why EQ isn't rated higher because of the added passing feature and wider field. I also noted in that column Mattel's original now belongs to the "mediocre middle" when all handheld football games are considered, but it gets a boost for being first and remaining the de facto standard. I will confess I was never as big a fan of this game as most probably are, but have tried to assign a fair grade without allowing my bias to be a factor.

Head to Head Football (B+)

This 1979 entry from Coleco was the obvious progression from Electronic Quarterback and a most welcome one. Two humans passing the unit between them and playing only offense is kind of a drag for any real football fan. Coleco gets credit for being the first to allow humans to play defense and for generally solid fundamentals, although other games eventually offered more and better options (if not always well implemented). The offense is unchanged from Electronic Quarterback, which is a minor bummer since allowing four-way offensive movement instead of three would make this a contender for the top spot. As it is, the lack of ability is a huge minus in terms of dodging a human defender during runs and pass patterns. In a two-player game the defender plays the deep safety and does get four-way movement (although, unlike the offense, he can't "wrap around" the screen). Blockers can wipe the human defender off the screen just like the automated blips and, unlike a missed tackle, there's no second chances after that error. The unit must be rotated between possessions, which makes the H2H's shortcomings obvious and something many competitors would improve upon as both players got a full set of controls. One rule - and opinions are probably split on whether it's positive or negative - is the human defender can't intercept passes, only break them up if he's in front of the receiver. Other two-player games are more advanced, but H2H will always have a lot going for it since it's unlikely any other game can simply be played by two people without worrying about extra rules and oddities.

World Championship Football (A)

This 1980 two-player game by Mattel is a massive leap forward in features and playability compared to the handhelds reviewed above, and there's definitely a strong argument it deserves the greatest-ever award instead of Football 2. The feature list is overwhelming: four speed levels; multiple formations, plays and programmable receiver patterns on offense; programmable formations and coverage assignments on defense; 30-second play clock, penalties; out-of-bounds runs; timeouts; lateral passes and pitchbacks, onside and free kicks; PATs (no two-point conversions); and much more. Also, the field is four "units" wide instead of the usual three, greatly expanding maneuverability and play options. All this complexity is the main reason I don't elevate it above the instinctively easy Football 2. World Championship Football was also considerably less popular, so it's unlikely you can quickly square off against a friend or foe without handing them the instruction book first (one example of many: After passing the ball you must press the same button a second time when the ball is in front of a receiver for him to catch it). Also bad for friendless geeks like me, the one-player option puts you in control of the offense of both teams. Being able to play defense against the computer would really make solo gamers feel more like this is a next-gen device. Minor factors are the unit's bulk - it requires six "C" batteries that fill a space roughly one-sixth of its size - and controls that are somewhat crapped despite the largeness. A couple of quirky features are the field is only eight yards long rather than the usual nine or ten, and the game pits five offensive players against only four on defense. Still, World Championship Football has to be considered the handheld of choice (of those considered so far) for hardcore players whose sessions are counted in hours rather than minutes. Alas, be prepared to shell out $75 or more for a decent unit on eBay and elsewhere if you can find one.

Superstar Football (a.k.a. Classic Football) (C)

This game's claim to fame is it has "the world's smallest graphic color display … (and) is the first hand-held color video game with a microprocessor unit," at least according to Bambino's instruction book. Furthermore, "it has over 100 million computerized plays in its memory." Even as a preteen I was pretty skeptical about promo copy, so my guess is this must have been a gift rather than a purchase with two months' allowance. Sure enough, Superstar Football is a mostly generic version featuring LED icons sort of resembling players instead of blips, and an oversize and awkwardly shaped case. There are a few noteworthy pluses and minuses. The good is the ability to select one of three offensive formations for running plays, which determine where your two blockers go (left/center/right of you ball carrier). There's eight defenders and a collision wipes out both players. Another nice touch is being able to separately select punts and field goals for kicks. Unfortunately the negatives are more pronounced. So-called passing plays are random and non-interactive as you merely press the pass button, watch a "football" scroll across the eight-yard field, and have an icon indicate if it's complete, incomplete or an interception. That cramped eight-yard field is bothersome given the unit's large size (a lot of competitors had 10-yard fields by this point). Another drag is a touchdown is only worth six points and there's no PATs. Isn't one of the major benefits of scoring TDs forcing the other team to do more than kick a couple of field goals to even things up? As for those 100 million plays, I can only gather it refers to every possible alignment of the players on the entire 100-yard virtual field. Seeing crap like that just reinforced the notion that adults were idiots when it came to knowing anything about video games.

Football 3 (B)

Take much of World Championship Football, throw in one of the worst features of Superstar Football and you have this 1980 entry by Entex. The company made some of my all-time favorite handhelds like Super Cobra, Turbo and Defender (and, oh, do I wish I'd grabbed an Adventure Vision when I had the chance so I could make a fortune today on eBay). But this was an early entry in their lineup and, much like real football, a small misstep is all it takes to disrupt something promising. Football 3 is a true two-player game in a reasonable compact package, with separate four-direction controls for each. The one-player game also has something huge to recommend it: the computer plays both offense and defense. Something that's a drastic departure from nearly all football games is there are only three defenders, but during a two-player game they are all human-controlled as they line up in 2-1 triangle formation and move in tandem. The defenders would, of course, be an impassible barrier if the field were the standard three units wide, but Football 3 outdoes World Championship Football and Electronic Quarterback by widening it to five units. The resulting potential is high, but finding out the offense has only one player sends warning signals about the game's drawbacks. The biggest one is the passing game, where the player pushes pass and then one of the four direction keys to determine how far the ball is thrown (10-30 yards). At least the outcome isn't completely random - the timing of when you press the distance button is a factor and longer throws have less chance of success. Another minor negative is punts/FGs are automatically selected by the computer. Scoring is for TDs, FGs and PATs (really wish someone had done two-point conversions, but this was before the NFL implemented them). This certainly isn't the best of the handheld footballs, but the unique control scheme on defense alone makes it a decent choice for two players. On the other hand, the drastically fewer players will probably make for a disconcerting experience for most people familiar with football handhelds which is why it comes in a tick below Head to Head Football.

Football 4 (A-)

This Entex game also was debuted in 1980 and has a lot of similarities to its predecessor above, making me think somebody hastily sat down and rewrote a lot of stuff people complained about. They got most of it right, but there's still hitches and odd features that will throw some players off. On many plays, for instance, there's even fewer players on the field than Football 3 - running plays feature just one offensive player and two on defense. Stranger, as you may have deduced, the number of players varies depending on the play called. Passing plays are either two-against-two or three-against-three, which actually is kind of cool since it increases the variability. Human-control of passing is also largely restored with some unique options, as the offensive player 1) selects the formation that determines the number of players (the third player being a lineman against a computer-controlled defensive end), 2) decides the distance of the pass (10-40 yards), 3) determines which of the five vertical rows the pass will be thrown to and 4) maneuvers the receiver to that location once the ball is snapped. The longer the pass, the farther down the field the receiver must run (but not beyond the initial field of play). Once the ball is thrown the receiver can't move. An interception occurs if the defender is directly in front of the receiver and occasionally even a perfect throw to the receiver will be dropped (the manual says this happens 20 percent of the time). One other complication is the QB is automatically sacked if he doesn't throw the ball within five seconds (just my opinion, but it ought to be a NFL-standard three seconds on the Pro level setting). Speaking of the Amateur/Pro settings, once again Entex scores big points for having the computer play offense and defense during one-player games. The punt/FG option is still computer selected, but at least the player knows what the choice is since anything more than 40 yards from the end zone is a punt (and obviously not all FGs are successful). Football 4's high grade is well earned, but I'd have warned people back then to try it first to make sure the differences from most competitors were acceptable. These days, with prices on eBay starting at $20 for working units and going up quickly for those in good condition, I'm assuming people will know what they're getting into.

MAME Reviews

by Mark Sabbatini

Radar Scope

Every programmer who's ever felt crushed hearing their game described as a "generic space shooter" needs to play Radar Scope.

The 1980 creation by Nintendo legend Shigeru Miyamoto is promoted as a 3D "cosmic space mystery," which sounds awfully impressive for the era. Indeed, the machines were subject to exhaustive use by arcade players even though few of them realized it and the game is nearly unheard of today.

The reason is they were playing the machine in its "evolved" state, although creationists can certainly say a master designer was involved. In something of a warped "Planet of the Apes" twist, those aliens that found their way through space to Earth suffered humiliating oblivion at the hands of a monkey. (Not as embarrassing as the Vl'hurg/G'Gugvuntt invasion - today's "Google it" digression - but still.)

Radar Scope is a Space Invaders/Galaxians hybrid that's less fun than either. It was briefly popular in Japan, however, and Nintendo sent a bunch of machines to the U.S. where it was mostly notable for annoying gamers and arcade operators with the haunted-house warble sounding from diving aliens.

As a result, Nintendo of America President Minoru Arakawa "faced financial disaster, so he pleaded with his father-in-law (Nintendo CEO Hiroshi Yamauchi) to provide him with a new game which he could install as a replacement in the Radar Scope arcade machines, which could be repainted to reflect a new game," the Wikipedia entry for the game notes. "Yamauchi assigned the game's designer, Shigeru Miyamoto, the task of 'fixing' the game so it would appeal to gamers. Rather than tweak a poor game, Miyamoto designed an entirely new game."

And thus, in the kind of happy accident that gave us penicillin, Donkey Kong was born.

About 2,000 of the 3,000 Radar Scope machines went ape, so these days it has a rarity rating of eight of out 100 (lower is scarcer) at The Killer List of Video Games. A cabinet model is on sale at eBay for a "Buy It Now" price of $600 as of this writing (there's no bids and a $5 minimum with four days to go - practically meaningless - and you have to be close enough to St. Louis to pick it up).

MAMEers get to play with considerably less hassle and expense, and there's some great reasons to do so even if Radar Scope is a less-than-great game.

The first is there's actually three games players should try out: Radar Scope, plus the same-era Nintendo titles Space Fever (a 1979 Space Invaders wannabe) and Space Firebird (1980 Galaxians ripoff) to see how formulaic one of the most innovative video game companies was during their formative years. Second, while playing Radar Scope look for elements surviving the transfiguration to Donkey Kong (I list a couple of obvious ones below, which was enough to get me looking for more subtle aspects of Miyamoto's technique).

Playing Radar Scope is as simple as games get with just a two-direction joystick and fire button for controls. DIP switches allow starting with three to six ships, with extras awarded at 7,000, 10,000, 15,000 or 20,000 points (the same options not so coincidentally offered in Donkey Kong. The lettering/scoring display may also look familiar).

A brief message after pressing start informs you that your mission is to shoot 48 UFOs. A blue grid appears at the bottom three-fourths of the screen to provide a primitive 3D effect, similar to other early "3D" games like Beamrider. Four rows of 12 UFOs materialize at the top, again progressively smaller in size toward the top, so those in the highest rows look more like hearts and dots than aliens.

The lowest row of UFOs starts doing a back-and-forth dance and the attacks commence, either singly or a few at a time during the initial wave. They fire tiny green missiles that aren't the easiest things to see and swoop either off the side of the screen or back toward to top after reaching the bottom quarter of the screen.

One extra complication is decoys that fall straight down the screen and will damage your ship, rather than destroy it as the UFO's shots do. Damage reduces your laser's firing speed and the wave must be completed to "repair" your gun.

The challenge level of Radar Scope isn't excessively high, as I fared better during my initial games than with Space Invaders and Galaxians - two titles I'm admittedly not highly skilled at. Moreover, it's missing whatever that intangible is that gives quality games that addictive replay value. Maybe it's simply because it's such an obvious "me too" imitator, which I think would have been the impression even way back then when titles were drastically fewer in number. These days there's nothing to distinguish it from a dozen shooters that appear daily as browser, mobile or shareware games.

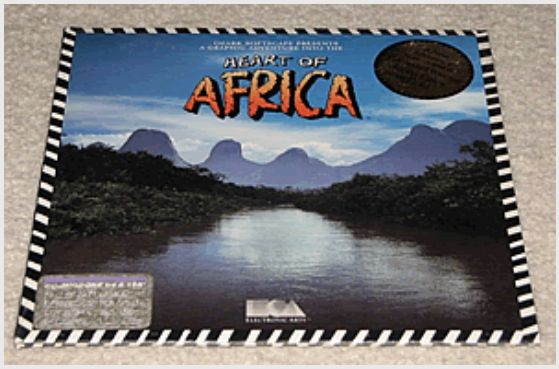
Still, one of the great things about the modern age is almost everything has devout followers. A rally cry of "now, DK owners, it is time to convert them back" is sounded The Radar Scope Pages (www.ostermayer.ch) authored by Markus Karrer Ostermayer, a Swiss resident who calls it "my favorite arcade video game." The site features project specs, schematics, owner tributes and plenty of other material.

Commodore Du Jour

by Marc Douglas

Heart Of Africa

Where did summer go? Well, I have a couple of weeks left until I return to the classroom to mold young minds so I thought that I would review a game that deals with a subject I teach which is, Africa.



Before I get to the game, I want to say that one thing that makes retrocomputing fun is that when you look back at these old games, you get the personal memories that start to flow, but you also appreciate at what the classic programmers were able to do with what we see now as very limited technology. Another aspect of classic computing that I enjoy is that publishers were willing to take chances on games that would have very niche audiences. SSI was big on that with some of the wargames and strategy games they released over their lifespan. If you availed yourself on some of these titles, not only could you have fun, but you might just learn something about a person, or a time period as well.

Another company that took early chances was, Electronic Arts. EA was always one of my favorite companies and the list of classic games that came out under their label is staggering. We all know, The Bard's Tale, Pinball Construction Set, Wasteland, M.U.L.E., Seven Cities of Gold and the rest. But I want to focus on the sequel to Seven Cities, a game that is not as fondly remembered but was in a way a natural progression of the foundations put down in Seven Cities.

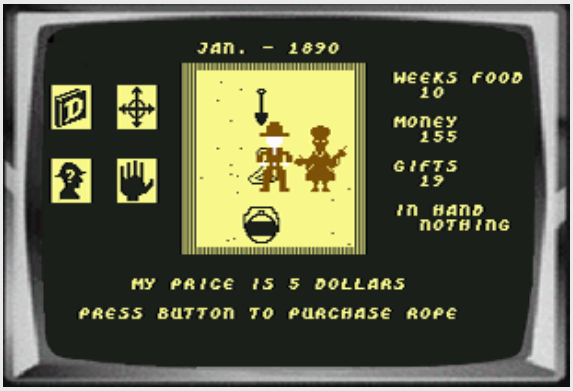
The game I am writing about is, "Heart of Africa (HOA)." It is from 1985 and stands out for two reasons, at least to me. First, was that it was a Commodore only release. By 1985 the C-64 was the leader of the 8-bit realm. The Apple was still there, but the Atari 8-bit line was already fading. Secondly, the creator of the game is a legend left us too soon before she (he back in 1985) could create more classic games. I am taking about Dan Bunten, a true icon of gaming.

The plot of HOA has you cast as a would-be explorer (after being solicited by the law firm of Flattery, Frump & Flaghorn) who must find the hidden tomb of the legendary pharaoh, "Ankh Ankh" and show that the earlier exploration done by Hiram Perkins Primm was not in vain. Since Primm's estate is funding your journey, you had better not fail!

You start near the city of Cairo with 250 dollars a few weeks food and no idea what to do next. fortunately, Cairo is one of the bigger cities in 1890 and is well stocked. The first thing you will notice is that the world map is very similar in style to Seven cities but there are a few noticeable differences. The date appears above the map window, to the right textually you will see how many weeks of food, money and gifts you have along with what is in your hand. To the left of the map are the four game icons. Your diary which records all important information which you can look at anytime. A compass icon which will give you your bearing. In a town, it gives you a small map that has the important building color coded. But only if the natives in that area give you your bearings (Hint: Give them a gift). Outside, you get the current location of Africa you are at with the undiscovered areas left black. Next is the options icon which looks like a silhouette of your character. There you can do three things…Find out how you are, where you are and drop an item, where you can create an item cache that will be designated on the map with an "X."

The last icon is the hand icon which allows you to choose which item to hold. you are only allowed 12 in your inventory, food does not count and is separate as are money and gifts. If you are on the map and you get a message saying,

"There is something buried here." hold your shovel and then go back over to spot to see what is there. As you explore and meet with natives, you will get an idea of what you should hold in your hand at any specific time. Just remember, if you hold the gun, the village/city will become hostile towards you. But, you may just be able to get some information from the chief of the village. But in this game in the long run, Violence is not the way to find the location of the tomb.



Ok, you now enter the city of Cairo and notice that the scale of the game is like Ultimas I-V where the interiors are much larger than how they look on the outside. As you walk around you will see various building some you can't get into but there are others that may allow you to buy food, a gun, or book passage to another port city. The game manual tells you what each building signifies. I suggest stocking up on some food, gifts and a map at least before heading back out into darkest Africa. You may also want to pick up a shovel as there is a nice cache waiting for you right outside of town. When purchasing from a store, always stand to the right (your left) of the vendor. If you go see the chief of a village, make sure you have something to offer. Sometimes that might be the barrel of your gun.

Back outside, you'll notice that Africa is a big continent. You'll be doing a lot of walking around. You can buy a canoe to traverse rivers and lakes, but it is very bulky to carry on land and will slow you down. Also, other items will make it easier to travel in some locations. I'll leave it up to you to find those out.

As you travel, your map will fill in making it easier to find locations that you have already discovered. And that is one of the enjoyable aspects of the game, is that sense of exploration. Stumbling upon a river, a mountain range, or some hidden treasure. It is those moments that help lessen the dullness that sometimes takes over the game as you walk around.

Some neat things can happen as you travel, you may get attacked by a rhino, or stung by a scorpion or have some other malady befall you. Not that you would want any of that to happen in real life but there is a chance that after an attack, you could get delirious. And when you do, the joystick does not function normally. Up may be left and so on. It is kind of a helpless feeling knowing that you have medicine to cure you, but you can't get to it because the joystick is being uncooperative. This adds a bit of tension to the game and is a nice touch.

The game really starts to pick up as you gather clues, discover locations and put the pieces together that will finally point you to the location of the tomb of Ankh Ankh. I won't tell you what happens when you discover it, but know you do get rewarded for your efforts. Is it the best ending? You'll have to find out for yourself, but you won't stop till you do it.

On to the technical part. I would have liked the main window to be bigger and the ability to scroll the map but this is 1985 and back then I know I didn't mind. The joystick control is very easy to use, if you want to select an icon, just press the fire button and choose the icon you want, if there are multiple options, you scroll through them with the stick and then choose the one you want with another press of the button.

The graphics are good but you will see some reused graphics not only from Seven Cities, but from M.U.L.E. as well. See if you can find out where. Your explorer is well defined when in a city or village as are the natives and chiefs and there is a nice variety to the natives. You don't get that feeling of sameness that is common with games of this era. What is nice is that the items in the game are given different icon and not just text descriptions. Another plus.

Sounds are also good, but nothing that pushes the 64 much. There is a nice musical tune at the beginning of the game with an impressive splash screen.

Oh, you want to save a game? Well you can only do it in port cities since those are the only places that have pubs. You have 10 saves per blank disk. Again, this is a product of its time and playing on an emulator means you can save anywhere. A big plus.

Is HOA perfect? No. The game does have a slow pace that has not aged well, and it really gets to you when you've been walking around for a while. Also get used to the color yellow as you'll see a lot of it and it does wear on you after a bit of exploring. The ending is a little short. I would say more but I don't want to give it away.

On the plus side, the use of icons was pretty new in 1985 and the game benefits from this. The fact that as you play you are actually learning but don't realize it is a major plus. The setting of Africa which was only done in wargames up to this point adds a level of freshness to the product. You also don't get penalized like you did in Seven Cities. You can experiment a bit more without the fear of losing all your gains. And again, the feeling you get when you get close to the tomb is exhilarating and you feel like you've really accomplished something when you finally uncover that tomb. And by the way, the location of the tomb changes from game to game which gives the game replay value.

In the end, Seven Cities of Gold is a classic. HOA does fall a bit short. But then again, Temple of Doom is not as good as Raiders of the Lost Ark, but you won't turn either off when they come on TV.

I like to think the same with HOA. If you load it up, you'll give it a go.

SCORE: This game gets a 7 (out of 10), not bad, but not great either.

Next month, a possible visit from MOM. Everyone enjoy the last bit of summer and thanks for reading!

NES'cade

by David Lundin, Jr.

Dig-Dug II

Two issues ago we took a look at Taizo Hori's original adventure, Dig Dug, which was released on the Famicom but was passed over on the NES. Three years after Dig Dug's arcade release, Namco followed it up with a sequel, aptly named Dig Dug II. In following what I consider the trend that sequels to video games in the 1980's adhered to, it was a pretty big departure from the original. Rather than being set underground and based around a vertical maze chase, Dig Dug II takes place up on the surface of a series of islands. The only similarity to the stage design of the original game is that rocks still fall down - in this case the "rocks" being the islands you move on and "down" being parts of said islands sinking into the ocean.

Taizo still has his special harpooning air pump which functions much the same way it did in the first game. Once the air pump is attached to a monster, they are pumped full of air until they explode. As before, if a monster is only partially inflated it will become stunned and unable to hurt Taizo until deflating completely. While the stun and run strategy doesn't really come into play until the more difficult stages of Dig Dug, it's a skill that needs to be mastered early on in Dig Dug II. In addition to the familiar air pump, Taizo also has a new tool in his battle against the Pookas and Frygars: the jackhammer. Each island has a series of dark areas, essentially wooden stakes in the ground where the island can be cracked open. By riding the jackhammer across these points, a crack will appear on the ground in the same direction that Taizo is traveling. By linking these cracks, sections of the island will break off and erode into the water, taking any enemies (or Taizo) with them for big bonus points. The part of the island that sinks and the part that remains is based upon how much total land mass is left with the bigger chunk remaining dry. Corralling enemies onto a part of the island that you have been slowly getting ready to carve off and then dropping the whole works into the water at once is the main attraction of this new game play addition. However as with the first game, the main goal is to eliminate all enemies on the stage. Just like the first game the last enemy will attempt to flee, in this case jumping into the drink, if Taizo can't catch him in time. Although the game was less popular than the original, it too had a Famicom port and it was actually published on the NES by Bandai.

Arcade Original

NES Version

The only control difference over the original Dig Dug is the second button for using the jackhammer, so transitioning the controls over to the NES control pad is free of any issues. Dig Dug II is often cited as being a very difficult game, primarily in that all the enemies are free to come and go as they please right from the beginning of the stage. Unlike the first game, there are no closed off tunnels or rock formations that the Pookas and Frygars are initially confined by.

Both enemies can fly as they did in the first game, giving them the advantage of moving diagonally as well as being able to cross gaps in the current island. This is the primary reason the stun and run strategy is something that has to be brought out fairly early, the enemies are simply always right behind.

In following with the first game, Dig Dug II runs in a vertical orientation but a solid job was done to scale the game to a horizontal aspect for the home version. Everything is accurately resized without having to use a large status sidebar that many NES conversions of this vintage were subject to. The enemy sprites are slightly enhanced over their original NES design and are well done within NES hardware limitations. With the exception of a little missing additional color detail, Taizo looks great and even sports his jackhammer on his back when not in use, just as he did in the arcade version. The individual stages are accurately represented and match to the arcade original, only lacking the arcade version's higher detail and color depth. Audio is spot on as with most of these Namco ports. Although one could say they were playing it safe with these arcade conversions, they almost always did a solid job.

I should note that there are actually two different versions of the Dig Dug II arcade game. It's actually pretty common to have different revisions of an arcade game of this era, such as Galaxian having more difficult to dodge enemy fire on the earlier boards, which was scaled back to be more forgiving as production rolled on. In the case of Dig Dug II there are two different game revisions that have completely different stage layouts. The "old version" is widely considered to be extremely difficult early on and most players will come to a point where they simply always get overwhelmed. The "new version" improved the island design and enemy placement, making for an overall more enjoyable to play game. The NES port is based upon the "new version" chipset so that's what it was compared against for this column.

While not as nostalgic or popular as the original Dig Dug, the sequel is still a lot of fun and arguably this is a more accurate home conversion than the original game received. Why Bandai thought it wise to bring over the sequel and not the original is still something I don't quite understand. Sure, Dig Dug was a game that was three years older than Dig Dug II but it was way more popular both in Japan and abroad. A lot of the Namco arcade game ports fall under the quick and easy localization criteria, usually requiring nothing more than a new title screen with revised copyright and licensing information Perhaps Bandai would have liked to release the original Dig Dug on the NES but thought the game seemed a little too bare bones with its sold black background, instead opting to publish the more colorful sequel. While I wouldn't consider it an arcade or NES classic by any stretch, Dig Dug II is still a fun game and has a solid challenge that will keep you busy if you can get into it. Surprisingly this one is a little uncommon so don't expect to see it in a standard NES collection or in a mixed box at a flea market. I wouldn't make any extra attempt to pick up a copy of the game but if you already have it on the shelf or come across a copy in the open, it's definitely worth a play or two.

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

Dual Perspective

by James Sorge

Double Dragon III: The Sacred Stones

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 “Double Dragon III: The Sacred Stones”, a brawler for the NES.

Graphics: 8.5/10

The sprites are large and detailed. However, I am not the biggest fan of the color schemes on this game. It seems Acclaim botched the color of the sprites and it comes off a little awkward.

Sound: 8/10

If this game had a recognizable tune, then yes, it would have had a better score. But there isn’t anything horrible here. I’ve heard worse.

Difficulty: 9.5/10

This might be a bit low considering I’ve never beaten it, but this is mostly because I’ve been to the final stage almost every time I play it and just can’t put the bosses away. Very impressive final stage difficulty, average difficulty in other stages. But man, the final stage is a doozy!

Replay Factor: 6/10

The final stage again. So hard, so frustrating. I think the final stage kills the replay value of this game.

The World Record Perspective:

The arcade version is hard to find and some say untrackable, so I am sticking to the NES version. First off, I’m going to say this: The final stage makes this a very limited field of competitors. Few have done it. The Twin Galaxies time can be improved a bit without glitches. But here are the numbers for those interested:

- Twin Galaxies World Record: 27:53, Andrew Furrer
- Speed Demos Archive World Record (with glitches): 14:15, Yadir 'Riskbreaker Y' Osornio

The Penguin Says:

"First of all let me say this, THANK YOU FOR THE FINAL STAGE, ACCLAIM! DID YOU TEST THAT ONE FOR GAME BALANCE? That put aside, the game is not all that horrible and is a decent improvement over the arcade version, final stage aside. World record wise, the SDA time is going to be really tough to beat, and this game’s final stage makes it relatively unhealthy to try to go for it. But as they say, everything’s improvable, if you can get it good. Another feather in your cap if you can do so. Good luck people! Overall I give this a 7.5/10 with a world record potential of 5/10."

The Pixelated Mage

by Jeff Wittenhagen

Jet Grind Radio

Platform: Sega Dreamcast
Developer: Smilebit
Release Date: 2000
Genre: Action/Platformer
Game Modes: Single Player
Tag Line: "The intuitive nature of the controls is what makes this game an amazing experience."

Synopsis

Jet Grind Radio on the Dreamcast, which is known as Jet Set Radio everywhere except the United States is the game that is known for help popularize the use of cel-shaded graphics in video games. In the game you are a graffiti artist on rollerblades named Beat who is a typical Tokyo hoodlum. You can add members to your crew by performing tricks with them which is an interesting aspect to the game. The story is gang-centric however and goes from simple spray paint gangs all the way to including a Yakuza-style group to add in a little tension and expand out a seemingly simple plot into something more.

Grinding and tagging is fun to do

Gameplay

The gameplay is where Jet Grind Radio excels the most. The intuitive nature of the controls is what makes this game an amazing experience. Once you master the jumping in the game, everything else happens near flawlessly which makes you feel like a rollerblading master. There are also combos that add in even more variety as it is fun to see what kind of craziness you can come up with.

Unfortunately without any kind of button commands, it makes you feel like you aren't in as much control of your character as in some of the more mainstream skateboarding games such as the Tony Hawk series. Although effortlessly running through a level is fun, after a while it comes off a bit uninspired. The camera can sometimes be awkward and causes confusion to which direction you are going, however they aren't a deal breaker here as using the camera button isn't too difficult.

As long as you don't get caught!

Graphics and Sound

While Jet Grind Radio may not be the first cel-shaded game created, it is the one that popularized it which is a great accomplishment in and of itself. Characters have realistic movement and everything looks like it should, which was a big deal during the early age of polygons. The diverse clothing and design is excellently executed and absolutely creative. The background graphics are that 32/64bit era cardboard cut out style which makes the game feel a bit dated.

The music in Jet Grind Radio is a mix of Hip Hop, Trance, Techno, Rock, Punk, and House beats that all mesh very

well together. You have the classic Dragula by Rob Zombie that seemed to be in a lot of games during that era, including the Gran Turismo series. The sound effects are inventive and creative with simple sounds coming across larger than life. The voices are unique and done well to match each characters style.

Why It’s Under-Appreciated

Seeing this game on the shelf, most gamers at the time didn't know what to make of it, which is a shame. Even a marketed sequel on the Xbox didn't help get the word out about this unique series. Jet Grind Radio is one of the few games on the Dreamcast that is a staple for the system and takes the system to the limit. The immense fun that I have each time I play Jet Grind Radio only confirms that this game is one of the greats. During its initial release I would have rated this game with a perfect score, however due to the apparent aging of the graphics, the score gets knocked down a peg.

Rating = 4 Skater Mages out of 5

A Pixelated 21st Century

by Paul Zimmerman

Hello Pixelated fans. “Pixelated Paul” is here to let you know about some of the retroware highlights for the month of August. Enjoy!

WiiWare

Flight Control (Click here to see a video of the game)

The WiiWare verson of the DsiWare game. Guide the airplanes to the airport. Not as easy as it sounds.

Kyotokei (Click here to see a video of the game)

A horizontal shmup. 5 levels, 5 huge bosses, co-op play.

Monochrome Racing (Video to the right)

Looks like Micro Machines. I hear it is not as good.

[redacted]

DSiWare

3D Classics: Urban Champion (Click here to see a video of the game)

The 3D update of the NES classic. Now the punches are in 3D! And the flowerpots!

B Team Episode 2 Ice and Venom (Video to the right)

More of the same squad-based shooter.

Crazy Hamster (Click here to see a video of the game)

Help the hamster to his fruit. Control his world, not the hamster.

Go Go Kokopolo (Click here to see a video of the game)

A fast moving maze game. Crazy cat!

[redacted]

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.

Avenging Spirit (Gameboy) (Click here to see a video of the game)

Should have been released in October. You're dead and you play as a ghost. Inhabit 20 different creatures and try to find your still living girlfriend.

Gargoyle's Quest (Gameboy) (Video to the right)

Another one good for October. You play as the Gargoyle from Ghosts N Goblins. Breath fire and fly to get back your stolen magic items.

Mario's Picross (Gameboy) (Click here to see a video of the game)

Picross is a very addicting puzzle game. Uncover the hidden picture. Over 250 puzzles!

As always, send me an email and let me know if you purchased any of these games and what are your thoughts about the games. 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!

I hope to see you all in the fall and I look forward to our next issue, which will be the Halloween-themed one. That's always an interesting one to look out for, and I expect to see you all there. There should be some fun yet scary things popping up in October. Not much else to say, except see you next month!