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It's that time again to wish the U.S.A. a happy birthday, as we here in the US celebrate the Fourth of July. Along with the Fourth of July celebrations , be sure to mark on your calendar that this September is the 100th issue of RTM (making 180 issues going back to the original Retrogaming Times days).

Thinking of the Fourth of July got me thinking of fireworks and therefore colors. That in turn got me thinking of discoloration, you know like when cartridges and video game systems turn yellow. It seems that some systems are more prone to this than others, especially some of the classic Nintendo systems. If you look at some of those SNES consoles on eBay, one can see that there can be some serious yellowing going on there. This made me bring up the question as to which systems are most prone to yellowing. Think about your collections and any items that might be yellowed. What items are there? I would love to hear about it and see which systems and games tend to be the hardest to maintain!

As to what you can do about yellowing? Well, from what I have read there is a thing called retrobrite which can help restore your games or you can go out and buy cream hydrogen peroxide and apply it to your yellowing items. Anyway, that's just what's on my mind this month. Now let's see what's on our columnists' minds while you try to de-yellow your collection!

EVENTS

ADAMCon 24
Friday, July 13 - Sunday, July 15 (Quebec City, Canada)

ADAMCon members and ColecoVision enthousiasts will celebrate the 30th anniversary of the ColecoVision game system during a 3-day convention in Québec City. It's probably your best chance to celebrate the ColecoVision anniversary in style during an event made for Coleco fans. You can expect newly released games to be presented during this convention!

2012 Video Game Summit
Saturday, July 14, 11:00am-6:00pm (Lombard, IL)

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

The date of the show will be July 14th, 2012 from 11am to 6pm at The Heron Point Convention Center, 665 West North Avenue, Lombard,IL (adjacent from the Fairfield Inn and Suites hotel), Admission is $5.00 per person (children 12 and under with an Adult are free) and booths are $30.00 (a booth consists of three 2 x 5 tables, 2 side tables and one front table). For more information visit our website above.

23rd Annual KansasFest
Tuesday, July 17 – Sunday, July 22 (Kansas City, MO)

Users, programmers, hobbyists, and retrocomputing enthusiasts are invited to Rockhurst University in Kansas City, Missouri, from Tuesday, July 17, through Sunday, July 22, for six days and five nights of sessions, demos, announcements, contests, and camaraderie.

The week kicks off with a keynote speech John Romero, co-founder of id Software and creator of Wolfenstein 3D, Dangerous Dave, and nearly a hundred other popular computer and video games. Romero will be available immediately afterward for a Q&A and autograph session.

The week then offers a variety of presentations and workshops, including but not limited to:

- The history of AppleWorks, presented by Randy Brandt
- Andy Molloy looks at the best of the Apple II demo scene
- Apple II Road Show -- Tony Diaz shows you how to tell authentic hardware from a fake
- Build your own Apple II WordPress site with Ken Gagne
- Learn to program interactive fiction in Inform 7 with Carrington Vanston
- A Kickstarter brainstorming session
- HackFest, an annual programming challenge open to coders of all skill levels
- A vendor fair and exhibit hall for attendees and the general public to show off, play with, and buy and sell new or unusual hardware and software

Check out our website above for more info!

California Extreme Arcade & Pinball Expo

Saturday, July 28, 11:00am-2:00am | Sunday, July 29, 11:00am-9:00pm (Santa Clara, CA)

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

This show is a great place to bring games you want to sell, and also a good place to add to your collection, or even start it! Not all games will be for sale; many collectors bring items to show (or show off!) that they would never sell. However, you can play from the moment you arrive until we shut off the power at closing -- Play as many games as you want, in whatever order you want to. There are *HUNDREDS* of games, all set to play for free. This is a your chance to try those older games, or the newer games that you'd never put money into in an arcade. There are also many games that never got produced, and are very hard to find. Click on the above link for more info.

Vintage Computer Festival Southwest 3.0

Saturday, August 4, 9:00am - Sunday, August 5, 5:00pm (Arlington, TX)

The Vintage Computer Festival is an ongoing series of events celebrating the history of computing. Come join us for our third annual Southwest gathering, an engaging public exhibition showcasing the technologies, people and stories that embody the remarkable tale of the computer revolution.

VCF Southwest 3.0 will take place in the city of Arlington, Texas on the beautiful campus of the University of Texas, Arlington. The Museum of Information Technology - Arlington and Museum of Computer Culture will proudly present a two-day series of fascinating speakers alongside an eclectic gathering of private retro computing displays in our exhibit hall.

Open to ALL ages! Children under 17 attend for free.

Featured attractions include a discussion with retro computing enthusiasts and their systems, powerful speakers and videos on a variety of retro computing topics, share ideas and network with like-minded individuals, and partake in special events throughout the weekend. Check out the Eventbrite page above for more information.

Classic Gaming Expo '12

Saturday, August 11, 9:00am-5:00pm | Sunday, August 12, 10:00am-4:00pm (Las Vegas, NV)

Mark your calendars for Vegas this summer as Classic Gaming Expo returns to The Plaza Hotel for another tour through videogaming's rich history. Classic Gaming Expo enters its 13th year as the world's first and largest event paying tribute to the people, systems and games of yesteryear. The 2012 event will feature vendors, guest speakers, music and events celebrating the rich history of videogaming, from Pong to PlayStation! This year guarantees to be the biggest and best ever. As always, CGE is open to the public and gamers of all ages are welcome!

This year, as in the past, there will be a large amount of well known figures from the video game industry. Among those included are, Ralph Baer, David Crane, Don Daglow, Warren Davis, Walter Day, David Fox, Brad Fregger, Ed Fries, and many more. Visit the site above for a full listing as well as other events that will be going on.

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.

Atari 5200 Zone

by Donald Lee

Atari's 40th Anniversary

Good Evening! As I write this, it's June 29th and SEVERAL days after Bryan requested we submit articles. Not too sure if Bryan can squeeze this in for July but if not it'll be fine for the August issue of RTM.

To be honest, I had hit a bit of a dry spell recently. I had lost interest in playing any retro video games. Ideas for articles weren't coming like they normally do and I decided not to write anything for July.

Part of the reason was that I had started playing a lot of recent games on my iPhone (Words With Friends, Scramble With Friends, 9 Inning Baseball, Tiger Woods Golf). Additionally, I had taken a huge interest in importing old VHS videos and editing them with iMovie. Both these activities ate up a good chunk of time.

However, I noticed that Atari's 40th Anniversary just passed on June 27th. As a very big arcade game player and owner of an Atari 5200, I decided to write something to acknowledge the significance of the anniversary.

As a proud owner of the 5200, I greatly enjoyed all the times playing the various conversions like Pac-Man, Ms. Pac-Man and Defender. Those of us in the 1980's didn't have MAME or even retro video game packages on the PS2 or iPhones to play. We had to play arcade games on our home systems or computers.

Mine was one of the "original" systems which had four joystick ports and the storage compartments for the joysticks. The joysticks for the Atari 5200 were greatly ridiculed and for good reason. When they worked, they were great. But overtime, the joystick controls broke and the buttons didn't respond as well as they did before.

Over time, I bought a Wico keypad plus two replacement joysticks. They actually didn't last that long but were improvements over the original joystick. Additionally, I got my parents to get me an original Atari trackball. I spent a good amount of time using it for Centipede and Soccer.

I can't quite remember how many games I had for the 5200 but it was a significant number. Besides the previously mentioned games, I played Star Wars, Robotron 2084, Keystone Kapers, and Mario Bros.

As an arcade game fan, I should mention I spent a great deal of time playing many Atari arcade games. These included Star Wars, Centipede, and Pole Position.

While Atari may just be "another company" these days, one can't deny the influence it had on the current video game industry. Happy 40th anniversary and here's to many more!

Lunch With...

by Ian Baronofsky

Roger Merritt

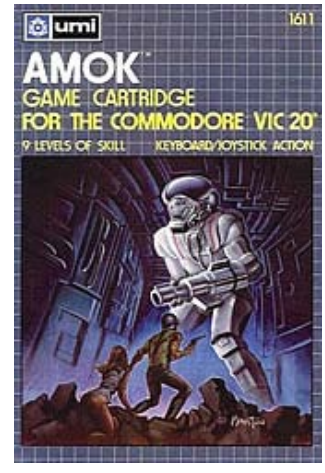
While selling on eBay, I occasionally get an interesting email from someone historically involved with something I'm selling. Recently I was selling a copy of Sub-Chase by UMI on cassette. Lucky for me, the programmer himself noticed and had time to answer a few questions. Following is an interview with programmer and serviceman Roger Merritt from June 2012.

Which games have you programmed, and on which systems?

All the games that were sold commercially were for the Vic-20. I made Amok, Satellites and Meteorites, and Sub-Chase. After UMI went down and ceased production I stopped writing games.

Did you program other applications?

None for civilian use.



If you don't mind me asking, what were you paid for your work?

I was paid by a royalty rate, depending on how many were sold and if any discounts were given to vendors. I usually got paid 15% of what the game was sold for. I still have one copy of a royalty report from UMI showing how much I made for one quarter.

Did you develop any hardware?

I made a "Visible Memory" board for the PET computer. It had 16k RAM of memory. There were two banks that were divided into 8k sections and either section could be turned on for game graphics. I only sold about 10 units. I had also made an "Asteroids" program to show off the visible memory board capabilities. It was that board that got the attention of Russ Bedford of UMI. He asked me to make a small 8k cartridge board for the Vic-20 to add EPROM game chips to. In exchange for that small board he traded me a dual floppy disk drive for the Commodore Pet computer.

What is your education or background in?

I only made it to the 12th grade. After High school I went into the Navy and learned how to work and program computers.

What was the computer gaming community like when you started out? Were you able to connect with other people who weren't working with you at the time?

I saw my broker using a Commodore PET computer when it first came out and was very interested in it. I had already made some game programs for the Navy Combat Systems computers and wondered what I could do with this new technology. My broker got me going to the Pet Users group meetings in San Diego, CA in 1981, I believe, and I saw others using the debug program to make games for the PET. I think it was the debug program or some utility that allowed us to write programs. All the programs were written in machine code.

How did you come to program for UMI?

I was at a Commodore Users group meeting in Long Beach when I was trying to sell my memory board. Russ Bedford of UMI saw it and asked if I could program games for him to sell commercially. He was a really nice fellow and I am glad I got to do work for him. My big drawback to writing games was that I had no sound or musical expertise. All of my work was being done while I was in the Navy, often while at sea in the Western Pacific.

Getting back to that meeting in Long Beach, there was one other fellow looking for programmers to write routines for DOS. Anyway, I actually knew what DOS meant but gave it about 5 seconds thought and turned that guy down. How was I supposed to know that Bill Gates would get famous making operating software for almost every computer made!

Did you have deadlines or project goals? Was it a full time job for you?

There was no deadline I had to meet. UMI understood that I was doing this on the side as I was in the Navy at the time.

Did you program for other companies? What did you do after you were done game programming?

I did write a diagnostic program for testing the display consoles that I worked on in the Navy. But I could not take credit for it as there were already contracted programmers that did that sort of thing for the Navy. The official version was called a POFA, which stood for Program Operational Functional Analysis. Since I worked on the display consoles so much, I saw that more was needed in the program to test out every aspect of the equipment. The one I made was much better than what the navy had, and many of the computer techs that saw it would make a copy and take back to their next command.

Do you still code or work with computers? Do you ever feel the urge to try out any of your old games?

The only Vic-20 game that I wrote that I would still enjoy playing would be Sub Chase. Even thought I wrote it and understood how it worked, I still enjoyed playing it. You had to maneuver the ship on the surface back and forth avoiding mines coming up from enemy subs and at same time trying to drop death charges to blow them up.

What was your favorite system from the early days of computer and video gaming, and why?

I enjoyed working on and programming the ole Sperry Univac computers. Those were the first computers that the Navy started using. About the size of today’s refrigerator. I think it used 32k of 30 bit memory. You had to program it with push buttons on the front panel. Thirty buttons across and a toggle switch to write to memory. Back then you could actually see the memory cores. They were made up of ferrite doughnuts the size of a pin head.

I made a few game programs on the Navy computers. The last one was Star Trek, which allowed up to 15 console players to enter the game controlling a ship in the center of the screen and travel around trying to destroy other players or computer driven Klingons. I'd have to say I made the very first multiplayer game.

Do you play any current games?

Right now I play Battlefield 3 as OldGunney. I really love the game. This old man ain’t never gonna grow up!

MAME Reviews

by Mark Sabbatini

Hard Hat

Two factoids offer the perfect punchline. It was promoted as the "first educational coin-op game!" And a computer calculation gives it a popularity rating of zero on a scale from one to 100.

Yet here I am recommending you try it out for some summertime "edutainment."

Just the name is amusing: Hardhat. One word, at least on the title screen of this 1982 game by Exidy, the same company responsible for a handful of minor classics such as Venture and Ladybug. The cabinet, meanwhile, is titled "Hard Hat." Leaving one to question how much confidence a parent would have in educational software that can't even get the spelling of its title right. Modern mathematicians, of course, can speculate about SNAFUs resulting in that seemingly impossible computer-calculated popularity rating from The Killer List of Video Games.

Hardhat (I'm going with the "official" in-game spelling) is actually legitimately entertaining if you're a fan of the arcade/puzzle genre popular in the app world these days. Combining elements of Pac-Man, Tetris and Sokoban, this is one of those games that's better on MAME than a real machine due to the ability to adjust settings and save games to cope with what's an overwhelming challenge when quarters are required.

Graphics and sound are pure vanilla by 1982 standards, so it's not hard understanding why Hardhat wouldn't stand a chance next to the sensory overload of games like Robotron in an arcade. Fans of games like Venture and Pepper II would probably identify Hardhat as an Exidy game immediately, and if you like the general presentation of the company's games the sights and sounds of this one won't disappoint.

Gameplay is simpler than the instructions and initial exposure suggest. Move around a grid-like maze avoiding a couple types of bad guys while pushing letters into designated spots at the center of the screen to spell the word displayed in outlined text. You can eliminate bad guys by pushing letters over them, although they quickly reemerge from the corners of the screen.

What might throw off some people (i.e. me) at first is the letters you need to push aren't visible when a wave begins. That's because most of the intersections of the maze are linked by thin green lines known as "supports" that disappear when you move over them. When you take out all the supports in a row or column it collapses and the screen scrolls either vertically or horizontally to display a new row at the edge of the screen (the target word always remains in the center). That's when the letters you need appear in the order they need to be placed (it's important to pay attention to this, for reasons to be explained shortly).

Here's the storyline as told by the promotional flyer:

"A busy carpenter is chased by hammers and whirlwinds through a grid of scaffolding. Where he goes, segments of the support are knocked down. When all the scaffolding on one edge of the screen is eliminated, the structure 'collapses' or scrolls to fill in that space."

"When all five letters (E,X, I, D and Y) are in their respective places, a new game screen in awarded. For the second level, the player must place the letters H, A, R, D, H, A and T."

Additional words appear in successive levels, eventually spelling out a message. Nothing in the on-screen instructions mentions this, which seems a bit of an oversight since it offers an inducement to keep playing long enough to reveal the message. It also means waves, while increasing in speed, don't necessarily increase in difficulty in a linear fashion. The third wave is an seven-letter word and the fourth wave a two-letter word, for instance, and length obviously is a major factor in how tough it is to push all the required letters in place. Once the message is complete the game begins again at "EXIDY" at a higher rate of speed.

Completing just the first wave is a significant achievement and, if the scant amount of online chat about the game is accurate, something few gamers were persistent enough to achieve at arcades. If you are successful, the second wave may seem all but impossible. Not only is "HARDHAT" a longer word, but the two "H" and "A" letters than appear are not exchangeable in their positioning – the first of each letter must go at the beginning of the word, the second at the beginning of the "HAT" portion. If that isn't enough, the word for the third wave is "SUCCESS." (The next few waves feature two- and three-letter words, so go figure.)

It's also worth noting each wave gets more difficult the longer you take to complete it. So while point jockeys might be tempted to run up scores by "hunting" – endlessly knocking out supports and killing enemies with letters while avoiding pushing them into place – it's not necessarily the best strategy.

For the very few able to complete multiple waves, the biggest negative is probably the lack of any new gameplay elements. Sure, you get to reveal the message, but there's no new enemies, obstacles or other things to add variety. Once you've revealed the message, of course, it's just an endless cycle of sameness.

If you're wondering how all this qualifies as a "logic game with an educational puzzle to solve," as Exidy claims, I'm not entirely sure since the "spelling" aspect hardly qualifies unless you're a tot who is still teething and playing with Fischer-Price toys. What does require quick thinking is how to push the letters around since, like Sokoban, it's possible for them to get stuck in corners and screen edges. Unlike Sokoban, where there's no choice but to abort and restart the level, in Hardhat you'll need to collapse one or more rows or columns to make permanent barriers and/or stuck letters disappear (they'll reappear somewhere along the opposite edge).

Different strategies tend to suit different players with games such as this, so the only gameplay advice I'm offering is to toss your "purity" pride overboard and save your game state any time you make significant progress without getting killed. The DIP switches also allow starting with two to five men and earning an extra life at 40,000 to 70,000 points. A second extra life is awarded at the same point interval (80,000 to 140,000 points), but no more afterward.

For ambitious gamers wanting a score to beat, Twin Galaxies hosted a MAME competition for HARDHAT in 2004 that was won by Martin Bedard with 307,350 points. The forum thread, which includes some useful observations and tips, is at http://forums.twingalaxies.com/viewtopic.php?f=68&t=2685.

Those posts offer generally favorable opinions of Hardhat, but a vastly different modern viewpoint is offered by Wil Wheaton at the A.V. Club (www.avclub.com/articles/hard-hat,25414) in one of the few detailed reviews of the game. Among the highlights:

• "A long-forgotten arcade stinker that was so hard to play, it put a generation of gamers into therapy."

• "This sounds simple, and even fun, but in practice, it's incredibly difficult, and about as far from fun as you can get without sitting in a dentist's chair."

• "Could be mistaken for: Sokoban, or that one mission in GTA: Vice City where you have to blow up the construction site with the RC Helicopter. Yes, the one we all hated."

And yet...

• "Even though Hard Hat is too difficult to be fun, fans of Lemmings, Tetris, and Chip's Challenge should thank Exidy for blazing the puzzle-based logic-game trail."

Harsher than my assessment, but probably more accurate for gamers whose patience level isn't above the norm. Still, I've seen the masses get sufficiently hooked on enough "monotonous" brain challenges such as Tetris and Sokodu over the years to think there's a modern audience for Hardhat. I'm just not sure they'll ever know about it unless somebody ports a version over to the various mobile platforms that allows pocket jockeys to absorb it in bite-size bits.

Commodore Du Jour

by Marc Douglas

Rootin' Tootin'

So here we are in July. Though the way the weather has been in New Jersey, it's been like July for a few months now. As I type this, I pondered, "What game was I going to put under the microscope?"

I tried to get Fireworks Construction Set in my sights but, I couldn't find my copy and doing a cursory search on-line got me nowhere. Well, it did get me to a couple of sites, but shady is too kind a term for them, so I passed. But back to the issue at hand which is, what else goes with the month of July?

- Fireworks – Can't do that as I stated above
- Hot Dogs – No real good BurgerTime port for the 64 or Amiga
- Hamburgers – Don't feel like reviewing Bard's Tale III right now (You kind of need to be a nerd to get that reference)
- Baseball – I wasn't a big baseball gamer on the 64, I liked football and hockey much more
- The Beach – Well, I did play Beach Head but that's not quite right
- Music – Hmmm….Concerts in July…Sitting in the park listening to a band…A brass band…That's It!

Now that we have that settled, what game falls in that category? After a few moments, I remembered a game that I once owned that back in 1984 I found enjoyable. After a few moments on Google, I found a disk version of the game that I remember having the cartridge version of. What game, you ask?

Rootin' Tootin'
By HES

RT was released by HES games back in 1983 and is a very solid port of the arcade game called, "La-Pa-Pa." The game is a Pac-Man derivative but has some originality sprinkled in. The first being, instead of being a small yellow ball, you are a tuba. Here are some more differences…

- Instead of a maze eating dots, you travel a series of Staffs that you would see in music notation. In place of the dots, are Beamed Notes that you do not eat, but play as you shoot them off the screen. Also, there are different maze layouts instead of the one maze you get in Pac-Man

- Pac-Man had the famous four ghosts chasing him around the maze. In RT, you are chased by different musical instruments. Gitacos (Guitars), Guitaros (Nastier Guitars), Cymbombs (Cymbals), Triens (Triangles), Madphone (Not sure exactly, could be a set of Headphones) and the scariest of the creatures the Pianha (A Piano that can travel anywhere on the screen)

- Pac-Man gave you four energizers to turn the tables on the ghosts, RT gives you an eighth note that freezes the screen for a moment so you can gobble them up the points structure is the same as Pac-Man (200 – 1600) You have to be careful as if a Beamed Noted hits the eighth note, the eighth note will vanish. But like BurgerTime, the notes will appear after you play so many notes but at random places on the board.

- There is no tunnel, the maze is locked

- There is no bonus like the Pac-Man fruit. But a random Tuba icon will pop up randomly on the board and if you

get to it, you get an extra life. This is the only way to get an extra life as it is not dependent on your score. Again, if a Beamed note hits the tuba, it vanishes.

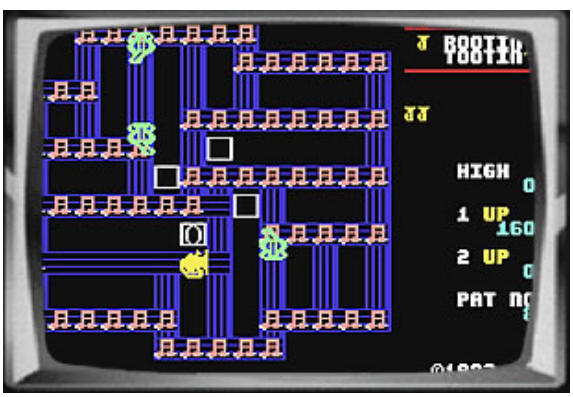
- A nice background tune plays as you work to clear the maze and each note makes a noise as you hit it. The arcade version handles this better as the notes scale up as you hit them reminding one of harvesting the cherries in Mr. Do! But still, this is a welcome change from the siren wail of Pac-Man
- There are no intermissions in the game. As soon as you clear a board, the next one appears with no real chance to relax and recharge
- One interesting ability, is that you can press the fire button and become invincible for a moment. You can pass through the enemies on the board as well as the notes. This will come in handy as you may have to double back to shoot a note at a series of nicely lined up enemies.

Now for the breakdown of the game and what I liked and didn't like…

Graphics – Nice and varied and colorful. Not up to arcade quality, but quite impressive for 1983. The enemies are varied in color, your tuba is yellow, and the maze is a nice deep blue. You can tell what everything is in the game as each enemy is nicely detailed. The graphics hold up surprisingly well 30 years after the fact.

Sounds – Very good again for 1983. Not up to arcade quality, but they hold their own. The background theme feels light and could have used more instruments. Again, I would have liked a selection of themes, but in 83 the 64 was still a new machine and its capabilities were not even close to being maximized. The theme just seemed a little tinny. The in game sounds are present and appreciated. They do not get on your nerves after an extended gaming session which is nice.

Control – Tight. Best thing to say about a game. Never felt that the stick let me down or didn't respond when it needed to.



What I liked – The game is very easy to get into and is original enough that you don't feel like it is just another Pac-Man clone. The musical motif is well done and not just for show. The standard conventions of the Maze Game are put aside somewhat as the Piano can move anywhere on the screen and has a disturbing knack of homing in on your position. This leads to a bit more strategy needing to be used and it forces you to clear the maze in a different way each time without being able to resort to using a pattern. I liked the variety in mazes as it adds to keeping the game fresh. I liked that I actually learned a little about music while doing some quick research in writing this review. I appreciated that the Triangles leave bombs on the screen that are deadly to the touch and that the cymbals will replace notes forcing you to clear out an area that you thought you were done with. The variety in enemies is welcome and the fact that they all do something different makes them more challenging than the four ghosts we are used to. Having some of the notes not on the maze itself makes the game a bit more challenging as well as you will have to be a little more thoughtful of how you control your tuba. It is very satisfying to be waiting by a note and then launching it at a ground of guitaros who are racing towards. And knocking off the Pianha never gets old.

What I didn't like – It's a Pac-Man clone, no more no less. These games are still fun, but at least for me now I play them in shorter doses as they do get repetitive rather quickly. But perhaps that is part of the genre's charm. I wished that the background tune changed. In the arcade game it did here, we get the same tune. I would have also liked the notes to scale as in the arcade version. There really isn't much to complain about here.

To conclude, I'm glad I dropped back in on this game and I think I will dust off MAME to give the arcade version a more thorough playing. This was a nice visit back to the past. Final Score: Rootin' Tootin' Gets An...8

NES'cade

by David Lundin, Jr.

Elevator Action

Long before the video game world had a genetically cloned super soldier fighting for world freedom, detachments of elite mercenaries operating within a shadow government or even before a certain British secret agent finally got a decent game, we had a lone spy with thirty floors between himself and escape. Elevator Action, released to arcades by Taito in 1983, created an excellent balance of planning, puzzle solving, shooting and quick reaction. The player assumes the role of Agent 17, codename: Otto. His mission is to infiltrate a thirty story security building, recover secret documents and escape to a getaway car in the basement. Otto repels onto the roof of the building on a zip line and enters via the roof access. He must use the elevator and escalator network to descend floor by floor, recovering the secret documents hidden behind conveniently colored red doors. As one would expect, since this is a security building, there is an endless army of enemy agents waiting behind every other door. Good thing Otto has his trusty sidearm to defend himself in addition to a jump kick for close quarters encounters. Being a resourceful agent Otto can also crush enemy agents with the elevator cars themselves or shoot out overhead lights, causing them to fall and crush his assailants at the cost of reduced visibility due to the darkness. After all the secret documents are collected Otto must make a mad dash to the basement where his getaway car awaits to complete his mission and the level. Even though Elevator Action was released at the end of the golden age of video games in 1983, a home version was released on the NES in 1987, four years later. While it is one of my favorite classic Taito arcade games and a pretty popular one at that, I've always found it strange that of the classic arcade games that were ported to the Famicom, Elevator Action actually got an American release.

Arcade Original NES Version

The assets that comprise the level design for Elevator Action are relatively simple and are comprised of building interiors with either doors, elevator shafts or escalators in every location. All the enemy agents are exactly the same and have the same moveset even though they become more agile as the levels roll on and the difficulty increases. Even Otto himself is a relatively simple character in terms of design and movement. This means the NES hardware should be able to recreate the arcade visuals without much trouble and aside from some slight color differences this is mostly the case. The differences in color create the only visual shortcoming, having to do with how enemy agents look on the darkened floors of the building. In the arcade there are two types of darkened floors: those that have the lights turned off to begin with are gray while floors that have the lights shot out will be pitch black. In either situation enemy agents will be shown as dark blue silhouettes, making them harder to see as well as adding an extra layer of detail to the game. On the NES both types of darkened floor situations are presented as pitch black however the enemy agents go through no visual change. Their black outfits disappear into the black background, leaving only their faces and hands visible. While it accomplishes the same thing in terms of making the enemy agents harder to see, one of the little details the game is known for is lost. It reminds me a lot of how the entire background in the Famicom version of Dig Dug was black, including the sky, but I can't really take any points off here as it's just one of those technical differences.

The levels themselves, while following the same premise and design, are completely different. In other words you can't use the NES version to memorize the building layouts for the arcade version and vice versa. Given the amount of time

between the two releases I can't fault the NES version as the core of the game remains completely intact. However things like the double elevators show up in the first stage which leaves less to be surprised and challenged by as the game continues on. For a home version of an arcade title you either have to attempt to provide the arcade game verbatim or add additional features to extend the play value. Starting the difficulty curve early accomplishes neither of these. If anything the NES version could be considered simply more or alternate levels of Elevator Action since while you don't get an exacting recreation of each stage you do get a nice conversion of everything else. The controls function true to the original with the directional pad being used for movement as well as door, elevator and escalator manipulation. The A Button causes Otto to jump while the B Button causes Otto to draw his gun and fire. Otto can jump and fire as well as duck and fire and both skills are just as important here as they were in the arcade. Additionally the subtleties of not being able to duck in an elevator car or running into the elevator cable when attempting to jump across an elevator shaft when the elevator is below are carried over. On later stages the enemy agents get far more crafty with their shots, ducking as well as lying down. The latter can create a particularly difficult situation as you can either luck out with a low shot from an elevator car or jump their incoming bullets. Otto is held to firing three bullets at a time just as in the arcade.

In terms of audio the game takes a bit of a sidestep compared to the source material. The familiar background theme is here but something isn't quite right about it. It's the same song and I suppose an attempt was made to make it sound as it originally did instead of beefing it up for the NES but it starts to grate on the nerves after a while. I love the simple background tune of the arcade version however I can only describe the NES version as slightly off key and tempo, not terrible but certainly not pleasant. Sound effects are reasonably accurate except for the elevator sounds which play anytime Otto is standing on an elevator car, regardless if it is in motion or not. Originally the elevator cars only made a movement sound when they were actually in motion, one sound for each floor movement. Yet on the NES you get a long deep endless hum the entire time Otto has a foot anywhere on an elevator car, even when just walking across one. This comes off as fairly lazy to me especially when so many other details were nailed properly. The attract screen is faithfully recreated as is the opening with the zip line being shot onto the top of the building, the slack being taken up and Otto sliding down onto the rooftop. Even the escape sequence in the getaway car at the end of each stage is very nicely recreated.

With a very solid recreation of the assets and gameplay functions of the original this one sounds like an exemplary conversion of an arcade classic, slight graphic and sound compromises aside. However it does fall short due to an overall issue of wonky performance. As the screen scrolls while in an elevator, the individual floors seem to have issues mirroring where the enemy agents feet are supposed to be positioned. In other words moving an elevator up or down causes the enemy agents position on the floor to slide either up or down. I assumed that this may also affect the level at which enemy bullets are fired but the shots move too quickly for me to form a definitive opinion. Unsurprisingly these shortcomings in technical competency can be chalked up to Elevator Action being yet another game developed by Micronics, universally known as the go to for quick and dirty ports of arcade games to the Famicom. While being a Micronics developed game isn't a complete deal breaker for me, with the NES versions of Ghosts 'n Goblins and Tiger-Heli being less than stellar but fine in my opinion, you can tell pretty quickly that this is one of their projects. Elevator Action on the NES is still a reasonably solid effort and a lot of fun can be had here once you get used to the slight differences and mute the sound. I can't wholeheartedly recommend the NES version but you could certainly do a lot worse. I do recommend everyone play the arcade original for this one though as it is readily available on the Taito Legends compilation that was released a few years ago.

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

The Pixelated Mage

by Jeff Wittenhagen

Wings Of Wor

Platform: Sega Genesis
Developer: Masaya
Release Date: January 25, 1991
Genre: Scrolling Shooter
Game Modes: Single Player
Tag Line: "Has an addictive quality that makes it fun to play for shmup fans of all levels."

Wings of Wor

Synopsis

Wings of Wor, Gynoug in Japan, is one of the games that showed how the Genesis could outshine the Super Nintendo in terms of pure speed and graphical power. When you first look at Wings of Wor, it does not seem any different than other 2-D shmups that have been released. You collect power-ups as you blast your way through hordes of enemies, facing a massive boss at the end in order to proceed onward. The first major modification from the usual formula is Wings of Wor's setting. Instead of controlling some kind of random spacecraft, you are a mythical winged angel named Wor. Wor is a resident of the planet Iccus who must save the world from a group of demons led by a being known as The Destroyer. The unique setting is perfectly displayed on screen, in terms of scenery and enemy design. The demons are represented as being not only nightmarish but also a bit slimy.

Gameplay

The gameplay in Wings of Wor is not the most creative that you will see. The only thing for you to do is shoot your way through multiple enemies and although there are tons of them, that's all there is to it. The number of enemies on screen is compounded by the massive amount of projectiles that they shoot at you, which puts the concentration on maneuvering Wor more so than purely on enemy destruction. In order to avoid multiple deaths, you will need to collect the scrolls that are found throughout each level. The scrolls provide more powerful weapons that can, at times, fill the entire screen with projectiles. The typical tactic of constantly attacking throughout each level offers a great way to figure out techniques. What makes Wings of Wor stand about other shmups of the time is the great level design combined with a consistent difficulty level. This gives Wings of Wor an addictive quality that makes it fun to play for shmup fans of all levels.

Graphics and Sound

The visuals in Wings of Wor is accentuated by the great enemy design. The enemies have a great look to them with a great artistic design that transcends disturbing. Apart from the enemy design, Wings of Wor doesn't offer anything else out of the ordinary aside from the amount of projectiles that can be in the screen at one time with no noticeable slowdown. Wings of Wor has a graphical style that just appeals to the senses on a primal level. The soundtrack in Wings of Wor has a very dramatic feel that fits in with the who eerie setting perfectly. The sound quality is top notch

and avoids the tin sounding effects that other Genesis games are plagued with. The sound effects are above par, never having an annoying feel to them aside from the scream Wor gives off when he is killed.

Is It Worth Playing?

While not the greatest game in the Genesis library, it does not mean that shmup fans shouldn't give Wings of Wor a try. Because of its adjustable difficulty and unique themes, Wings of Wor is a game that players of all levels can get behind. Wings of Wor stands above the generic shmup with something a bit different, and that's not a bad thing.

Rating = 3 Massive Boss Mutations out of 5

Well, that's all we have for this month. Now go off and buy some fireworks and celebrate the Fourth of July in style! Also, if you are interested in submitting anything for our upcoming issue #100 in September, just send me an e-mail by clicking my name above and I'll be sure to check it over to see about including it.

Following in last months footsteps, here's a nice listing of some games to play over this Fourth of July. While they might not be specifically Fourth of July material, they at least have a bang to them:

- Boom Bang (Atari 2600)
- Astroblast (Atari 2600)
- Laser Blast (Atari 2600)
- Blaster (Arcade)
- Nova Blast (Intellivision, Colecovision)
- Master Blaster (C64)
- Blaster Master (NES)