Printing Help

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POWERING DOWN

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It's Easter time already? Wow! Feels like the Christmas issue just came out not that long ago. There's actually a lot going on which needs to be announced this month so be sure to stop on by the Retrogaming News section to see it all.

Here's something to ponder that I have not thought of too much. I came across a Pong clone on the Internet and read that that particular model was actually a clone of a clone. Stop right there, a clone of a clone? I never really thought too much into it, but I guess it would be possible. At first I was like how would you know the clone was of a clone and not just a clone of the original? Well, in this case I guess it was obvious as the Pong system looked identical to one of the many Pong clones out there, but it was not made by the manufacturer of the initial clone. Confused? Probably, but if you think about it, it is possible to have a clone of a clone, something which I never really thought about before and makes for an interesting opening to this month's RTM as it gives you something to ponder. How many clones of clones can you think of? Are there any clones of clones of clones? And do clones get worse with each progressive cloning? With that in mind, let's get to the April issue of RTM. Maybe in the future we should have a clone-themed issue…that sounds interesting!

Retrogaming News

ANNOUNCEMENTS

A.N.A.L.O.G. Magazines Available In Full Text

Big news! we've added the full text of 10 issues of A.N.A.L.O.G. Magazine to AtariMagazines.com . A.N.A.L.O.G. magazine was devoted primarily to 8-bit Atari computers, with some emphasis in later years on Atari ST computers. It was published from 1981 to 1989. In April 1988 (issue 59), the magazine was purchased by Larry Flynt Publishing (yeah, the adult magazine people). This site has permission to offer the full text of A.N.A.L.O.G. during LFP's ownership -- 21 issues from April 1988 through December 1989. To start, I have 10 of those issues for you.

There's so much good stuff in those magazines, it's hard picking just a couple of the best to mention here. How about What's New In Consumer Electronics (1989 edition) and Joyce Worley's History of Video Gaming? (Well, part 1 anyway).

Hidden Treasures: Rare & Unappreciated Gems Book Hits The Shelves

RTM's own Jeff Wittenhagen has just published his first book, Hidden Treasures: Rare & Unappreciated Gems! If he gets enough people to pre-order the printed copy he can then do a full color print run. Follow the above link to find out more on this new book.

EVENTS

Pax East 2012

Friday, April 6 - Sunday, April 8 (Boston, MA)

PAX East is a three-day game festival for tabletop, videogame, and PC gamers. We call it a festival because in addition to dedicated tournaments and freeplay areas we've got nerdcore concerts, panel discussions, and an exhibitor hall filled with booths displaying the latest from top game publishers and developers. Even with all this amazing content the best part of PAX East is hanging out with other people who know their stuff when it comes to games.

The American Classic Arcade Museum will be hosting a pinball and coin operated video game panel discussion session in addition to having a free arcade of coin-op games. To read more and see if you want to drop by, check the link above.

Cowlitz Gamers For Kids 2012

Saturday, April 28 10:00am – 5:00pm (Kelso, WA)

I am happy to announce the 3rd Annual Cowlitz Gamers for Kids Charity Videogame show to help raise funds for the Childrens Justice and Advocacy Center(CJAC). Over the last two years, the show has helped raise over 4,000 to the Childrens Justice and Advocacy Center (CJAC) and we're convinced we can do better this year with your help!

PRGE is once again absorbing much of the cost of putting on this show so that 100% of the admission will go directly to CJAC. It is CJAC's mission to provide children who have experienced sexual or physical abuse a coordinated community approach to investigation, prosecution and treatment that promotes their safety, healing, and well-being.

The show will be on Saturday, April 28, 2012 at the THREE RIVERS MALL in Kelso, WA. THIS YEARS EVENT WILL BE IN A VACANT MALL BUILDING WITH OVER 42,00 SQ FEET! Kelso is about 1 hour north of Portland or 2 hours south of Seattle on I-5. Doors open at 10:00 AM until 5:00 PM. Admission is a suggested donation of $5 to CJAC, although we invite you to contribute more if you can!

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.

Book Of The Month Club

by Donald Lee

Game Machines 1972-2012

Continuing the trend of branching out into different avenues in RTM, I take a look at an interesting book entitled "Game Machines 1972-2012: The Encyclopedia of Consoles, Handhelds & Home Computers (Game Machine Moving Forward)."

Toward the end of 2011, RTM received an email from Heinrich Lenhardt looking to send out promotional copy of the Game Machines book for review. As I figured Bryan would be busy, I requested that the promotional copy of the book be mailed to me. About a week or so later, I received the book. Unfortunately, I have been busy and did not get around to reading the book until now, so here's an overview of the book along with some positives/negatives from my perspective.

OVERVIEW

As the title indicates, Game Machines is focused on consoles, handhelds and home computers from 1972-2012. The book is laid out well with introductory information about the hardware, and chapters are laid out well with information on computer technology (bits, bytes, storage media and optical media).

The hardware section of the book is divided into six eras:

1st Era: 1972-1981
2nd Era: 1982-1984
3rd Era: 1984-1990
4th Era: 1991-1997
5th Era: 1998-2004
6th Era: 2005-2011

Every system that is covered in the book is fitted into the eras based on the year the system was introduced. Every system covered has several pages of history and photographs of the systems or accessories.

The book concludes with a lengthy appendix which covers several systems not in the main parts of the book, as well as more information on all the systems that were previously covered.

POSITIVES

Over my lifetime, I have read quite a few books on video game and computer gaming history. So while Game Machines is not a game book, it was an easy book to read because I like history in general. As I used the Apple II and Atari 5200 extensively, I jumped to those chapters first. I would later move around to other chapters to learn more about other systems.

The book is in paperback format and a breezy 248 pages. It is very light reading for a day at the library or even a cross country plane ride. Besides the history itself, the photographs of the various systems are in color and look great.

NEGATIVES

For someone looking for more details about the individual systems or company history, this is not the right book for you. To cover so many details in 248 pages, some sacrifices had to be made.

I believe this book will likely appeal to someone like me who likes video games AND history. However, people have to be curious about the hardware side versus the gaming/software side. If you put together a book featuring retro video games, there is a good chance that many readers will have played a good number of the games and at least heard of the ones that they have never played.

But when it comes to video game consoles and computer systems, not everyone had the money or luxury to own more than two systems. Thus, this book may be of limited interest if the reader just wants to read about the few systems they owned.

Additionally, the book has a lot of hardware specifications. Unless you're a super tech geek, most of the tech specifications will go right over your head. In fact, there is no way to verify if the specifications are correct unless you want to look up the information on the Internet.

CONCLUSION

While it seems I wrote more negatives than positives, I was just trying to look at the book from as many sides as possible. I personally enjoyed reading it, even if the technical specifications didn't quite stick. Just reading how some of the systems originated and some of the basic company information was good enough for me.

All in all, I do recommend the book as a nice overview to the various systems that have been around since 1972 and It makes a good complement to some of the computer game history books that are out there. I'll get to some of those books down the road.

Commodore Du Jour

by Marc Douglas

Star Fleet I: The War Begins

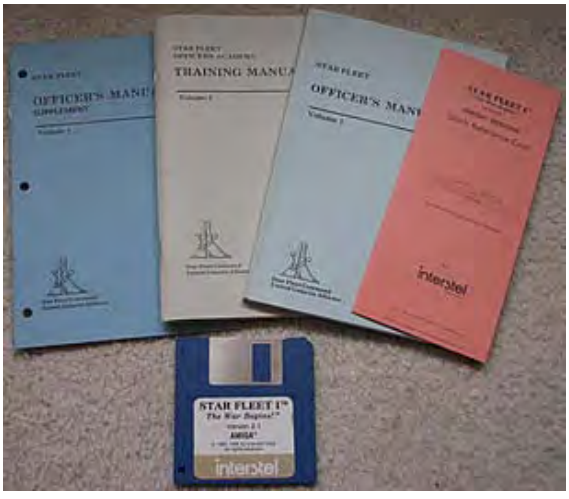
Welcome back, all. I hope the year has been treating everyone well so far. I have to admit that I thought I would get my first Amiga review done before now, but the sampling I had last month really brought back some great memories of my teenage years when the Amiga was (even though it was short) the king of the hill. After firing up my 500, I knew exactly which game I was going to pop in for this month's trip into the past.

Star Fleet I
The War Begins
By Interstel formerly Cygnus

SFI is an adaptation of the classic Star Trek mainframe game from the early days of computing. In that version, you would explore (On the USS Enterprise) the galaxy hunting down Klingons and Romulans. There was a time limit, in Stardates to complete the mission. To assist you during your time as Captain Kirk, there were also Starbases that could replenish your energy and repair the Enterprise. I remember playing a version of this game on my C-64. It was on a Load-N-Go collection that had that and I believe two other updated versions on the same disk. I may still have the original disk somewhere in my collection. I enjoyed playing that 64 version as I was a huge Trek fan in the 80s and still am today. Back in my high school days, a friend had gotten an Amiga 500 and told me to stop over so he could show me this new game he had gotten. So I went over…

And I saw Star Fleet I for the first time. Wow! this was a major upgrade from the 64 version. There were the obvious changes that had to be made. Klingons became Krellans and Romulans became Zaldrons. You had 32 different starships to choose from and of course none could be named, the Enterprise. Instead of USS we had U.G.A.S.

But many things in SFI were similar to Star Trek. There were Starbases. There was a Star Fleet organization in the game. Your ship had Phasers and Torpedoes at its disposal. You could also invade an enemy vessel by using a Transporter. You also have a Tractor Beam at your disposal to tow ships to a Starbase.



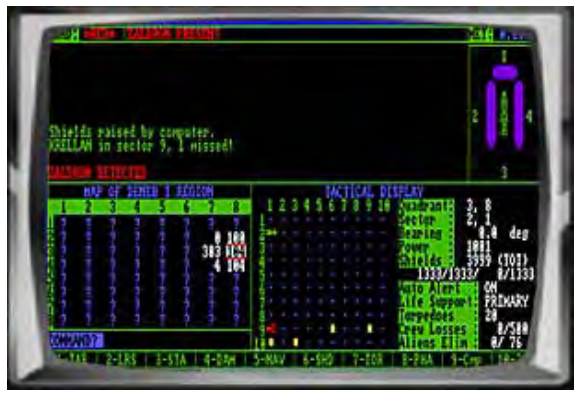
What really makes SFI stand out is that when you create a fleet cadet, you are embarking on a career that can go on for as long as you keep booting up the game. As a cadet, you will be introduced to the game gradually through training missions that are there to get you used to the game interface and the various elements of gameplay. But before you are sent to the training simulator, you must give your cadet a name and a password. For a game from 1985/86, the level of security in the game is impressive. Besides giving your cadet a password, if you even need to go into the game as an administrator, you can password protect that as well. As an admin, you have access to all personnel and the related files. Really neat stuff for a high school kid.

You've created your cadet and now it's time to go into training. As a cadet, you do not get to choose your ship, you are given a training vessel and your orders from Star Fleet. The orders will state what region you are

assigned to (Deneb, Antares, etc…) how many enemies you must eliminate along with how many days you have and finally, how many starbases are in the region. Once you have read your orders, you are transported to you ship and the fun begins. The number of enemies you need to destroy will depend on the type of mission you choose, long, medium or short. Short missions usually max out at 30 enemies. Medium mission in the 50 to 60 range. Long missions can hit 80 enemies and up.

The screen is broken down from top to bottom as follows…

- An information bar that gives current condition (green or red) if a Zaldron is present and how much time you have left to complete your assignment
- Next, the main display that will give you any information pertinent to your assignment. (Shields raised, damage taken, an intruder alert and so on) To the right of this is your shield display that shows what shields are up and how much power is left in each
- Next, the main map or the region. This is an 8 x 8 map that begins blank but as you explore, you can find out the following three things that can be in each quadrant. Number of Krellans, if a starbase is present and the number of stars in the quadrant, an unexplored quadrant will be represented with a "?". To the right of this display is the tactical display which shows the current quadrant you are in represented by a 10 x 10 grid. Next to that is your current ship status that tells you how much power and how many torpedoes you have left along with the number of enemies you have killed and so on.
- Finally, the menu commands are at the bottom. You can choose these with either the mouse, or the function keys on the keyboard (F1 - F10)



In the training missions, you will never find enemies in your starting quadrant. This gives you a chance to set your strategy, do a long range scan of the surrounding quadrants or if you want, you can launch a probe to see what is out there. Most likely, there will be a Krellan hanging out in an adjoining quadrant. Using your mouse, you will select your targeting computer which will allow you to choose with quadrant you want to travel to and what sector you want your ship to end in. The computer will calculate angle and power needed all you will have to dim is click ok and you're off.

When you arrive in a quadrant with an enemy, the computer will sound the red alert and the Amiga will tell you as well using the default male speech voice. Your ship comes with an Auto Alert Switch (AAS) that will handle all shield control, as long as the AAS is on, you do not have to worry about shields. What you will control, is what weapon system (Phasers or Photons) you will use to destroy your enemy. At first you will only face Krellans, the Zaldrons will become a part of the game later. You can have the computer automatically target, or you can do it manually. This is true for both phasers and torps. If you choose phasers, you can either destroy, or disable the enemy. Whichever you choose, the computer will calculate the power needed. The farther away the enemy the more power needed for phasers. Torpedoes need the same power no matter the distance.

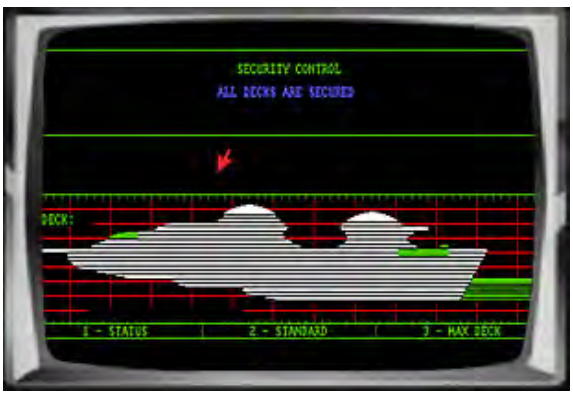
After you have made your decisions, the enemy will fire. The closer they are to you, the better chance they have of hitting. If you are hit, your ship on the tactical display will show the phaser hit and your shield display will change if you have taken enough damage. When you fire, you will hear the phaser sound and if you destroy the enemy, it will blow up with a nice explosion graphic and an appropriate explosion sound. If you use Torpedoes, you will hear them being fired and you can watch them as they find their target. Torpedoes can be deflected so keep that in mind when deciding your combat options.

In later levels, in the middle of combat, a Zaldron can enter the quadrant. Like Trek's Romulans, they have a cloaking device that makes them a pain to lock on to and destroy. But if you are lucky, after they fire, the sector they are in will blink for a moment, giving you an idea of when to fire a phaser or sling a torpedo. In can get exciting when you enter a quadrant with five Krellans attacking a starbase and then have a Zaldron enter the quadrant and beam someone over to my ship who then begins to knock out my ships systems (If your life support goes, you have BIG problems) right after I have launched my last torpedo at an enemy.

If you survive, and you decided to disable an enemy instead of destroying it, you can put the ship in your tractor beam and then beam over a squad of Space Marines who will try to take prisoners and transfer any left over power the ship may have in its reserves to your ship. Be careful, when you beam over your squad, you must lower your shields and guess what can happen? That's right, a Zaldron will usually enter the quadrant really putting your plans in a bind. Smart use of you AAS will help you during these moments. After you capture the ship, you can tow it to a starbase and drop it off along with any prisoners you have. This will help your final mission rating which if high enough, can net you some nice awards that will become a part of your service record. Again, you have to be careful because after you get to level three, a prisoner can break free and wreak havoc to your ship. You do have a security patrol that you can assign to search decks in hopes they will capture the intruder. If you make it to a Starbase, the prisoner is automatically captured.

While docked, the Starbase will refuel and repair your ship. If an enemy attacks while you are docked, the base will absorb the damage. That's great, but if the base is destroyed while you are in it, then you are destroyed as well! Also, the more stars that are in a quadrant help a starbase recharge its shields quicker. On good thing about fighting in a quadrant with a base is that the base has a phaser and if it destroys a ship, you will have one less ship to destroy to finish your mission.

If I were to tell you all that SFI has to offer, this review could reach 10 pages. So I think I will just give you some highlights that you will discover while playing the game…



- There are 10 levels in the game, as you reach the higher levels, you will rise in rank, hoping to reach Admiral Emeritus. Once you get to level five, you will basically have to play long missions if you want to have any chance to win
- Your ship can lay mines which you will have to do as enemy ships will move after firing. Mines are one hit one kill. And when a cloaked Zaldron runs into a mine…that never gets old
- The more prisoners and ships you deliver to a starbase will help your final mission rating. If your ranking is high enough (usually over 100%) you can get a Star Fleet decoration. Each decoration has three levels. If you can deliver a Zaldron to base, do it as they are more valuable than Krellans.
- Be careful when boarding a ship, as you only have 70 marines. Capturing an enemy ship is totally random, you have no control over what your marines do when attacking. If you lose your first boarding attempt, you can try one more, but if you lose the second attempt, a third would be foolish.
- If you have to travel over 20 spaces, your ship enters hyperspace or Warp Speed. While in hyperspace, you can get hit by an ion storm which can knock out a critical system on your ship and have you entering a quadrant with no phasers, or worse, life support.
- There will never be more than one Zaldron in a quadrant at a time and there can only be a maximum of five Krellans in a quadrant. In later levels, Krellans move from quadrant to quadrant
- Mission levels 1 & 2 give you five starbases. When you hit level 9 & 10, you will only have ONE. Protecting this base is obviously vital to your success as your ship can only hold 5,000 units of energy and it can drain very quickly.
- Your ship holds 20 torpedoes. There is a way to make it 30. I'm going to let you figure out how :)
- You can get a commendation for blowing up your ship. There are 32 ships in the fleet so why not?

I want to give a few lines to the interface, graphics and sounds. SFI takes advantage of what the Amiga has to offer. What is odd though is that you can only use the mouse in game. All menus are keyboard controlled. The mouse is also inverted. It points down instead of up. It doesn't affect gameplay, it’s more an aesthetic thing for me.

I would have liked more color in the game. Roughly 8 colors are used in the game. More would have been nice. I would have liked some multi-color sprites in the game as well. Also, the screen draw is slow which is surprising and

something that I would expect on an 8-bit system but not the Amiga. I also would have like some graphic representation of your phasers. But the Amiga version outclasses all others.

Sounds are solid and in stereo. The explosions are deep and speaker rattling. I like the use of speech in the game to tell you when a Zaldron is present, there is an intruder alert and so on. The music is ok. Themes from Star Wars, and other science fiction movies are used in the game. Yet, no music from Star Trek is present.

I also want to add that the documentation in the game is thorough and a great read. It is also a necessity to have if you are playing a non-cracked version of the game as you need to look up a word in the manual if you want to play the game.

To conclude, SFI is a game that is still a blast to play 26 years after its release. I would love to see this given a modern makeover. But if it never happens, I'm fine with that, as I can see myself booting this game up five or even ten years in the future.

My final rating...

Star Fleet I gets an 8!!!!!

Beyond The Plastic

by Elena García Méndez

Bugs Bunny's Crazy Castle 4

One day while I was exploring the land of Amazon for videogames, I came across Kemco's Bugs Bunny's Crazy Castle Four for the Game Boy Color. Since I've always been fond of this cartoon character, I looked deeper into the game.

I read the description and found out that it was a puzzle game. Researching a little bit more on some other websites, I discovered that the game was particularly long and somewhat difficult. But I decided to take the challenge, and I bought it! I haven't regretted it—it entertained me for hours and hours! Isn't that what a game is supposed to be about?

So come on! Let's go and review it now!

Story

There was Bugs cleaning his lovely cozy rabbit hole when he suddenly stumbled across an old map. The map showed the representation of an island in the middle, but the paper was so battered and worn it was hard to read it out properly.

On the image of the island, the map read "C Castle". What could C stand for? "Oh, I know," thinks Bugs to himself. "C stands for Carrot! This is Carrot Castle! I gotta go to this place! It's a paradise for rabbits!"

Poor Bugs! He didn't realize that C actually stands for "Crazy"! The Carrot Castle he thinks he's heading for is none other than the dreadful and dreary Crazy Castle of Taz Island!

He really needs your help or he will never return from that place!

Kemco Corporation

Kemco is a videogame creator and publisher based in Seika, Japan. The corporation was founded in 1984 as a subsidiary of Kotobuki System Company, Ltd. As one of the first Nintendo licensees, Kemco started to produce videogames for the NES in 1985. The company created a US subsidiary in 2001, with the North American and PAL Region markets in its sights.

Kemco videogames include Spy vs. Spy, Superman, Desert Commander, Lagoon, Dragon Wars, Phalanx, First Samurai, Daikatana, Batman: Dark Tomorrow, and the Top Gear series.

The Controls

The controller functions for this game are as follows:

- **The control pad:** Move Bugs via the left, right, up and down arrow buttons. The up arrow also opens doors.
- **A button:** Select item or weapon.
- **B button:** Use item or weapon.
- **Start button:** If you press the Start button while playing, you will pause the game. While paused, use the control pad to view the map of the entire level you are in at that time. I strongly advise you to use the map. It will help you to locate the next door or simply prevent you getting lost!

Getting started: Your mission

Every time you are in a new level, you will be offered a password. It's very important you write it down. Then, if you decide to end the game there temporarily, you can turn it off and come back at any time, enter your password, and go right to where you left off. Otherwise, you'll have to start over from the very beginning!

The objective of this game is very simple: Collect the eight keys that open the locked door that will lead you to the exit.

However, simple as the objective may be, this game requires you to use your brains and wits. Bear in mind you will have to avoid many enemies and also make use of the items distributed in each level. Use them wisely, and you will win; use them wrongly, and you may regret it!

The other thing you will have to keep in mind is that Bugs cannot jump. You will therefore have to use various kinds of transportation in order to keep moving along the level. There are many transportation facilities in this game. Learn how to use them and you will escape from the Crazy Castle successfully!

The Game Screen

This is what you will be able to see at the bottom of the screen on your Game Boy Color:

- **Life:** Every time Bugs is touched by a rival character, he loses one heart. The maximum hearts you can play with are three and there are no possibilities to earn more (but see Carrots in the Objects section to follow). If you are hit three times, you will have to restart the level you're currently playing. That also means losing all the keys you've collected!
- **Key:** This symbol indicates how many keys you have gathered. The keys, as well as other items, are hidden in treasure chests. The chests open automatically when Bugs touches them. Make sure you take everything the chest has to offer! But avoid those chests which try to bite you as you approach or you will lose one heart!
- **Weapon:** This indicates either the number of cork guns or balloon bombs Bugs is carrying.
- **Hammer and pickaxe:** These two items can assist Bugs greatly on his way! The hammer breaks stones and the pickaxe helps him climb rock blocks!

The Objects

These objects can give Bugs many advantages. Some are collectible objects; others are defensive and help you beat enemies, and some others you can carry with you! Plan your strategy and use them prudently!

- **Keys:** Gather eight keys per level in order to unlock each level's exit door.
- **Carrots:** These are what Bugs likes best! Collect 10 of them to regain one heart and to become temporarily invisible!
- **Balloons:** These burst when touched by an enemy. All the enemies that are hit by the balloons will faint and disappear from the screen. Be quick and use this weapon to your advantage!
- **Cork gun:** This fires cork bullets that will stun enemies, enabling you to get them out of your way! If you miss the enemy, don't worry! You will be able to grab the cork gun again.
- **WB invincible item:** Seize this Warner Brothers logo, and you will be able to eliminate your enemies while you are temporarily invincible!
- **Lightening:** When you use this object, your enemies will be stunned as you walk along the level!
- **Shield:** With this item, you will be protected from enemies for a little while. They will not be able to harm you!
- **Clock:** This freezes the enemies for a brief moment.
- **Shoe:** Pick it up to increase your speed and get past your enemies faster!

- **Hammer:** If you obtain this, you can crush breakable blocks in your path.
- **Pickaxe:** This object will be very useful to you when you need to climb rocks!

Tricky floors and transportation facilities

Some stages in Crazy Castle feature some tricky traps but if you get to know how to use them, you will be able to utilize them to your advantage and sidestep your enemies!

Here are some of them:

- **Ice floor:** Walk on this floor and if you don't watch out, you will slip!
- **Disintegrating floor:** This floor disappears as you walk over it!
- **Moving floor:** As the name indicates, this floor moves either left or right when Bugs sets his foot on it!

Transportation facilities: Since Bugs cannot jump, these means of transportation are essential for him to move along the different levels of the game and to avoid the enemies! Become familiar with them and you will be able to escape!

- **Pipe:** Slide all the way to the exit!
- **Rope:** Swing from place to place!
- **Ladders and stairs:** Move up and down between floors.
- **Mushrooms and Springs:** Bounce up to reach the highest places!

The stages and enemies

There are 13 stages in this game, each consisting of different levels. But each stage doesn't have the same number of levels. For instance, stages three and six each have three levels; but stages 10, 11 and 12 each consist of eight levels! They are also the hardest levels of the entire game!

Bugs starts in the forest stage and has to go through different stages until he finally arrives at the castle! Inside it, you will encounter many different rooms: the courtyard, the ice room and machine room are only a few examples of this.

In the last stage of them all, stage 13, you will have to find the eight keys while trying to avoid the crazy Tasmanian Devil! A sweet surprise will await you when you finally complete this game . . . Lola Bunny! She was also trapped in the castle!

As for the enemies, they couldn't be more varied. From Daffy Duck to Yosemite Sam, you will also contend with witches on their brooms, ghosts, foxes and many other Looney Tunes characters!

The further you progress in the game, the more of them you will encounter! In some stages it is very likely you can see four Daffy Ducks trying to catch you!

Each character has a particular ability and speed. Some enemies are rather slow, such as Pepe' le Pew, and will not be much of a bother to you. The foxes on the other hand are super fast and will not cease to pursue you! Other characters are able to tele-transport themselves, such as the ghost, and some others simply move either left or right but will not follow you.

Good luck with all of them!

And the verdict is . . .

Alright, hold your horses! Before giving you my overall grade, let's calmly

consider a few aspects of Bugs Bunny Crazy Castle Four.

It has to be borne in mind that although the game's characters are from the Looney Tunes series, it's not designed for children—it will be completely frustrating for youngsters to finish it!

You will surely spend a couple of days, if not weeks, attempting to complete this game, as it is one of the longest I've encountered! (Remember to write down and save your password so you can restart right where you left off!)

The enemies are highly varied, as are the stages themselves. You will have to play in a forest, a waterfall, the underground, etc. This contributes substantial playability to the game!

Regarding the graphics, they are quite excellent—you will be able to distinguish each and every character perfectly!

With respect to the music, it might become repetitive to you sometimes, but on the whole, the developers have made sure to work on a different tune for each stage! The only problem is that in some of the long stages, you will grow bored in hearing the same tune for eight levels consecutively.

As for the playability, your interest will hold only until you have overcome all the levels. You probably won't come back to this game once you know how to solve the puzzles, but you will have a grand time getting there!

Finally, I would say that if you're willing to take up the challenge in beating the 13 stages of this game, it will keep you entertained for quite a long time. If you're a puzzle or problem-resolving lover, this game is for you! No one can get bored while these puzzles last! Therefore, I will grade this game with:

7 stars out of 10 possible ones.

The Pixelated Mage

by Jeff Wittenhagen

Undead Line

Platform: Sega Genesis
Developer: T&E Soft
Release Date: December 1991
Genre: Overhead Shooter
Game Modes: Single Player, 2-Player Cooperative
Tag Line: "Don't expect a walk in the park."

Synopsis

Undead Line is a game that has a history of being an extremely difficult and unforgivingly brutal to play. After spending a few minutes with it though, you will realize that those preconceptions are a bit over exaggerated and if you have spent any time with a vertical shooter before you will get used to the learning curve at a decent pace. Undead Line reminds me of a graphically upgraded Kings Knight on the NES with a much better weapons system in place. The story is about gods, giants and other typical fantasy elements having demon armies invade a kingdom and you simply control the hero. Nothing too out of the ordinary here.

Gameplay

As in most bullet hell vertical shooters you have an automatic shot, however it is a little different as it's slightly off center as the shot is coming from the players right hand. There is also a shield button that is essential to master in order to progress deeper into the game. There are times when you cannot dodge every bullet so you must learn how to effectively use the shield. You are also given three bombs throughout the entire game which increases the strategy and difficulty a bit. There are multiple weapon power ups which change your shot, as well as items that have various effects on the player and enemies.

An interesting aspect to Undead Line is the ability to level up at the end of each stage depending on how many fairies you catch. Getting these fairies is essential once you get into the latter levels of the game. Just like in a majority of shooters, once you die you must restart the level from the beginning without any of the powerups you have collected. As the levels in Undead Line are quite long, this is one of the most difficult hurdles to overcome.

Graphics and Sound

The graphics in Undead Line are excellent and really set the fantasy atmosphere perfectly.

You have gigantic bosses, mid-bosses and lots of amazing backgrounds. You may initially find yourself distracted from the sheer beauty alone. As the game has an undead theme to it, you get lots of gothic settings and enemies. The end boss Dracula looks amazing and takes up three quarters of the screen!

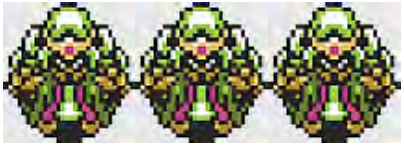
The sound is standard shooter fare and the music has that Sega feel to it, with what I like to call "blast processing beats" as it has a crunchy bass. While the tunes throughout Undead Line are well done, nothing stands out as exceptional or even catchy. So overall the sound is mediocre at best.

Is It Worth Playing?

Due to the unique leveling system, Undead Line is easily a worthwhile game to put some time into. This isn't your typical shooter where you can trudge through bit by bit and eventually beat, here you have to strategically plan out each and every power up that you pick up as getting the wrong one could be fatal.

I recommend that you immediately get your hands on the spread shot and keep it throughout the game as it protects you from the sides better than any other weapon. The other hint is to get the shield item each and every time in order to always have extra protection. Finally, keep in mind that the shield button is unlimited but doesn't block enemies, just bullets. As long as you approach this game with the few tips I have put out you will make progress and get a lot out of this title. Just don't expect a walk in the park.

Rating = 3 Undead Mages out of 5



MAME Reviews

by Mark Sabbatini

Games That Should Have Been April Fools Jokes

An arcade game where you stick a probing finger in an anus and spank it to defeat enemies.

Just writing that makes it obvious this is the April issue but, unlike past years where I've tried to fob off feasible-but-fictional games on everyone, this is an actual coin-op console. The game's mascot, incidentally, is a giant pile of feces.

As is often the case, reality turns out to be more demented than my imagination (at least in a non-criminal way on an off-day). So this month's MAME column takes a look at games that should be obvious April Fool's Day fodder, but are actual titles somebody considered a good money-making idea.

It's hard to imagine anything surpassing the finger-the-anus machine no matter how much traveling or Googling anyone does, although sadly it's obviously a limp MAME mating since, again, there's probably no amount of searching that will turn up a suitable home controller replicating the arcade experience. Which isn't to say I wouldn't like to see someone try (or make a push to get a bunch of coin-op versions in bars and arcades), just to watch the reaction in the U.S. from Rick Santorum and Co. (lest anyone think I'm on a Socialist Norwegian rant, I'd also love to see the kill-the-live-lobster machine reviewed below get more prominence to watch PETA and Co. go bonkers.)

Boong-Ga Boong-Ga apparently made its debut in 2000 at a trade show in Japan, which is probably of little surprise to many savvy gamers. Of course, with U.S. programmers cranking out titles from Custer's Revenge to Bully meant to be played in the family home rather than adult-oriented arcades we can't exactly sneer at our counterparts in The Land of the Rising Sun.

The console features a giant fake ass sticking out and a plastic finger controller to do the probing. You select one of eight characters from choices such as "mother-in-law" and "child molester." The promotional flyer notes "when you spank the character that you choose to punish, the face expression of the character will change as they scream and twitch in pain. The funny face expressions will make people laugh and relieve the stress."

And you were doubting this is clean, wholesome fun.

At the end of the game "after detecting your power with a sensor, a card will come out. It will explain your sexual behavior."

After that experience, fortune cookies are sooooo has-been.

Given the various homosexuality and pornography laws in various parts of the world, I could probably be arrested for suggesting you give this a shakedown – or acknowledging if I've done so. But that's not why it's on this list, since there's an immense number of pornography coin-op games out there (something I plan to address in a reasonably tasteful manner in a future column). It's because that even among the most perverse entries in that genre this stands out as a man among boys, so to speak.

On to a few other titles, although it should be noted this is only a tiny percentage of the eligible entries. I encountered coin-ops in Russia and other former Soviet countries, for instance, resembling 1960s sci-fi robots with concepts as indecipherable as their Cyrillic titles. There's also the mass-market tragicomedies such as Professor Pac-Man, Michael Jackson's Moonwalker and Donkey Kong 3, but we'll leave them alone since 1) it's reasonable to think the makers weren't completely insane in thinking there was a commercial market for them and 2) most gamers know about their infamy already.

Sub Marine Catcher

OK, the water tank is a good indicator this isn't making the transition to MAME format any time soon, but it's a coin-op game and involves giant bugs (or so a former flame called them) so we're diving in, so to speak. This is another "ooohh, look at the funny Japanese game" that actually didn't involve much effort or creativity. It's one of those "claw" games littering the entrance of every Wal-Mart and supermarket in the "developed" world, only instead of stuffed animals the prize area is filled with water and live lobsters. I've never come close to even hooking a plush pal in the normal machines, so snagging an odd-shaped prize that can evade and fight back obviously has no chance of happening. Like I'd really be charming my date with one of these instead of a teddy bear. Versions of this have apparently made their way to some seaside towns in Florida and elsewhere in the U.S., generally outside restaurants that will cook your catch if you're lucky. (For the record, I rock at the Alaska version of the "claw" game, which involves killing a fresh-caught king crab by grabbing all of its legs and ripping them all off at once. That did end up impressing my date, since the alternative was doing it herself or going out for pizza.)

Virtual Dog-Walking Game

Another animal freak show from Japan almost certainly unplayable on MAME, if the ROM exists (I couldn't Google the Japanese name to find out), since the main control is a treadmill. The concept actually seems pretty cool by modern standards given the popularity of various Wii exercise games. Maybe it'd even be welcome by all the critics saying video games are turning our kids into obese zombies, but I can't imagine the tykes playing it willingly. At the front of the treadmill is a fake dog on a leash (definitely not cute, since all you're basically seeing is his rear) and your simple objective is to hold his leash while walking on the treadmill. OK, it's not that simple. There's things to avoid like cars and nastier dogs, and you need to walk at speeds that don't bore or exhaust your lovable little snookums. I despise dogs and all other pets, which nobody ever believes because they inevitably seem drawn to me and I treat them kindly to avoid being disemboweled by their owners, and the idea of volunteering to take canines for a walk as a leisure real-life activity is comical. But I could see trying a few games of this, mostly because I've spent an incredible amount of gym time on treadmills and other machines (hey, you live in the Arctic and jogging isn't always appealing despite the nice scenery), and I always need a TV or something to make it tolerable. One gym had those rowing machines where you're racing another boat and I was hooked on them for some demented reason. Only problem, of course, is how many people find themselves at arcades and bars in their gym clothes, or anything they want to sweat heavily in?

Snacks 'n Jaxson

I scoffed at the "clowns are scary" stigma many kids suffer from until I saw this. I think it's great a lot of early programmers were on drugs because they gave us a lot of games more encumbered minds could never conceive of, but there's no way Snacks 'n Jaxson is anything but the result of an extended acid trip. I don't even need to tax my snark skills writing a review, I'll just quote the flyer: "Snacks 'N Jaxson is a unique game built around a clown who tries to eat his way through life without letting his nose break any windows. The player moves to clown's head around the screen to chase down and gobble food. At the beginning of each wave, the clown sneezes his nose off and the gamer must move the face to keep the nose from bouncing into a window. The game consists of a trackball, to move the clown head, and a sneeze button. The sneeze button is used to blow away hot peppers and soap placed in the clown's path by his arch enemy." Something the flyer doesn't mention is your clown's head is still attached to its body – in the same way a tether ball is to its post, which is to say by something resembling a string. It does note "the games graphics are striking" and, uh, that's one way of putting it. Another would be is the single-screen playfield depicts a three-dimensional room with psychedelic colors. There's also in-game music, the joys of which I'll leave your imagination to explore. As for the game, your body remains still at the back of the room while your head-on-a-string caroms around the screen like the crosshair in Missile Command gobbling food and deflecting your nose. Look at some screenshots or YouTube video first, because playing this without mentally acclimation is likely to make your head explode in real life. As for its MAMEability, for people who care about doing anymore than simply test driving it for the freak show experience, it's like most trackball games in that a mouse or keypad (my preference) works fine and trying to get by with a keyboard sucks. DIP switches can adjust the number of starting noses from two to five, and earning bonuses at anywhere from 15,000 to 30,000 points. The console for this was something Bally called its "Sente System," which basically allowed operators to install any of eight game ROMS quickly. I looked at the titles (Goalie Ghost, Chicken Shift, Snake Pit, etc.) and don't remember seeing any of them in an arcade. There is an official "Trivial Pursuit" chip which I'm guessing was installed in more than a few bars.

Death Race

Maybe this 1976 cult classic of driving over innocent civilians (or "gremlins," as they were officially dubbed to make it seem less macabre) doesn't deserve full-fledged freak honors, but I'm including it because I've always been fascinated by it and for some reason never got around to trying it in MAME. Well, devastatingly, it turns out I can't: It uses integrated circuits rather a ROM, so there's no code to dump. A few remakes are floating around, but none are true emulations. Don't get me started on the multi-platform Carmageddon franchise, since I'm rather sore it's basically obliterated its ancestor from gamers' minds. So all that's left for me to do is to reminisce for you young 'uns who don't know about the first truly controversial video game. Death Race is a single-screen all-directions driver using steering wheels and accelerator pedals for controls, a somewhat common genre during that early arcade era. One or two players try to down those, um, gremlins, who scream and are replaced by tombstones when hit. Even cooler is you can use a reverse gear to back up and finish them off. But here's the hitch: those crosses depicting tombstones stay on the screen and turn into barriers, so the longer you play the harder it is to maneuver around the screen. Maybe that's why I'm so put off by the "blood" feature in many games today where the screen will turn increasingly red (or green, yellow, etc. in a zombie game) strictly for visual gratuity without affecting gameplay in the least. Now, for those wondering about my not-subtle "gremlin" skepticism, I'll start by noting the resolution of those black-and-white graphics is so low that, alas, it seems those gremlins just happen to look like stick-figure people. It should also be noted the drivers in the cabinet graphics, raising the question of why they're "officially" running down their undead brethren rather than the living. Finally, having raised circumstantial evidence, I rest my case with proof that the original working title was Pedestrian. However you

choose to interpret things, the game is hilarious to a 10-year-old in much the way fart jokes are, or least were 30 years ago. These days, of course, it's so tame and lame it's beauty is shamelessly doomed to go unappreciated by all generations from now to eternity.

Retro To Go

by Donald Lee

Midway Arcade

Retro video games have been available for video game systems, smartphones and home computers for some time now. An interesting release that graced the iPhone App Store recently was Midway Arcade app for the iPhone, iPad and iTouch devices (iOS 4.3 and above).

Midway Arcade includes a slew of classic games such as:

- Defender
- Spy Hunter
- Rampage
- Root Beer Tapper
- Arch Rivals
- Joust
- Table Games: Basketball, Pool, Air Hockey and Skee-Ball
- Several locked games that can be unlocked for 99 cents

The interface for Midway Arcade is like a real arcade. You can walk around and view each of the games before playing. This can be a little annoying after a while so there is an option to just pick the game you want to play from a list. To play a game, you have to insert a coin by pressing a button and then hitting the one player button.

Unfortunately, the table games are NOT on the list, so that is a bit of a minus. If you remember arcades of old, you could earn tickets by playing the various games and redeem them for prizes. Midway Arcade has that available as well. While cool, it’s not quite as cool as having the actual prizes in your hands.

Midway Arcade also interfaces with the Apple Game Center which shows the players with the highest scores and the people who have earned the most tickets. This part is probably the best aspect of the collection. One point of pride for many people playing arcade games was having the highest score for at least a day. With the Game Center, you can have it for a lot longer.

As far as the games themselves, here are some brief thoughts from playing the games (on iPhone 4). Please note that the default controls were used. There are options for other controls which won't be covered in detail here.

Arcade Games

Defender

Playing Defender in the arcade was a challenge due to the multiple buttons and controllers that were needed. Defender was definitely a game for those with great dexterity. Playing the game on the iPhone was difficult. There are four controls for your ship (joystick, laser, bomb and hyperspace). With the limited real estate on the iPhone screen, your fingers will obscure some of the space. Defender requires fast action but controlling the game on the iPad proved difficult. While the controls for Defender are less complex than the original arcade game, it doesn't make it any easier to play. Besides the controls, the graphics for Defender are way too small and difficult to see.

Spy Hunter

In the arcade, Spy Hunter was popular as games got a chance to pretend to be James Bond. The other charm of the arcade game was that there was a steering wheel. Alas, with the iPhone, you have to use the touch screen. It took quite some time to get used the controls and play the game.

Playing the game itself was an interesting experience. For some reason, if you had the car remain at top speed, you were able to outrace the enemies for the most part. If you did have to engage the enemy, it was difficult to use the iPhone controls to knock them off the road. The other odd thing was that you could not get your car to dock with the trailer which would arm you with a second weapon. All in all, like Defender, this game is not the most playable.

Rampage

Did you ever imagine yourself as King Kong or Godzilla? Rampage gives you that chance. This was the first game in the collection to translate well onto the iPhone. Unlike Defender or Spy Hunter, Rampage is not a particularly high speed game. The slower pace allows players to fare better and the game is definitely enjoyable.

Root Beer Tapper

Root Beer Tapper was originally released as Tapper (with in-game advertising, Budwiser). As the game was introduced into arcades, it was decided to rebrand it (sans Budwiser) as Root Beer Tapper. The arcade game had straight forward controls and that translates well onto the iPhone. It is quite playable even though it is a little faster than Rampage. It does take a little bit of touch to get used to the game but it can be done. This is definitely one of the best games in the collection.

Arch Rivals

If Arch Rival looks familiar, it's probably because it is the precursor to the better known NBA Jam. Unfortunately, for most players who are used to NBA Jam or the current generation of NBA games, Arch Rival will seem dated. Through no fault of the game itself, it feels a little slow and sluggish. However, the game is still reasonably playable. Unfortunately, with the current generation of basketball games being so readily available, most people will probably want to play NBA Jam instead.

Joust

Like Root Beer Tapper, Joust's controls are simple (left and right, flap button) and that translates into a great game for the iPhone. The speed is quick but not too fast and you can get into the game quickly. It is definitely not easy but can get addictive.

Table Games

Basketball - The best of the table games. Simply swipe up and shoot at the basket for a minute. Great way to work up a quick sweat while on your iPhone.

Pool - Nice game, but takes some time to get used to controlling the cue stick.

Air Hockey - While Air Hockey is a great table sport at the arcades, it is less so on the iPhone. The small screen and different dynamics makes it a much different game than the one you play in the arcade.

Skee Ball - The second best of the table games. Like Basketball, you just swipe up and try to get as many points as you can. One negative is that the skee balls seem to roll much faster than in real life. All in all it is still enjoyable.

Overall

At 99 cents, the collection is worth checking out for retro video game fans. However, as noted above, not every game may play like you expect. If you temper your expectations, you will get your money's worth with Midway Arcade.

Middle Aged Gamer

by Tom Zjaba

What Is A Middle Aged Gamer?

You may ask what is a middle aged gamer? It is more than just a gamer who is middle aged. It is a frame of mind, it is having a sense of history. While a big part of being a middle aged gamer is remembering the past, it is also about the present and the future. It is understanding that you may not have the skills you once had, but it does not stop you from wanting to play the latest games. Here are a few things that will make you realize you are a Middle Aged Gamer:

- If you still feel more comfortable with a joystick than a gamepad.
- If you remember when handheld gaming was playing Blip.
- If you refer to your reading glasses as gaming glasses.
- If you finally gave in and restarted a game at a lower skill level, so you could beat it.
- If you have clean thoughts about blowing a NES cartridge.
- If you remember Mario before he rescued the princess.
- If you were excited about being able to play Atari 2600 games on your iPad.

Look for more observations such as these in each issue. While you may not like that your teenaged child can whip you at most video games, it is better than the future when you become a Geriatric Gamer. Yeah, one day you will be sitting on your porch telling your grandchildren about when video games were a quarter at the arcade and having them ask you what an arcade is.

Tom Zjaba (Who is a Middle Aged Gamer and proud of it. Don't believe it, check out his two websites full of video game stuff – Tomorrow's Heroes (http://tomheroes.com and Arcade After Dark (http://arcadeafterdark.com).

Hope you all have a great Easter and I wish you the best in your egg dying efforts. To end this issue, let's do it on an Easterly note. One of the things I just realized as I write this conclusion is that we should have done an Easter Egg themed issue for April, discussing all the Easter Eggs we have found in video games through the years and the mystery surrounding them. I do remember a great article written in RTM 61 by Dave Mrozek called How I Discovered THE SECRET Of Missile Command which talked about the initials "RF" appearing in the game and the mystery surrounding it. I would like to add one of my own memories on finding an Easter Egg in a game, Moonmine for the TI-99/4A. While the Easter Egg is pretty blatant, it left me intrigued for a while. In the game, one of the monsters has the letters "JMP" written on him. At first I was like, why does the monster have an abbreviation for jump written on his body? It wasn't until I got onto the Internet years later that I discovered John M. Phillips was the programmer of the game and that "JMP" were his initials. While this might not be as intriguing of a story as the Missile Command one, it's just something to think about this Easter…Remembering when we all found our first Easter Egg and what we thought it meant at the time. See you all next month!