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Press Fire To Begin

by Bryan Roppolo

Tee-hee-hee!

Welcome to our Halloween issue, which is something every classic gamer should look forward to each year. This year we have some good articles in store for you which should send shivers down your spine. It seems like this year is one of our better Halloween issues, so be sure to flip through this one all the way.

I finally finished putting up all of the back issues of RTM on the website, meaning that you now have access to over 14 years of issues right at your fingertips! For more Halloween frills, be sure to check out our previous 14 October issues to see what was going on in past Halloween's.

The good news is that with all the back issues on-line, I have started indexing the pre-2004 issues now, and stand at October 2002 as of this publication. Come November I should have everything indexed and then it will just be a matter of putting the finishing touches on the whole thing and making sure everything is categorized correctly before unveiling it to the public. Both Alan Hewston and I have been testing the index so far, and things are operating pretty smoothly. It's so neat to have 14 years worth of retrogaming covereage to search through! Once complete, I do expect that the Article Index will become the most visited part of the website, save for when a new issue comes out.

In other news, the 40th anniversary of Atari is coming up next year (1972-2012) and the new Atari is asking what should be done to commemorate the event. There are mixed feelings on it, since the current Atari (Infogrames) was not around back then and many classic gamers feel Infogrames does not deserve the Atari name. You can read more on Atari's facebook page at http://www.facebook.com/atari/posts/10150347491293534 and let them know what you think of their idea of a 40th anniversary celebration (are they worthy of holding such an event and if so what do you think they should do?).

Retrogaming News

AtariAge Secret Santa

AtariAge is holding their annual Secret Santa where you send one gift to your randomly assigned recipient. Then get one back from another super secret elf. It's a fun thing to get involved with and you can read more about it by visiting the link above.

SC3/Arcade Party

Saturday, October 1, 12:00pm - 12:00am (Alhambra, CA)

SC3 is once again teaming up with Nucleus, an art gallery and store in the northern L.A. area, to bring you a blowout arcade and console event. The party will take place on Saturday, October 1, 2011, from 12 noon to 12 midnight, at the Nucleus gallery in Alhambra, CA. Admission to the event is $10 if you pre-register online or $15 at the door. Visit the Nucleus event registration page to order your tickets.

To buy tickets, go to Nucleus site at http://www.gallerynucleus.com/event/319. For more info about SC3 click on the aSC3 is once again teaming up with Nucleus, an art gallery and store in the northern L.A. area, to bring you a blowout arcade and console event. The party will take place on Saturday, October 1, 2011, from 12 noon to 12 midnight, at the Nucleus gallery in Alhambra, CA. Admission to the event is $10 if you pre-register online or $15 at the door. Visit the Nucleus event registration page to order your tickets.

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Retro Gaming Revolution

Saturday, October 1, 12:00pm - 2:00am (Chelmsford, UK)

Retro Gaming Revolution is a retro gaming event being held at The Red Lion in Chelmsford, Essex on Saturday, 1st October 2011. The Pubs Postcode is CM2 0AA. The event runs from Midday to 2AM. Entry is FREE!

Website: http://www.retrorevolution.co.uk
Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/event.php?eid=248880938472846

I am also pleased to announce that the event will be featuring Atari User Live (http://www.atariuser.com). There will be a few tables full of Atari systems including an Atari 7800 and Atari Jaguar CD.

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.

Your Mom Was Wrong!

by Jonathan Imberi

Playing Video Games IS Healthy For You!

I don't know about you, but just that title makes me feel even better about all the quarters I stuck into arcade machines in the 1980's!

There have been several research projects done lately on how playing video games can have a positive effect on one's health. According to researchers at NASA's Langley Research Center in Hampton, VA, the results of combining biofeedback (a mind-over-matter technique) with the hand-eye coordination of video games may actually improve and protect a player's mental and physical health.

"Thirty years of biofeedback research has shown that by training specific brainwave changes, or reductions in other abnormal physiological signals, people can achieve a wide variety of health-enhancing outcomes. With this new technology, we have found a way to package this training in an enjoyable and inherently motivating activity," said Dr. Olafur Palsson, assistant professor of psychiatry and family medicine at Eastern Virginia Medical School in Norfolk, VA.

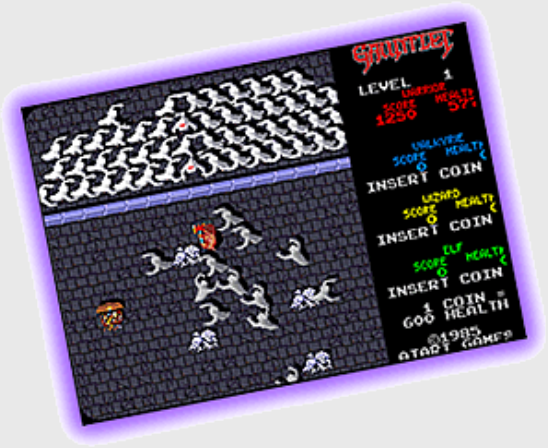
In a nutshell, they attach sensors to the player's head and body that relay signals through a signal-processing unit on the game's joystick or other control device. The joystick becomes easier to control as the player's brainwaves produce a more optimal stress-free pattern. This encourages the player to produce these signal patterns in order to win the game. In other words, the less you run Mario into a Goomba, the better you will feel.

Using this new method, recreational video games have the potential to help both children and adults with health problems ranging from concentration to physical stress. This new technology can easily be adapted to today's most popular games and even old classics. "This technology could be in homes all over the country within the next two or three years," according to David Shannon of Langley's commercialization office.

I can just see it now: we'll have the HealthStation and the Nintendo Sic-No-Mor.
Not only can playing video games make us healthier, action video games can boost cognitive and attention skills according to a study by Shawn Green and Assistant Professor Daphne Bavelier of the Centre for Visual Science at the University of Rochester in New York. "Therefore, although video game playing may seem to be rather mindless, it is capable of radically altering visual attentional processing," the researchers wrote.

"The games teach players to keep several attentional windows open, and this is a type of training that can be generalized to other training," commented Professor Pene Sanderson from the Cooperative Research Centre for Interactive Design.

The US Researchers used several experiments to demonstrate the benefits of playing video games. Their first experiment was to test whether playing video games increased the capacity of the visual attention system. They also performed a test to see if players could concentrate outside their playing area.



In a separate experiment, they tested to see if the pressure to act rapidly on several items would alter the player's ability to process tasks over time. The result found that video game players possessed an enhanced attentional capacity and have an enhanced capacity of visual spatial distribution compared to non-players.

Thinking their results might be skewed because people who generally play video games do so because they are good at it and those who don't avoid the games because they may lack these skills, the researchers trained a group of male and female non-players to play "Medal of Honor" for one hour per day for ten days and then tested their abilities. As predicted, the group trained in this game had a greater performance over those who did not play the game at all.

In the end, all those years of playing "Gauntlet" was actually forcing us to juggle a number of varied tasks (such as detecting new enemies, watching for food, and of course avoiding getting hurt, etc.) and preparing us to handle the multiple tasks of everyday life.

Remember how everyone was so worried when game consoles came out that we would become anti-social kids, sitting in dark rooms by ourselves playing video games all day? New research proves them all wrong. The Teachers Evaluating Educational Multimedia (TEEM) has discovered that playing certain video games will sharpen the skills kids need to do well in school and future jobs.

The findings reveal that specifically in simulation games where kids are in charge of constructing and controlling the forces that affect their simulated environment, they are actually developing strategic building and planning skills. They also found that adventure games can help to sharpen problem-solving skills. The best part of this whole study is that it proved that kids prefer to play in pairs or small groups, which contradicts the prevailing notion that gaming promotes solitary and anti-social behavior.

A word of warning: their findings do not apply to all video games. Playing "Grand Theft Auto" is not likely to improve your child's grades or social skills.

But wait, there is more! Video games are not only healthy for you; they are also being used to improve our hospitals and medical facilities. It has been found that children who play video games on a Game Boy in the operating room before undergoing surgery are more relaxed than those who were given tranquilizers or just held Mommy's hand. Dr. Anu Patel, an anesthesiologist at University Hospital in Newark, NJ, found that by giving children a few minutes to play their favorite game reduced their anxiety until the anesthesia took effect. Dr. Patel said, "We find that the children are just so happy with the Game Boy that they actually do forget where they are."

The study was conducted on 4 – 12 year olds divided into three groups of 26 children each. All of the children had their parents with them in the operating room until they were anesthetized. The children in the first group were given a tranquilizer, the ones in the second group were given a Game Boy to play, and the third group had only their parents to comfort them. Using a 100-point scale for measuring preoperative anxiety, the three groups had their anxiety levels tested. On the average the Game Boy group had no increase in anxiety levels before surgery, whereas the tranquilizer group jumped 7.5 points, and the parents-only group increased by 17.5 points.

According to Dr. Erin Stucky, head of the American Academy of Pediatrics' Committee on Hospital Care, if a larger study produces the same results, video games should be used more widely in hospitals. She went on to add, "This is great because this offers a wonderful ability to have the child's attention immersed elsewhere."

Children are not the only patients benefiting the use of video games. The Virtual Reality Medical Center has used video games to treat more than 400 people with anxiety disorders. Patients use the video games as a way of facing their phobias. For example, people who are afraid to drive play "Midtown Madness", a racing game; those with a fear of heights play the "Unreal Tournament" shooter game using a custom-crafted level featuring a playing field of sky scrapers 50 stories tall.

Dr. James Rosser, who heads the Advanced Medical Technology Institute at Beth Israel Medical Center in New York City, knows exactly how he would like to see video games used in hospitals. Dr. Rosser has been using video games like "Super Monkey Ball" for Nintendo's GameCube to train doctors in laparoscopic surgery. Dr. Rosser found that students who had played video games more than three hours in a one week period, even if it was only once, had 37% fewer errors during the surgery and preformed it 27% more quickly. "If you played in the past, or are currently playing, you're significantly better than the non-players," Dr. Rosser said. "Video games were the determining factor -- more than years of experience, gender, dominant/non-dominant hand, all of that."

Dr. Rosser is convinced that it is only natural that video games would help doctors with laparoscopic surgeries (this refers to surgeons who use a tiny camera with joystick-controlled tools to perform an operation). Dr. Rosser says this type of surgery is about as close to gaming as surgery gets.

So the next time you're about to go under the knife, make sure to ask the surgeon about his latest score in Super Monkey Ball.

The moral of this article?

A Power Pill a day keeps the doctor away (or at least Blinky, Pinky, Inky and Clyde). Wocka! Wocka!!

Retrogaming Turntable

by Jonathan Imberi

Pac-Man Fever

You may remember hearing the song “Pac-Man Fever” on the radio in the early 80’s. Maybe you even owned the record like I did. And maybe, like me, you wore the grooves right off the record playing it so many times.

Great news! As the demand for classic video games increased, so did the demand for related items, including songs like “Pac-Man Fever”. In 1999, Buckner and Garcia decided to meet that demand by releasing Pac-Man Fever, The Album on CD. Yes, they had an entire album of video game hits, not just the well-known title track.

There was a problem, however. CBS refused Buckner and Garcia access to the masters of their original album, so they decided to re-record the whole thing. For those of you that remember the original album, the songs were mixed with samples from each of the games, which had been painstakingly recorded at local arcades by Buckner and Garcia. Since these 20+-year-old games are no longer available at the local arcades, they had to enlist the help of MAME™ (Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator) to obtain the samples.

The result: a fantastically reproduced album, almost indistinguishable from the original. I say almost because the quality of the music and lyrics as well as the samples used in each song are unbelievably clear and very easy to pick out. The original album, due to the limitations of its media, was never able to obtain the fidelity achieved with this CD. I must make a note that they were unable to find samples for the game Mousetrap, as its sound had not yet been emulated in MAME™. They cleverly substituted the sounds of a real cat, dog and hawk.

One last difference between the original and the new CD. You can no longer hear someone ordering a pastrami sandwich at the beginning of the title track “Pac-Man Fever”. Now how picky is that?

The CD’s tracks include:

- “Pac-Man Fever” (Pac-Man)
- “Froggy’s Lament” (Frogger)
- “Ode to a Centipede” (Centipede)
- “Do the Donkey Kong” (Donkey Kong)
- “Hyperspace” (Asteroids)
- “The Defender” (Defender)
- “Mousetrap” (Mousetrap)
- “Goin’ Berzerk” (Berzerk)

You can order the Pac-Man Fever CD from Buckner and Garcia’s official website at http://www.bucknergarcia.com for $9.95 plus $2.55 shipping and handling.

Now this CD is definitely worth chomping into! Wocka! Wocka!

Retro Collecting 101

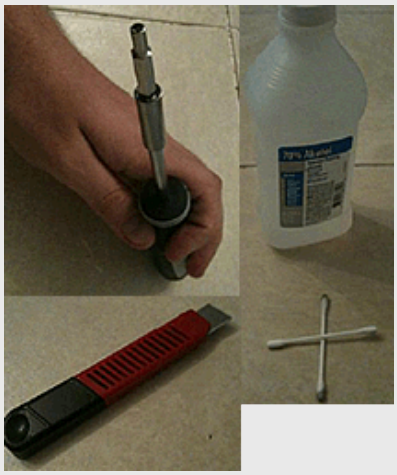
by Jeff Wittenhagen

Getting Seemingly Broken Cartridges To Work

More times than I can recall, I have seen games at garage sales and flea markets that are musty, dusty, moldy, and sometimes even rusty. Some people would say that there is no way that those types of games would ever work. I scoff at those simple minded folk and now you can too, as I will teach you how to fix your games so they will be operational again. Keep in mind that this article isn't going to talk about aesthetics (I will cover that in a future column) but simply getting the game to play again.

DISCLAIMER: I recommend that you only do this method when you are desperate to get your game to work and conventional cleaning methods aren't bringing you the operational results you desire. I also wouldn't bother with this method on a common game as you can usually get another copy for a few bucks/quid.

First off you will need the following materials:



- Game Tool Kit - So you can take apart the various cartridges, as most aren't simple phillips head. They can be found on various game hacking websites.
- Rubbing Alcohol - Essential in cleaning the metal connectors on the game cartridge, however make sure you don't douse the chips on the board in it.
- Q-Tips - Best way to clean the cartridges with the perfect amount of pressure, from the metal connectors to the outside of the game without overloading on the rubbing alcohol.
- Exact-O Knife - A razor blade will also work, however make sure you have something to hold on to as comfort will make the process easier.
- Rusty/Dirty Game - For this article, I used a copy of Dragon Warrior III that I got for a reasonable price from a used game store. The label is in mint condition so I decided to take a chance on it. Of course, upon examination the chips were black and green with rust.

First step is to use the Q-Tips and Rubbing Alcohol to thoroughly clean the metal connectors and see if the gunk will come off. Besides for cleaning the game, this will also in turn clean your system when you test your newly clean game. Normal cleaning methods won't help with a rusty game of course, so it's on to more drastic measures.

We begin by taking apart the cartridge in order to get access to the chip. For NES games this is 3 screws which will usually come loose with little effort from your special head screwdriver. Dragon Warrior III is a normal NES cartridge so I need to use the special screwdriver attachment, however some of older games will use a small philips head.

When taking the game apart after removal of the screws, always carefully pull the cartridge apart near the bottom as there are little tabs at the top that you don't want to break.

Once the chip is out, make sure you note how it fits into the cartridge. If you put it in backwards the game obviously won't play and making a quick note will save you some time having to disassemble the cartridge again.

Now it is time to get down and dirty with a combination of Q-Tip/Rubbing Alcohol and using the Exact-O Knife to carefully scrape away the rust on the metal connectors. The way you scrape doesn't really matter as we are dealing with simple metal connectors, however it is important that you don't scrape above the metal pins into the computer chips as this could damage the game. This can be a tedious process and takes a bit of time and patience depending on the level of filth on your game.

After you have sufficiently gotten rid of all the grime, dirt, and rust it is time to thoroughly clean once again with Rubbing Alcohol. Next, assemble the cartridge again and give it another cleaning just to be sure you get rid of the majority of black soot. It seems like the dirt will never stop, but I ensure you eventually it will. Just remember the cleaner you get the pins, the less of a chance the game will glitch or flash. Now it's time to put the game in to test it.

And voila, we have a working game! Not too shabby for a few minutes work! The main thing to keep in mind is to be extremely careful with the game board as they are delicate.

If you have any questions feel free to ask in the comments section below.

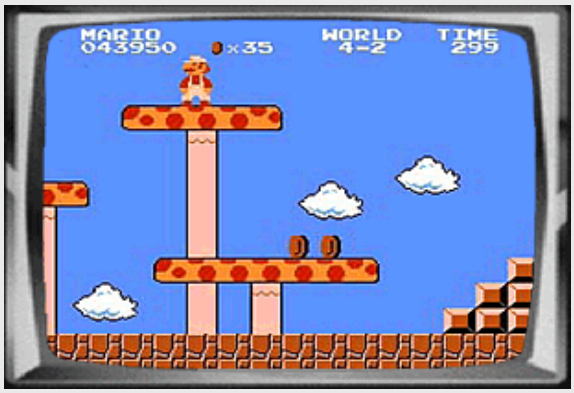
Gaming Tetralogies

by Jeff Wittenhagen

The Super Mario Bros Series

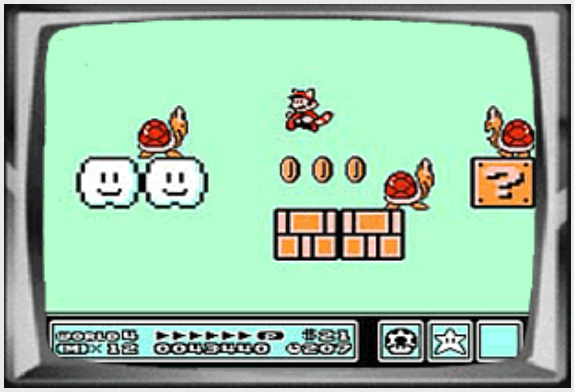
Gaming Tetralogies covers four of the best games from any single game series on any platform. The games will not be listed in any particular preference order but by release date and will be more of a must have list for each series. Feel free to comment on any games in the series you feel should have been included.

This series is kind of a gimmie, but it has to be covered as it is one of the most universally recognizable series in all of gaming. The hardest part is limiting the series to the four most influential games, leaving out tons of great ones in the process.



Super Mario Bros (1985) - Nintendo Entertainment System

Super Mario Bros is one of the most well known video games of all time. It helped Nintendo set the world ablaze with its NES and gamers all over the world were amazed by it. Never before had such a game been available to so many people, with its 2D platforming glory and the weird, yet interesting, setting of the Mushroom Kingdom.



Super Mario Bros 3 (1990) - Nintendo Entertainment System

Some call Super Mario Bros 3 the perfect 2D platforming game. It took the formula popularized with the original Super Mario Bros and refined it by adding in a world map with tons of levels, multiple power ups, and an extensive enemy list. Combine that with secrets galore and you have a game that you can pick up and play, even to this day, just to see if you can find something new.

Super Mario 64 (1996) - Nintendo 64

Retreading history, Super Mario 64 essentially set the standard for all 3D platforming games, just as the original Super Mario Bros did a decade prior with 2D. With its spot on controls using the newly developed and perfected analog stick, and colorful and crisp 3D polygons that have aged better than most, Super Mario 64 is an essential play for all gamers.

Super Mario Galaxy 2 (2010) - Nintendo Wii

Super Mario Galaxy 2 has everything you could want in a 3D Mario game. In addition to the gravity craziness that the original Super Mario Galaxy introduced, part 2 also brought the series back to having tons of power ups including Yoshi, not to mention having a ridiculous amount of unique and fun boss battles. The level design is both creative and unique leading to multiple playthroughs without experiencing the same thing twice. The ultimate 3D Super Mario game!

MAME Reviews

by Mark Sabbatini

Blaster

Considering Robotron 2084 is my favorite arcade game, you'd think I'd have known long ago there was an official sequel. The fact I and most other gamers didn't probably says a lot.

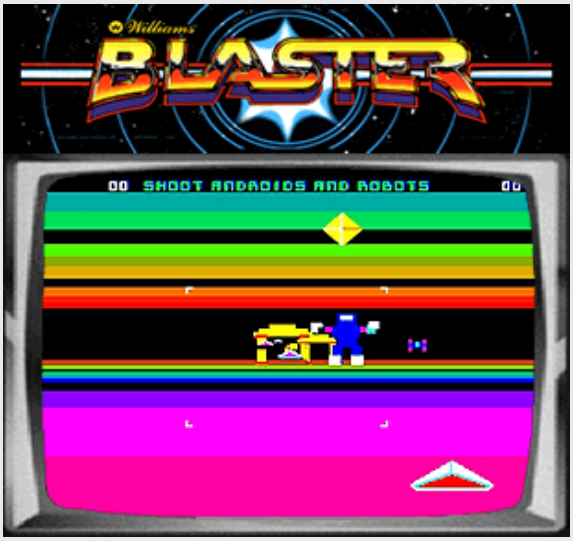
Let's start with the name: Blaster. It's about as generic and non-descriptive as you can get. My immediate association with the word is Astro Blaster, an underrated top-10 vertical shooter IMHO for its creative variety of attacks and special bonuses. Other people doubtless have associations having nothing to do with the 1983 Williams coin-op.

But Defender wasn't a linguistic trailblazer either and it's a household word to anyone who's even looked at a joystick. Plus we're talking about a game by Eugene Jarvis, programmer of the aforementioned Defender and Robotron (not to mention Smash TV in 1990 which is a stellar, if unofficial, Robotron sequel). It's not like anything of his is going to suck.

And, well … Blaster doesn't. Kinda. Sorta.

Basically, it's a too-ambitious attempt to leap into the world of 3D and an overabundance of "greatest hit" touches (i.e. sounds, bonuses, etc.) from previous games. The result is a difficult and confusing mess that emits a lot of cool sounds, but doesn't look or play well despite lots of nifty colors and stages. Also, maybe it's just piling on, but some things I learned researching the game's history definitely took their toll on my previously unbridled affection for Williams Electronics.

That said, I wouldn't be wasting time writing this column just to tell you not to bother with a game you've probably never heard of anyhow. It's definitely worth at least a few plays - and there are devout fans who say it's worth much more - to see some of the ideas Jarvis and his Vid Kidz company were trying in their games for Williams (as compared to so many programmers doing little more than tinkering with commercially safe concepts).



Blaster's origins are a harbinger of the snafus to come, as it was originally written for the Atari eight-bit computers with the idea of converting it to the 5200 for release.

"Vid Kidz was so convinced that the Atari 5200 was going to become one of the greatest systems of all time that they developed Blaster for the Atari 400/800 while they waited for the 5200 hardware to be finalized and released (400/800 code was easily ported to the 5200)," writes Matt Reichert, editor of AtariProtos.com. "However once they showed their prototype to Williams, Williams decided that they wanted to do an arcade version of Blaster because 'The arcade version always came first.'"

Reichert gives high marks to the eight-bit version of Blaster, arguing it likely would have been a hit if released for the 5200 when completed in 1983 (an official release never occurred due to the video game crash). I'm inclined to agree after playing the eight-bit version in an emulator since in some ways it's more enjoyable than the arcade version. My comparison

and mini-review is after the review of the coin-op version since, after all, this is a MAME column.

Williams probably made the right call - if for the wrong reasons - since the 5200 obviously didn't take the home gaming market by storm and one more decent game for that console wouldn't have changed its fortunes. But what landed in arcades feels more like the result of muddled corporate-think than something a programmer created with a clear-minded purpose. That sense of corporate-mindedness is magnified hugely when one reads how the game was marketed to arcade operators - I'd have felt like a chump if I'd come across the operator's manual after actually investing quarters in the machine.

Downloading a copy of the manual, available at The Killer List of Video Games at www.arcade-museum.com/game_detail.php?game_id=7145, is worthwhile for both the corporate insight and the instructions on how to change the game's settings since accessing the DIP switch menu is somewhat tricky. I desperately needed to tweak things to make the game more playable (a.k.a. easier) and, after reading a few pages near the beginning of the manual, it became clear my incompetence wasn't accidental.

"Thorough field and factory research has shown that two-minute games both satisfy players and also keep the quarters flowing," the manual notes, emphasizing average time per play is "your most important figure on the bookkeeping totals screen."

I never timed my arcade games before, but in retrospect I realize some of my favorites such as Marble Madness did tend to last all of about two minutes. However, I was able to play most for considerably longer and I at least had realistic hopes of the same for those I couldn't.

Williams also notes "no other brand of games permits such a broad range of game adjustments." There's certainly a lot of them, with an example of the sinister category requiring the player to purchase a minimum number of credits (i.e. paying a dollar for four credits instead of a quarter for one). But MAME users can take advantage of the wide-ranging settings to do things like start with 20 ships and play the easiest of nine difficulty levels, thus allowing the player enough latitude to figure out what the hell is going on.

Launch the virtual coin-op and the attract mode will get you started on a downer cycle by reminding you the Robotrons were victorious in the Great Battle of 2084 and destroyed the human race. You escaped in a stolen space and your destination is Paradise, "a remote outpost 20 million light years away." Bummer about the Earth but, hey, if it means going another round with the Robotrons then the loss of Dancing With the Stars isn't that unbearable.

Unfortunately, you do go another round - sort of - but only one, at the beginning.

Gameplay in Blaster is from a first-person 3D perspective using a joystick for navigation, a button for thrust and a second button for firing shots. The player starts with three ships on the default setting, each of which can take three hits before being destroyed (an energy bar at the top of the screen indicates the ship's status). Each stage is a light year toward Paradise, and players can opt to start on any of the first four levels. There's also a continue option where players don't just resume where the game ended, but keep their score as well (I won't dwell on whether being able to "buy" a high score is cool or tacky).

The Robotron grunts make their sole appearance on the first wave, but they don't look or behave much like they do in 2D (not to mention there's a relative scarcity of them). The wave generally involves avoiding obstacles and shooting a few different types of enemies while flying through "gates" on a planetary surface. If this sounds generic and vague, then it successfully captures the experience of a video game suffering from a couple of critical flaws.

The first and most important is the 3D graphics are a mess. It's hard to tell what a lot of the objects on the screen are and they become horribly pixelated as they grow in size, resembling those Atari 2600 sprites that turn into huge blobs of boxes when you increase their scale. Everything zips around and past quickly - too quickly to ever get a full grip on

the situation. From the start I didn't have much strategy beyond just firing continuously and trying to avoid anything that didn't look like an obvious bonus or power-up.

Second, while there are (I believe) eight different types of waves en route to Paradise, the diversity of gameplay is far less than the total suggests. Essentially you try to destroy all the enemies on most waves, sometimes getting some large point bonuses for hitting all of them, except for Time Tunnel waves where you try to score points by rescuing drifting astronauts. Sometimes you'll be fighting enemies on planets, other times in asteroid fields or outer space. But the befuddling experience makes waves less distinctive than the themed waves in Williams classics like Robotron and Joust.

There's also a sense that, instead of playing an original game, you're playing something assembled from bits and pieces of other titles. Most of the audio is straight from Defender and Robotron, although the transition between waves sounds and looks remarkably like Tempest. The cracked windshield effect when you die is copied from Battlezone. Most of the space battles feel like inferior relatives of the Star Raiders/Star Wars/Star Trek family. And so on.

Finally, while I won't give away the "ending" for those wishing to persevere, let's just say reaching Paradise is a less than utopian experience. Afterward you're sent back to the equivalent of wave 10 and the ability to continue a finished game is eliminated, thus putting at least some limit on the ability to purchase scores.

Because I ultimately slogged through Blaster by maximizing my initial ships at 20 and minimizing the difficulty it's fair to accuse me of not getting immersed in the nuances enough to fully appreciate the game. But I found Blaster trying to cram so many elements into the game that they lost the ability to be distinctive, much like a pizza once you get past the first four or so toppings. Combine that with the massive quarter-robbing difficulty and it's easy to see why this flopped despite its marquee makers. It's got a rarity rating of 15 out of 100 at the KLVG, which is actually higher than I expected, although the also-obscure Joust 2 has a rating of 21 on the scale.

"It was a bummer that Blaster's primitive 3-D hardware system was too expensive to be widely distributed," Jarvis said in an interview in James Hague's book "Halcyon Days" (free online at www.dadgum.com/halcyon/index.html). "Bottom line: the fun in the business is seeing your game get played. If nobody plays a game you busted ass on for two years, you feel like your life's work is an abandoned piece of garbage."

The game is probably not as unknown among home console players since it's part of "Midway Arcade Treasures" or "Midway Classics Volume II" for the PlayStation 2, GameCube, IBM PC, and Xbox.

Also, speaking of home machines, the previously mentioned Atari eight-bit version that originated the project benefits from some things that usually make conversions inferior on early consoles: it's slower, simpler and expectations are lower. There's only four waves that cycle continuously. Because the action is slower it's both more playable and easier to depict what's going on. The graphics are stripped down, but that's not all bad and they don't have to do much to be competitive with the coin-op version. The sound is close to dead-on accurate. It's possible the 5200 joysticks would have negated all this, but non-centering controllers usually are a decent choice for flight games and the question is academic anyhow,

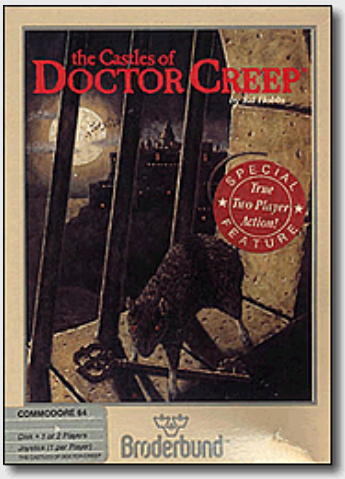
Finally, as is almost always the case, there's at least one internet fan site, even if it's a weak one. The "Official Blaster Game Registry" has a list of 10 owners of machines and is seeking others ("I have enough bandwidth to handle the traffic," the host rather optimistically promises). The registry is at www.barrettebaron.com/arcade/arcade_game_blaster.php.

Commodore Du Jour

by Marc Douglas

The Castles Of Dr. Creep

Wow! October already. Where is the year going? Well, one good thing about time flying is that I get to go back and review another game that I have ignored for far too long. Since it is the month of Halloween, I had to find a proper game that conveyed the mood. It didn't take me long to find the floppy and load up another game that stole many days of my youth, "The Castles of Doctor Creep" by Broderbund and Ed Hobbs.



Creep is a puzzle action game where you as the main character, have the unenviable task of trying to escape from the 14 castles of the mad doctor. You will face all sorts of devious traps and puzzles along with two scary enemies in the form of The Mummy (who can only torment you on the level you are on) and Frankenstein (who can use ladders and poles). While you are avoiding those two terrors, you will also have to deal with…

- Ray Guns
- Matter Transmitters
- Trap doors
- Force Fields
- Lightning Machines
- Moving Sidewalks
- And having to find the proper colored key to open its lock

Now I know it seems like a lot, and it is actually very impressive that all this was crammed into the C64. But as you go from room to room, you will begin to see that there is a method to Mr. Hobbs' madness. You will have to run from room to room many times over to finally get to that key, or to open that final door that will lead to the final exit.

Now you do have some advantages that I suggest you use. First, you can use the ray gun and the trap doors to your advantage. Almost 30 years later, it is still fun to trap a mummy over a trap door and watch him vanish, never to return. You can also control the ray gun and the lightning machines so you do have some weapons at your disposal. But sometimes you have to be very quick with your decisions as you may have to hit the button to lower the force field, run down a ladder, hit a switch to move a trap door and then make it out before the force field snaps back on. At times it is frustrating, but you also get that feeling of accomplishment when you pull it off. And if you do get stuck, you can kill off your character by hitting the RESTORE key. But remember, you only have three lives unless you are emulating where you can find a cracked version of the game that lets you have unlimited lives.

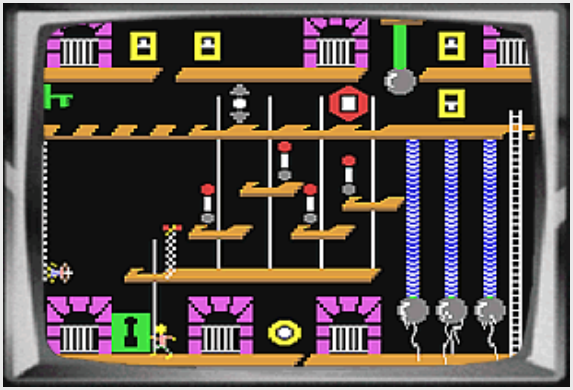
A very nice touch when you first play the game is the tutorial castle. The tutorial is interactive and gives you a chance to play with all the items that you will encounter when you start exploring the castles. Another bonus is that like all the other castles, the tutorial is timed and you can save your best times to the disk. If you play the tutorial right, you can make it out in under a minute. The other castles will take a bit longer to solve.

So how does Creep hold up after 27 years? Pretty darn good. The graphics are colorful and large, yet well defined. The mummy lumbers after you and Frankenstein has a knack of homing in on you. Your character is nicely animated and as he runs, his hands wave wildly

making it look like you are going faster than you actually are. The levels have a quasi-3D feel and are well laid out though at times you will wander into a room and wonder just how the heck you're going to solve it. Seeing multiple force fields, ray guns and lightning generators can be overwhelming at first. Add to that a matter transmitter and you'll want to drop the joystick and run for safety. I am also impressed that when you run by an Ankh which activates the mummy, a panel in the wall will slide open and the mummy begins to come after you. If you kill the mummy, the panel stays open. No respawning here, which is a welcome relief. One thing any classic gamer will notice is that the Atari 8-bit font is used which makes me believe that there was going to be an Atari port, but as far as I know, Creep was for the Commodore 64 only.

The map of the castle shows all available exits and each room has a different color that will match the color of the floor of the door you exit the current room in. You cannot access the floor plans while in a room, but it is not a drawback.

Sounds are well done. When you flip a switch, you can almost feel the thunk. When you run by a Frankenstein, he growls and comes after you. Very appropriate for the Halloween season. There is no music, but I didn't miss it. I would have loved to hear the lightning crackle as it shoots out from the generators, but alas, it was not meant to be.



My main complaint are the joystick controls. You have to be lined up perfectly to go down a ladder or pole and exiting a level needs a gentle touch. You have to use combinations of joystick moves and button presses to use the ray gun, open a trap door and so on. If there was a game that made me wish that the Commodore 64 controller had more than one button, this is it. But as you play, you'll get accustomed to the controls and you'll be escaping the castle in no time.

The game has great replay value as there are 13 castles along with the tutorial. Some of the castle's names which add to the feel of the game are…

- Lovecraft
- Baskerville
- Doublecross
- Romania

In conclusion (and I apologize that this review is a little shorter this month) I will be going back to Creep around some more. I really forgot how much fun this game was and still is. It also goes to show that back then, Broderbund was not just the company that made Lode Runner.

SCORE My spooky score this month is...8.5 (out of 10), definitely worth playing!

Have a great October and I'll see you next month!

Apple II Incider

by Donald Lee

Mystery House

It's October and time for our Halloween themed game for the Apple II. I had to poke around a few different games before settling on the classic Mystery House.

As noted in the Mystery House entry on Wiki, the game was developed by Ken and Roberta Williams and released in 1980. Mystery House's main claim to fame was that it was the FIRST adventure games to utilize text and graphics. Most previous adventure games had purely been texted based. The game also eventually helped Ken and Roberta Williams launch their company Sierra On-Line. Sierra On-Line would go on to create some classics such as King's Quest and Space Quest during the late 1980's and early 1990's.

As for the game itself, it was interesting but it took me a little time to get used to it. Unlike arcade or action games where you can learn to play fairly quickly, adventure games are a little more difficult. The one stumbling block for me was trying to figure out the text commands I could use to go through the game. I stumbled around a bit before figuring out some commands myself and getting some other commands from the Internet.

After playing the game a bit and taking a step back, I had to remind myself of several things. Mystery House was developed in 1980 and only needed one disk. With the addition of graphics to the game, it would appear that some sacrifices had to be made. My best guess is the command parser had to be simplified so the graphics for the game could be stored on the disk. For those used to Infocom games and its advanced parser, it's best to tone those expectations down a bit.

Overall, Mystery House is a classic but it's a little dated. I'm not much of an adventure/text gamer but wanted to give this classic a shot. It was a tough experience but I'm still glad I tried it out. For those who are adventure/text gaming fans, I do suggest giving it a shot as well. For those looking for more action oriented games, this one is not for you.

Vectrexenstein

by Donald Lee

WebWars

He's Back! Who is back you might ask? It's Vectrexenstein! Vectrexenstein has been busy exploring the World Wide Web in recent months but decided to swing by for the annual Halloween issue of RTM.

It's interesting that Vectrexenstein has been exploring the web recently as this month we will take a look at a game called WebWars on the Vectrex. Given the game was created in the 1980's, this has nothing to do with the World Wide Web or the Internet. It also does not play like any of the current Facebook games like Mafia Wars.

Upon first impression, WebWars reminded me of an old arcade game called Tempest. While I never played Tempest extensively at the arcades, the game play mechanics of WebWars is quite similar. If you know how to play Tempest, you will be able to play WebWars quite well.

Like Tempest, WebWars gives you a ship that you can maneuver around at the bottom of the screen. There are some differences though. In Tempest, you are primarily shooting and avoiding enemies to stay alive.

In WebWars, you are shooting as well but also attempting to capture creatures. According to documentation I found on the Internet, there are 20 creatures you are supposed to capture during the course of the game. If you do happen to capture a creature, an entrance to the trophy room will appear. You need to maneuver your ship to this entrance to deposit your captured creatures.

If you are unable to capture creatures or enter the trophy room after capturing a creature, a dragon will appear. Unfortunately, there is no way for you to destroy this dragon. All you can do is try to avoid him while he shoots out fireballs.

In playing this game, I was impressed by how easy it was to get into. However, as you have seen, the game is a little different than Tempest. I had to do a little research on the Internet to better understand the full game mechanics as it does differ from Tempest. Once I got a better understanding, I was able to play the game much better.

WebWars takes good advantage of the Vectrex graphics to simulate 3D quite effectively. The sound effects are decent and serve their purpose. In summary, I would say that WebWars is one of those Vectrex games that demonstrates the system's capabilities at its best. Definitely worth checking out if you haven't played it previously.

Dual Perspective

by James Sorge

Castlevania

Hello, and this is James Sorge back with Dual Perspective, the column that reviews games from both the playing and World Record Perspectives. This month, the victim is Castlevania, the Dracula game that started it all for the NES.

Graphics: 9.5/10

This game looks good even today. Everything is well detailed and well drawn, and the palette is generally not a mess. My only gripe is a yellow Simon Belmont, but there are worse…Pink Simon in Castlevania: Harmony of Despair.

Sound: 10/10

The first stage theme, “Vampire Killer”, is a timeless classic. It has been in virtually every Castlevania game save Simon’s Quest. The rest of the game sounds good too. I think this is how the game stayed popular with the casual crowd after the difficulty problems.

Difficulty: 9.5/10

Just because Twin Galaxies and Speed Demos Archives do this for sport, doesn’t mean that the game is still brutally hard. Many people can’t beat the game who do it for score. I got good at it recently; however, it took me years to get there.

Replay Factor: 9/10

Good sound, good music, not horrible graphics for the NES. Plus, you fight Dracula, one of the most popular vampires of all time. Can it get any better?

The World Record Perspective:

As far as speed goes, FunkDoc has this cornered, but there is a lot of competition out there. The Twin Galaxies run has no wall skip glitches in Stage 4. Points wise, this one goes to Mexico and Juan Castellanos. He beat the legendary 10 million score of Tom Votava.

- Points Record:11,815,540, Juan Castellanos
- Speed Record (no glitches): 13 minutes 8 seconds Twin Galaxies, Ian Greenwood
- Speed Record (with glitches): 12 minutes 6 seconds, Josh “FunkDoc” Ballard, wall-skipping glitches

The Penguin Says:

"A timeless classic, pick it up for Halloween! Score is still wide open and not in the 8 hour marathon range if you’re good enough to play it (still will need to play 4 hours or more). Speed, forget it. You’re only chopping a few seconds off at best. Pick another game. Overall this one gets a sweet 10/10, with a world record potential of 4/5 (points), 0/5 (speed)."

NES'cade

by David Lundin, Jr.

Chiller

For a video game console mainly marketed to children, there were a surprising amount of horror themed games on the NES. Of course we all know about the games based on Friday the 13th and A Nightmare on Elm Street and of course the spectacular Castlevania series. There are still many other titles that could be loosely considered horror themed or at the very least Halloween appropriate. However there is one game that is both distinctly horror themed and is also a conversion of an original arcade title, that game is Chiller. Originally released in 1986 by early arcade powerhouse Exidy, Chiller is a shooting game that uses a fixed mount lightgun, similar to other Exidy titles Cheyenne and Crossbow. What makes the game different from those titles, and pretty much every other shooter, is the subject matter. Instead of blasting away at objects simply for points or to protect characters on the screen, here you take on the role of the bad guy. Yes, in Chiller nearly everyone and everything can be blasted away. Still doesn't sound like anything different? Well the gruesome detail and the horrific nature in which your targets meet their demise is what sets Chiller apart.

The first screen opens up to a torture chamber with nearly nude men and women chained to the walls or strapped into various torture devices. Blood and body parts litter the floor with decapitated heads displayed upon a shelf. Free these people? Stop whoever did this to them? No, not here, your objective is to blast them apart. The poor fool in the guillotine? Shoot the blade free and watch his head pop off. The guy with his head in a vise? Be sure to shoot the crank to get the vise to crush his head. As the tortures are performed and the bodies are shot to shreds, more blood and gore is displayed. The objective is to kill every victim as quickly as possible. While simply shooting everyone to death will take care of the objective, incredibly, you are actually awarded more points for using the torture devices. There are a set amount of shots you must connect with before the timer runs down to advance to the next screen. Missed shots will cause the timer to run down faster. Eliminating key targets will award a slot machine based bonus round upon competition of the current stage. The second area is a rack room, complete with a river of blood and various victims helplessly secured to torture devices. Area three is a hallway in a spooky mansion filled with ghosts and ghouls. The fourth and final area is a graveyard with the dead rising from their graves. If you're able to clear out all the key targets in each of the four areas then you are taken to the bonus round, a rather tame target shooting experience compared to the rest of the game.

Arcade Original

NES Version

I'm sure no one in their right mind at this point would expect a home version to be licensed by Nintendo and it isn't. Chiller made its way to the NES in 1990, courtesy of an unlicensed release by American Game Cartridges which was actually a subsidiary of ShareData, a small computer software publisher. Chiller was their first NES release and while

the ties between AGCI / ShareData and other unlicensed third party developers goes beyond the scope of this column, Chiller was not developed in-house. This explains the title screen on the NES version, "Chiller For ShareData." The NES version is interesting in that it is the only game on the hardware that can use two Zapper lightguns. Alternatively the game can also be played via the standard NES control pad, in which an on screen cross hair is moved with the directional pad.

While each of the four areas make it over onto the NES, there are quite a few changes. Most notably the stage order has been reversed, so the NES version begins at the graveyard, saving the more graphic areas for later. The coloring is a little different between the two versions and the NES graphics take a hit but nothing is all that different from how it was before. Graphics that originally scaled or had a transparent effect have been replaced with standard moving sprites. Originally the woman in the center of the graveyard could have her clothes shot off, which was removed in the NES version, although she still gets shot to pieces just the same. Also originally the graveyard scene had a monk pushing a cart full of body parts across the screen. On the NES this was changed to a nun pushing a baby carriage. However the nun and carriage can still be shot and most would consider the NES sprite change to be even more offensive to the original monk and cart. Torture victims are shot apart with less detail and the amount of body parts strewn throughout the later torture areas is also lessened on the NES but it's still just as disturbing and gory. Audio is pretty poor on the NES while the arcade version had an appropriate mix of shrikes and screams that built up a solid feeling of atmosphere along with classic sounding horror music. The biggest and most head scratching change however comes in the form of added back story to the NES version. In an attempt to lessen the violent context of the game, the victims are now monsters who have come back from the dead and it's up to you to stop the growing forces of darkness. The key objects used to access the bonus areas in the arcade version are now called talismans and your underlying objective is to find them all to stop the monsters from appearing. I don't know about you but those "monsters" chained to torture racks look like terrified regular people to me.

While I understand that the arcade version has a cult following due to it simply being an Exidy shooter along with the other games they developed on the same hardware, personally I just can't stomach Chiller for long stretches. If you've never played Chiller in the arcade it was probably due to another controversial game Exidy released years before in 1976, Death Race. While doing research prior to writing this column I came across many sources that said due to the negative press Death Race got when it was released, many arcade operators refused to purchase Chiller for fear of public backlash. Don't get me wrong, I love Exidy, even though my favorite Exidy game is trivia based (Fax) and only one cabinet of my second favorite Exidy game was ever produced as a prototype (Teeter Torture). Exidy made some awesome games including the classics Venture and Mouse Trap, arcade classics that I'm sure every Colecovision owner is familiar with. Chiller is just one of those games that dances a little too far over the line for most people which is why it's not often seen or remembered. The NES version is a tough cartridge to find and the value is all over the map on this one. While blasting away at ghouls and zombies is standard fare for action and horror games, executing innocent people via torture devices is something that thankfully didn't become a genre onto itself. I'd say this one is a curiosity at best but if you're looking for something disturbingly over the top for your NES, you can't really get farther away from the norm than Chiller.

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

The Pixelated Mage

by Jeff Wittenhagen

Splatterhouse 2

Platform: Sega Genesis
Developer: Now Production
Release Date: 1992
Genre: Horror, Beat 'em Up
Game Modes: Single Player
Tag Line: "A festival of flesh and mayhem."

Synopsis

Splatterhouse 2 is the sequel to the extremely famous arcade and TurboGrafx 16 game that takes everything from the original and gives us even more blood, guts, and gore to wet our whistles. The story is simple, it has been three months since the events that took place in the original Splatterhouse and the Terror Mask has reformed after breaking during the climax of the first game. The mask appears to Rick and convinces him to "go back to the house" as Jennifer "doesn't have to die" and repeatedly tells him that he needs the mask.

In the western release, the Terror Mask is more skull-like, whereas it looks more like a Japanese kabuki mask in the Japanese version with black stripes over each eye. Also, in the Japanese version, the story is much clearer in that Jennifer is in the land of the dead unlike the western release which leaves this important plot point ambiguous. This omission confused western gamers who didn't realize that the mansion in Splatterhouse 2 is not the same mansion from the original. The ruins that you trudge through during the first stage are in fact what's left of the West Mansion, which can also been seen in the opening of the game where the "hidden house" is revealed.

Gameplay

The gameplay in Splatterhouse 2 is extremely similar to the original game. You control Rick through the eight different stages where he basically has the same throwing punches, kicks, jump kicks, slide kicks, and uses several weapons to destroy anything that gets in his path. Each level has a boss at the end that you must defeat in order to progress further, often decaying as you beat them down. One notable addition to the gameplay is an added difficulty setting and password system to continue, which was present in the Japan-only released Splatterhouse: Wanpaku Graffiti for the Nintendo Famicom.

Graphics and Sound

The graphics are as dark and gruesome as ever which personifies the Splatterhouse feel to a "T". The gore seems to have been turned up a notch, if that is even possible as the original was also a festival of flesh and mayhem. The game has a gritty feel to it not only graphically but also musically. The music feels like it belongs in a horror movie which is exactly the tone that the series sets so perfectly. Every song is ominous, and while they aren't memorable per se, they still get your blood pumping as you engage in the on screen action.

Why You Should Play It

Splatterhouse 2 takes everything that made the original game so good and recreates the magic once again. There is nothing better to horror movie fans than getting to play as an icon that mirrors a deranged psychopathic serial killer such as in this case with Jason Voorhees. Not only do you get to do that with Rick, but they do such impressive storytelling you actually truly feel for him as a hero and want him to succeed in rescuing his girlfriend Jennifer from the abyss of the “Hidden Mansion”.

Rating = 4 Sexy Priestess 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 September. Enjoy!

WiiWare

escapeVektor: Chapter 1 (Video to the right)

[redacted]

For sure the WiiWare highlight of the month! Take control of Vektor. 30 levels, 5 worlds, enemies and weapons. Similar to Qix. Excellent “retroware” graphics and music. Buy it now!

Trenches Generals (Click here to see a video of the game)

A tower-defense game made for the Wii. Single-player campaign, splitscreen co-op and competitive multiplayer.

DSiWare

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

[redacted]

Remastered 3D version of the shmup arcade classic.

Break Tactics (Click here to see a video of the game)

A full-scale tactics game.

Defense of the Middle Kingdom (Click here to see a video of the game)

Another tower-defense game. Includes an epic story from the Three Kingdoms in Chinese history.

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

Very fun game that is similar to Dodge ‘Em for Atari 2600. Collect the coins, dodge the other cars use items. Great “retroware” look. But it now!

Legend of Zelda: Four Swords Anniversary Edition (Video to the right)

An updated version of the GameBoy Advance game. All new stages and modes for this edition! Oh yeah, and it is free! Download it now!

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.

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

32 holes, 2 full courses with hazards that change every time you play!

Mega Man: Dr Wily's Revenge (Gameboy) (Click here to see a video of the game)

The first Mega Man game for GameBoy. Similar to Mega Man and Mega Man 2 for NES, but only 6 stages.

Pac-Man (Gameboy) (Click here to see a video of the game)

This Pac-Man is similar to the NES Pac-Man, which is not really a good thing.

Super Mario Land 2: 6 Golden Coins (Gameboy) (Video to the right)

The greatest Mario game for GameBoy?

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!

Thanks for visiting our spooky abode this month. Come back next month for more retrogaming madness if you dare. By then all the back issues should be indexed and I'll be able to give you a better timeframe as to when you might be able to search through all the hard work that has been done for this magazine. I know that I have been pretty impressed with what has been done through the years. I am especially amazed that even without a way to search through the back issues, I have yet to run into duplicate columns, where someone looked at an issue or game that had been discussed in the magazine previously. I do know one thing, once this index is done, you will have access to a goldmine of articles on the classic gaming hobby! Until next time!