Printing Help

Retrogaming Times Monthly #100 - September 2012
Special Big 100th Issue

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I must start out by saying congratulations to Retrogaming Times Monthly for reaching 100 issues! It is a major achievement and one that the original Retrogaming Times did not accomplish. It is very gratifying to see my newsletter continue on long after I stopped it.

I can still remember when I first started the newsletter. I wanted to give something back to the classic game community that I was an active part of. Things were so much different back then, before eBay changed the market. It was a time of a handful of sites selling games and newsgroup auctions. Trading was the way to find the elusive games that you needed to complete your collection. I do miss those times when I would get excited about finally getting a game like Q*Bert's Qubes for the Colecovision.

While Retrogaming Times started off small, it did grow quickly. One rule that I made from the beginning was that I wanted it to be an open forum. Anyone who wanted to write about classic video games could contribute to it. I am happy to see that RTM keeps that rule alive. I believe everyone has something to contribute, no matter how good of a writer they are. It is good that there is a newsletter like this that allows all gamers a place to review a game or tell a story.

I never envisioned back in 1997 that Retrogaming Times would be my legacy. Every writer dreams of creating something that lives on. This newsletter is my legacy and I hope that it outlives me. It is satisfying to see something that I created continuing on. So here’s is to another 100 issues of RTM! Long may you run!

Tom Zjaba

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mage - The Enchanted Crystals for the Odyssey^2 Released

Join Wizzy, the son of the Wizard of Odyssey, in his first adventure!

While working on a powerful spell, Wizzy's father was being watched by others. As a precaution he captured the spell inside a crystal and divided it into 4 pieces, which he buried inside the mines, just south of your village. It is now up to you to collect these pieces and bring them together inside the enchanted chest to ensure the spell doesn't fall into the wrong hands.

This game really pushes the boundaries of what is possible on the dear old Philips Videopac and the Magnavox Odyssey 2!

Check out the trailer at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WcD6qczYIJY

Game features:
- Playable on Videopac and Odyssey2 consoles
- High resolution background on Videopac+ consoles
- Multicolored backgrounds and sprites
- Digitized speech using the voice add-on
- Internet high score uploading
- Online rewards system

Release information:
The game is available on cartridge with a limited release of 100 copies.

Check out the Revival Studios website for more information, at: http://www.revival-studios.com/?page=131.

EVENTS

Retro Game Beurs Deurne

Sunday, September 9, 10:00am - 4:00pm (Deurne, Netherlands)

After the success of the first convention, there will be another retro gaming convention in Deurne on the 9th of September 2012! This convention is in the south of the Netherlands and only a short ride from most parts of Holland and Belgium!

At the convention traders, resellers and collectors will display, trade and sell their retro games. From MSX to Atari and Playstation 2 to Gamecube, anything you'd want will be there. With more than 150 tables of gaming goodness and an arcade event this will be a convention you don't want to miss!

The information
- Location: Den Draai, Blasiusstraat 2, 5754 AV, Deurne (Zijlberg)
- Entrance fee: 3.50 euro (kids below 12 are free with a supporting adult)

- Over 150 tables of retro goodness
- Arcade event with prizes
- Catering and abundant parking space
- Easy to reach with public transport, 10 min walk from the train station

See the website above for more info! See you on the 9th!

3rd Annual Retro Gaming Day

Saturday, September 22, 1:00pm - 4:00pm (Piscataway, NJ)

Join us on Saturday, September 22, 1:00-4:00pm at the Kennedy Branch of Piscataway Public Library for this fun, free & all ages event. We'll be displaying and demonstrating a wide range of vintage video game consoles and equipment from the Atari 2600 and Intellivision, all the way up through more recent hits like PlayStation and Nintendo64. Our theme this year is handheld games, so we'll be featuring early handheld game systems including Nintendo Game Boy, Sega Game Gear, and more. We'll also be featuring a game themed drop-in craft for the kids from 2:00-3:00. This is an all ages event, so bring the whole family!

For questions or more information, please call Allen at 732-463-1633 ext 18.

Vintage Computer Festival Midwest 7.0 / Chicagoland Commodore Expo

Saturday, September 22, 8:00am - Sunday, September 23, 4:00pm (Lombard, IL)

VCF Midwest is a free and open exposition of classic computing hardware, software and memorabilia. It is being presented this year in conjunction with the seventh annual Chicagoland Commodore Expo. Two great shows, one great non-price! We will be at the Heron Point Building in Lombard, IL and if you mention "Fall Commodore Expo" to the Fairfield Inn and Suites desk, you will receive a special $69/night room rate!

Some of our planned exhibits and demos:
Glenside Computer Club - The Radio Shack Color Computer
Robert Smith - Genera and Lisp on a Symbolics MacIvory Lisp Machine
Bill Madden - 1964 IBM Modem and Acoustic Coupler
Dan Werner - N8VEM Retro-computing project: Z80 SBC, N8, 6809, 6802 and 6502 systems
Nick Allen - Sun 1, Homebrew S100 Computer, Homebrew Cosmac
Dennis Boone - Vector MZ
Bill Degnan and Justin Jernigan (MARCH) - Tandy-centric Small Computers and Hand-helds
Marty Goldberg - His new book Atari Inc: Business is Fun

Stop by our website above for more info. Look forward to seeing you there!

Portland Retro Gaming Expo

Saturday, September 29, 9:00am - Midnight | Sunday, September 30, 10:00am - 5:00pm (Portland, OR)

We can hardly believe it, but it's our 7th year of the Portland Retro Gaming Expo in beautiful Portland, Oregon. Here's the big news for 2012:

PRGE has moved to the Oregon Convention Center! The main show floor will be in a massive 60,000 square foot hall with the speakers and panels taking place in two separate auditoriums just outside the main hall. The venue is more the three times the size of the Doubletree last year and is fully climate controlled to eliminate that glorious geek-stank we enjoyed so much last year.

PRGE, in cooperation with Ground Kontrol Classic Arcade, introduces Mega-Cade - a 20,000 square foot zone of full-size arcade and pinball machines - all set to freeplay. The main show floor will be open until 7:00 PM on Saturday - vendors and all, and will close down between 7:00 and 9:00 on Saturday during the live auction, but will reopen for an after-hours party in the Mega-Cade sponsored by Ground Kontrol for those 21 and up. Features musical entertainment, snacks and a cash bar.

As always, PRGE is right on Portland's famous light rail line and close by several hotels.

Tickets just went on sale and we are continuing our tradition of 1 hour early admission for presale badge holders. We have no idea what kind of demand we are going to see this year by moving to the Convention Center so you may want to reserve your passes early. Stop by our website above for more info and tickets!

If you would like to have your event featured in Retrogaming Times Monthly, just send an e-mail to Bryan Roppolo at bryan@retrogamingtimes.com and he'll make sure to announce it in a future issue.

Apple II Incider

by Donald Lee

What A Long Strange Trip Its Been

Back in 1991, when I was still a junior in high school, Incider / A+ magazine celebrated its 100th issue. Back in the mid 1980's until 1989, Incider and A+ magazine were the premier general interest Apple II magazines. Due to declining interest in the Apple II line, the two magazines were merged in mid 1989. In an editorial titled "What A Long Strange Trip Its Been", editor Dan Muse looked back at the history of the magazine, some of the hijinx over the years and also noted that "100th issues only come every 8.3 years".

This month, Retrogaming Times Monthly (RTM) celebrates its 100th issue. 8.3 years ago (in June of 2004), RTM was started after the old Retrogaming Times (RT) ceased publishing after 80 issues. To celebrate, here are some thoughts on the first 100 issues:

1. My first article for RTM appeared in Issue #31 (December 2006). It's hard to believe it has almost been SIX YEARS since I started writing. If you look back at Issue #31 (and also Issue #30, especially the editorial), you will see why I started writing. The magazine had considerably thinned down and I wanted to help keep it going. Plus, in all the years of RTM, I thought it was interesting that there had NOT been a dedicated Apple II column.

As the years have progressed, I branched out and wrote some columns on the Atari 5200, Vectrex, PC Games, Mobile Games and other topics. The Apple II is my main love but I enjoy many aspects of retrogaming besides the Apple II.

2. Early on, I wrote about multiple games but it was a little later I started focusing on single titles. I also saw that many people are quite serious about their columns (points, rating systems, etc). There's really nothing wrong with that, but I wanted to share my gaming experiences of titles I played in the 1980's. However, there were a wealth of games I didn't have a ton of experience with, so I decided to just see how those games were and get my feel for them. It may be a little unconventional but I found it works better than just throwing around ratings.

3. In going through the past issues, I took note of the various editors that have graced RTM. Here are some thoughts on each:

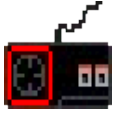
Adam King (June 2004 - October 2006)

I had no direct experience working with Adam. I signed on to write for RTM two issues after he left. However, I will say I saw that he had lost interest in the magazine toward the end of his run. He had minimal to say for his editorials and ultimately decided to step down.

Scott Jacobi (November 2006 - December 2008)

Scott was the first editor that I worked with writing for RTM. Scott didn't do anything too fancy, he mainly maintained the magazine as it was and many people liked it that way. However, he did come up with the idea to use icons for each column, which continues to this day. I also thank Scott for being super patient as I turned in many articles right on the dot (or late) during this time. Actually, I still do that today!

The magazine had thinned down right around the time Scott took charge. Despite some months of 7 or 8 articles, Scott's last issue only had five articles. It was a tough time for the magazine.



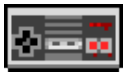
Eric Schuetz (January 2009)

Unless you look really carefully, you won't even know Eric took over. He was announced as the new editor by Scott in the December 2008 issue and took the reins in January 2009, but then gave way to Bryan Roppolo. If I recall correctly, Eric emailed the staff sometime after the January issue saying that he had apparently underestimated the amount of time to put the issues together and decided to step away.

Bryan Roppolo (February 2009 to October 2010, January 2011 to Present)

Bryan took over after Eric and probably has done the most to push RTM to the future. All of us reading know that Bryan has done a lot of work:

1. He changed the old HTML format to the more advanced format that we have today. This wasn't popular with everyone but many of today's readers prefer a fresher look.
2. RTM was originally on Alan Hewston's website (Tom Zjaba's before that), but Bryan got RTM its own retrogamingtimes.com domain.
3. Bryan has a creative streak in him as he created plenty of graphics, icons and did other creative things with some of our screenshots in the articles.
4. Lastly, Bryan put up the past issues of RT and RTM on the website plus an article search along with some other features.
5. Under Bryan's leadership, there appears to be a renewed enthusiasm for the magazine among the writers and the readership.



Chris Osborne (November 2010 to December 2010)

While Bryan did plenty of great work, he announced in October 2010 that he wanted to step away from being the editor and focus on the creative aspects of the website. Someone named Chris Osborne offered to assist in Bryan's place. He wrote one editorial for the November 2010 issue. Based on the editorial, I recall that I had suggested RTM have a group of editors that could take over on a rotating basis. This would take the pressure off of one person having to do everything.

Beyond this, Chris wanted to change the format of the magazine and thus in December 2010, published RTM in a blog style format. However, the new format was heavily criticized. It was at this time that Chris went out of touch. Despite efforts by Bryan and me to reach Chris, we never got in touch and made plans moving forward.

Donald Lee (November 2010 to Present - Rotating Editor)

After a couple of months I took over as the sole editor for about three months in 2011. In looking over the past issues, Bryan wrote the editorial in the April 2011 issue and has continued on since then. I am noting that I am still an editor "presently" mainly because I am still listed on the website as such. In reality, Bryan has quietly done the work in putting the issues together for quite a while now. Of course, I am always ready to step in to assist.

4. For any publication to get to 100 issues, it takes dedicated readers and a dedicated staff. Even though I wasn't with RTM at the beginning, I feel I am part of a family writing for RTM. I want to thank all of our readers and the staff of RTM (past and present) that have contributed to the magazine reaching its 100th issue.

What does the future hold for RTM? The magazine will continue to chug on and celebrate the 200th issue (RT and RTM combined) in about two years. If you think about this, RT and RTM have been around for over 15 years combined.

Then, in another 8.3 years, RTM will hopefully be celebrating its own 200th issue. I will be curious to see what RTM is covering then.

Train Of Thought

by Tony van de Graaf

"Retro Gaming"

In this world full of super realistic games, what's all the fuss about Retro Gaming?

The first and most common known argument is: Playability. Most 'modern' games don't have as much of that compared to the old ones.

What is the real reason more and more people want to play games that are at least 15 years old? Imagination! If you are playing one of today's games, the graphics are so realistic there's not much left for you to imagine. When you play a game and all you have are a bunch of pixels moving around the screen, it boosts your brain. When some pixels are supposed to be a space ship, in your mind you create it and it looks just like you want it to look. That is fun! If you have a game where you see a very detailed space ship on screen there's not much you can change about it.

If you're lucky enough to be around my age and were in the middle of the start of the computer (gaming) era, you probably share my feelings of Nostalgia. In the early 80's you had arcade halls. Halls stuffed with arcade cabinets and pinball machines. No matter how many machines there were, they were all occupied with at least one person. If there was a new game released there were three or four of those machines. I went there more than a few times, which was how I 'discovered' games and game playing.

When I was in the military service in '83 one night I had night shift. The corporal who was sharing the shift with me brought a game computer. I don't know what kind of computer it was but I remember it had a black screen with green characters and it was playing Space Invaders. Wow! Compared to the 'real' arcades it was nothing of course, but it was so much fun! Guys were lining up to be able to play a round. In the cafeteria they had a pinball machine along with Donkey Kong or Galaga, I don't remember which exactly. With a few mates we held pinball tournaments. That was amazing! By that time I had hardly heard of home computers.

After my military service I started working at a print shop as junior graphic designer. My colleague/teacher went to a computer fair where he was going to buy a Schneider. However, he also came back with a Commodore 64 for me. When I had my C64 I was really sucked into home gaming! Now I was able to play games in my own house, and the C64 not only had a lot of arcade game conversions but also a lot of originals. That was when my real roots for games were planted.

It must be the same as with music. The music you listened to in your childhood is the kind that stays with you for the rest of your life, no matter how more advanced or better the newer music is.

After the C64 came a Commodore Amiga and after that 'real' PC's, Playstations, Xboxes...But even through all this technological achievement, my two favorite apps are Commodore 64 Forever and Amiga Forever. So the situation is: I have a computer that's roughly 9000 times faster than the C64 and I use it to play Miner 2049'er or Galaga via emulation. If you mentioned to my 1983 self that I would be using a computer with this amount of power to do C64 games, I would have thought I was crazy. But, there’s something about these old games that just keeps you coming back for more.
Because Retro Gaming is fairly popular, the emulation circuit on internet is very much alive. Try and Google 'emulator'. I got about 80,000,000 results! There are emulators not only for the regulars, but even for the most obscure computers, GameCube, Playstation, Xbox, and Sega Genesis to name a few.

If you want to try out some retro games, just search for 'Retro Games online' and look out for a site that offers games to be played online. Try something like Boulder Dash, Break Out, or Galaga. That's the easiest way to get the feeling you went back in time 25 years!

Here’s to having lots of retro fun!

Virtual Memories

by Donald Lee

What Happened To The Video Game Arcade?

It's Tuesday evening as I write this and I am watching the San Francisco Giants play the Los Angeles Dodgers in a National League West baseball showdown. Tomorrow, I will work a half day before heading down to Los Angeles for a short vacation with friends and family.

Before I make the trek, I wanted to submit another article for RTM's 100th Issue. It was something I had been thinking about recently and combined with something I did a few weeks ago, it made for the perfect article.

On a slow Sunday a few weeks ago, I decided to make a trek to the California Extreme Pinball / Video Game show in Santa Clara, CA. It's about a 30 to 35 drive for me from San Francisco. Despite the fact that gas is expensive and I had to pay admission for the show, I decided to give it a shot as I had never been to the show before.

As David Lundin, Jr. noted in his Show Report last month, this event was held at the Santa Clara Convention Center. I actually had been to the Santa Clara Convention Center about a year or two before when there had been a technology show and my current company had a booth. I was asked to work the booth so it was good to be familiar with the area.

David's article does a great job of covering the show so there is no need to rehash what he said. However, I will note some of my experiences. I arrived around 1:30 PM and stayed until about 6:30 PM or so. Most of my time was spent simply playing various video games and pinball machines. Here's a list of games I played (maybe slightly incomplete):

- Track & Field
- Hypersports
- Super Punch-Out
- Sinistar
- Robotron
- Stargate (I gave up rather quickly with the controls)
- Space Dungeon
- Food Fight
- Super Sprint
- Joust II
- Galaga (on a little mini machine) - I was surprised I didn't see a regular sized Galaga machine at the show
- Terminator 2
- Star Trek SOS
- Star Wars
- The Empire Strikes Back

I went by myself so I didn't have a chance to compete, but I did try to survive in the games as long as possible. I had this great idea of perhaps video taping myself playing which would have been a great addition to the article. Unfortunately, I only had my iPhone and there was no easy way to record and play at the same time, so I abandoned that idea. I did end up taking some pictures of the screens and game titles to show that I was at the show! All in all, I enjoyed my time there. It was great to see a lot of people of all ages, as kids today are so tied to their game systems

they don't realize how great the older arcade games were.

Fast forward to a couple of Fridays ago. I was about to leave work and trying to figure out something to do. It occurred to me that it would be good to hit up an arcade somewhere. I did a search on Yelp and did not find one that I could get to easily. There was one in downtown San Francisco but I didn't want to make such a long trek. There were arcades at Malibu Grand Prix but it was fairly far away. Ultimately, I decided to just make a trek to a bookstore and read some comic books for a while.

I started to wonder why arcades are seemingly fading away in the Bay Area. There used to be a lot around. Some of them were stand alone establishments or part of a shopping mall. I guess a part of the reason is that today's video game machines and computers are so much more powerful than older machines. In years past, you had to go to the arcades to play the best games. Home translations were pretty good (especially if you had machines like the Commodore 64 or Atari computers) but still were slightly inferior (in most cases) than their arcade counterparts.

These days, that is rarely the case (except for maybe Dance Dance Revolution, which is better played at the arcade). Many of the most popular games are ones like Call of Duty or Starcraft which are played on PC's and consoles. Additionally, tons of gamers play on their mobile phones.

This is not to say that arcades are completely gone. A local movie theater and bowling alley had some video games that could be played (though the bowling alley is now closed). In fact, I mentioned a while ago that a Pinball Museum also exists in the Bay Area and that is great fun.

My main point is that arcades (like bookstores) were not only entertainment centers but social gathering places. Most people spend enough time sitting at home surfing on the Internet, so going out to the arcade is a plus (fresh air / exercise). It's too bad that it doesn't happen as much now like it used to.

If there is an arcade around your area, drop by and enjoy the experience. Bring a friend or two, or maybe you'll make new ones. You'll enjoy it! I guarantee it!

Cabinet Fever

by Tony van de Graaf

So I'm Building An Arcade Cabinet

What is wrong with you? You hardly ever in your life picked up a hammer or a saw...You've got two left hands! ..."

Ok, all true. But...on the internet I read you don't really need woodworking skills to build your own cabinet. And the internet never lies!

What IS wrong with me? Why would I want to build an Arcade Cabinet?

Looks nice, huh?

There are a couple of reasons.

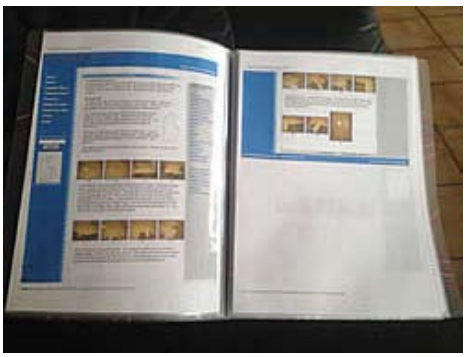
I grew up in the Arcade Era, the early 80's, so I spent a lot of time in those arcades where there were dozens of the arcade and pinball machines. Therefore, this project is an attempt to honor those times and to be able to re-live them without spending lots of cash. Besides that, it's every Retro Gamer's dream to play on an arcade, let alone having one for themselves! Be honest, who doesn't love those big, shiny, tinkling, colorful, arcades with their heavy-duty joysticks (one could lift the arcade cabinet up with one!) and huge buttons?

Another reason I guess is that I want to prove something to the world...that a computer freak is able to build something with his/her hands. Being a graphic designer/system administrator comes in handy for the computer stuff and shiny graphics on the side panels and the marquee, but most of my family members are carpenters, plumbers etc. The only one who isn't is me, so this is also a personal mission.

Wanting to build an arcade cabinet is one thing, really doing it is another. It's a very long road from thinking about it to touching your first piece of wood.

Setting out on my own adventure

Here's how I got started on my quest to build the perfect arcade cabinet.



Some clear & helpful instructions

First, in my head I imagined how I was going to do it. Then I did some research, most on the internet, by reading about other people's experiences and viewing pictures of their results. After still not being intimidated by others' adventures, I carefully showed a picture of an arcade machine to my wife with a quick, "it would be great making one of these myself". An hour or so later the doorbell rings, but I had to send the folks presenting me one of those white coats with sleeves around your back away (just kidding, the funny farm didn't try and collect me, as much as some people around me would have liked!). After showing all the pictures to my wife she goes, "you are really serious?" If you can survive that phase it really is time to make concrete plans, so I did. The hunt for a good arcade cabinet plan started. It turned out to be a long hunt because there are lots of plans out there you can use, only you have to pay for them. The rebel spirit of the 80's whispered to me that there's no need to pay for plans. Eventually I found a perfect set, a real nice machine with a very clear step by step description, and, for free! So I downloaded it and started reading. When done I started reading again...and

again...and again. For keeping up the costs, needed tools, and materials I started a fresh Excel document where I put everything I needed, I added a column for price, amount, and if I already have it/bought it. From the day I decided to really do this, the months flew by. That was ok with me because I realized with a project like this the second most important thing to do is to plan and do proper research so you really know what you're expected to do.

Now it was time to go to the hardware store to get the first things to get me going. I bought 3 sheets of MDF (2.20 x 1.10 meters, 18 mm thick), 3 boards of 'normal' wood (3m x 2cm x 2cm), 3 boards (3m x 4cm x 2cm), screws (3 sizes), and 3 clamps for securing the wood while sawing. Tools I needed and bought were a saw table (!), some T-squares, and some more little things, like 8 L brackets for the drawer and the control panel and 4 casters so I could move the cabinet around without killing my back. When I came home I was thinking, “YESSSS, finally in business, let the adventure begin!”

And now the adventure begins!

Next month I’ll chronicle my struggles to start properly and my first cuts...

Take care and have plenty of Retro Fun!

The Business Of Gaming

by Jonathan H. Davidson

Who's Suing Who?

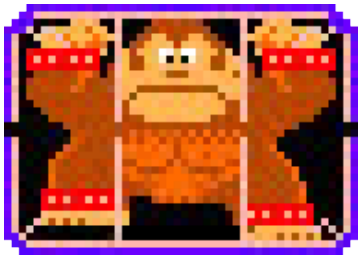
Introduction

For this special 100th issue of RTM, I am going to take a rather different approach with this installment of the Business of Gaming. Rather than review the business press for a particular year, I am going to look at a few of the numerous lawsuits that involved video game companies in the early 1980s. Next month, I will be back with a review of the business press for 1984.

Significant court decisions are routinely published in volumes called law reports. While the main focus of any court decision is a detailed legal analysis and conclusion, there is usually a detailed review of the facts. Thus these decisions can provide a unique perspective on the video game industry. Very often they include “inside” information not otherwise publicly available. The challenge with this source is that only a very small fraction of lawsuits ultimately end with a published decision.

Please note that I am not a licensed attorney and that this article is not to be considered legal advice. Copyright law is a very complex and ever-evolving subject, and so the cases reviewed below may no longer represent the current state of the law in the United States.

Who owns Donkey Kong?



Donkey Kong is probably the most frequently litigated of the classic arcade games. Indeed, the disputes over who owned the title character began even before the video game was created. In 1975, Universal City Studios brought an action against several companies to determine who held the rights to the King Kong of movie fame. Ultimately it was determined that the rights to the character belonged to Universal.

In April 1982, Universal sued Nintendo of America in New York claiming that the video game Donkey Kong infringed on its trademarks on the King Kong character. (Universal had previously successfully negotiated royalty agreements with both Atari and Coleco for the use of its character.) The judge eventually concluded that there was no confusion in the marketplace between the video game and the film, and so he dismissed Universal’s claim against Nintendo.

The finding of facts in this case include some interesting background information on the origins of the game: “Nintendo's development of Donkey Kong began in March 1981. In the design stages, the original game concept involved a port scene, and featured the Popeye cartoon characters — Popeye, Bluto, and Popeye's girlfriend, Olive Oyl. Because it was determined that it was not technically possible to present the Popeye characters on the video screen, the characters Popeye and Bluto were replaced with ‘Mario the Carpenter’ and a comical gorilla, and the port scene was changed to an unfinished building.”

Subsequently, in June 1982, Nintendo brought a suit against Elcon Industries in Michigan. This was a company that manufactured and sold arcade games. Commencing in November 1981, Elcon began importing “Crazy Kong” circuit boards from Japan, assembling the games, and then reselling them in direct competition with the official units. (Crazy Kong was not actually a bootleg game; it had been officially licensed by Nintendo, but for sale in Japan only.)

The Court found that “at various times in the last few months, [Donkey Kong] has been the most popular and commercially successful audio-video game in the United States.” Because of the potential negative impact on the sales of the official Nintendo version, the Court ordered that Elcon immediately cease selling the Crazy Kong games.

At about the same time, Nintendo filed a separate action against Bay Coin in New York. In this case, the company was selling a hacked or pirated version of Donkey Kong called “Crazy Cong”. Unfortunately, the court does not describe the (apparently minor) differences between this version and the original. Once again, the defendants were ordered to immediately stop selling their game.

Pac-Man & Clones

Not to be outdone, Pac-Man was also the subject of numerous lawsuits. The first salvo was fired by Atari in 1981 when it sued Online Systems (and its owner, Ken Williams) in California. Online Systems had recently developed a game called “Jawbreaker” (programmed by John Harris) that Atari felt infringed on the copyright for Pac-Man. It had not yet released a version, but one was under development and expected to reach the market “in about the second quarter of 1982”.

The Court held that while the basic game play was similar, there were some significantly different elements: “in ‘Jawbreaker’, the chasers are in the form of happy faces which seem to roll along in the maze and travel in a random pattern”, “the object which is chased by the chaser is a set of teeth, simulating false teeth”, and “when the smiling faces appear to catch the false teeth, the teeth fall out to the bottom of the maze”. Consequently, the Court declined to stop the sale of this game.

Undaunted, a few months later, Atari brought a lawsuit in Illinois against North American Philips Consumer Electronics Corp. (the developers of the Magnavox Odyssey 2). Once again, the subject matter was a Pac-Man clone – “K. C. Munchkin”. The programmer of that game was Ed Averett.

The Court found that there were some differences between the two games. K. C. Munchkin, for example had “several modes with an almost indefinite variety of mazes. One mode, for example, employs a constantly changing configuration, […] and in yet another, the maze disappears when the gobbler moves.” Other aspects of the game, however, especially the character graphics and animation, had blatantly similar features.

After a very detailed comparison of the two games, and a lengthy analysis of the law, the Court held that K. C. Munchkin infringed Atari’s copyright, and so it ordered Magnavox to immediately cease production of the game.

While Atari held the rights to the home video game version, Midway held the rights to the arcade game, and they engaged in their share of litigation too. A Japanese firm called Kaken developed a tabletop version of Pac-Man and it was available at retail in April or May of 1981 (in Japan).

The Court described it thusly: “[the game] is housed in a silver-grey rectangular plastic box measuring approximately 8 x 4 x 1. The display screen is at the upper right of this box and is approximately 1 1/2 x 4. The player controls the action of the game via a small black plastic joystick at the lower right-hand of the game.”

Sometime prior to February 1982, Bandai began importing these games to the United States, and selling them under the name “Packri Monster”. It sold for approximately $30 to $50. (This slightly predates the introduction of the Coleco mini-arcade version.) As of July 2, 1982, Bandai was prohibited from importing any more of these games.

In December 1982, Midway successfully sued several parties in Illinois to stop the sale of a “Cute–See” modification kit for use in Pac–Man arcade games. This was a set of replacement ROM chips for the original hardware; “however, the Cute–See characters bear no resemblance to Pac–Man and his monsters. […] At a more advanced stage of the game, after the maze has first been successfully cleared of track, the maze barricades disappear leaving only a pattern of pink tracks. And finally, at a third stage, the maze limitation on the chase is altogether eliminated, substantially enhancing the difficulty of eluding the pursuers”.

Other Legal Actions

Atari’s lawyers were kept very busy in the early-1980s. Atari was the plaintiff in two other legal actions against

companies that have long-since disappeared from the video game industry.

In October 1979, Atari introduced the Asteroids arcade game. By November 1981, they had sold some 70,000 units, making it the largest selling video game ever (not counting sales in Japan). In March 1981, Amusement World, Inc. launched its similar game, Meteors. Almost immediately, Atari sued in Maryland to stop the sale of the competing title on the grounds of copyright infringement. Because the games were found to be sufficiently different (e.g. Meteors had colour graphics, game play was much faster), the Court denied Atari's request.

In the Fall of 1983, JS&A, Inc. began to sell a device called the Prom Blaster. It was designed to copy Atari 2600 cartridges: "you simply plug in your Atari or Activision cartridge in one slot and a blank cartridge in another, press a button, and three minutes later you've created an exact duplicate." JS&A also apparently marketed nine games for the 2600; unfortunately the court decision does not identify or describe them.

In December 1983, Atari sued in Illinois to prevent the sale of the Prom Blaster. The Court held that the sole purpose of such a device was to facilitate copyright infringement, and so it granted Atari's request. Approximately 100 units were manufactured, but it is not clear if any were actually sold before the lawsuit commenced. The proposed retail price was $119, and $10 each for the blank cartridges.

Sources

The above article is based on various published law reports. Some of these decisions are feely available on various court websites. Others can only be obtained from a commercial database (Westlaw) or in print at a law library. Please contact me directly for the specific citations and references if required.

Gaming Tetralogies

by Jeff Wittenhagen

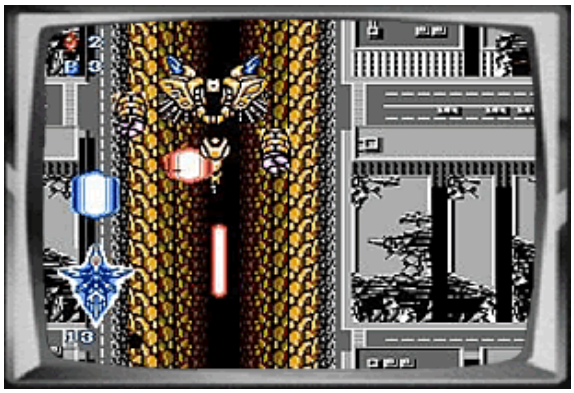
Vertical Shoot 'em Ups Of The 8-Bit Console Era

Tetralogies is back for issue 100 and we are about to blow your mind! Gaming Tetralogies now covers 4 of the best games from any type of series or genre on any platform or platforms. The games will not be listed in any particular preference order but by release date and will be more of a must have list for each series. Feel free to comment on any games in the series you feel should have been included.

Going into the new realm of Tetralogies I will focus on a genre that I have played to mastery, the vertical shmup or shoot ‘em up. I will only be talking about games from 8-bit consoles and I consider the PC Engine/TG-16 more of a 16-bit console. Enjoy, and here’s looking to more along this format. Post suggestions in the comments on the side.

Summer Carnival Recca '92 - Nintendo Famicom

Such a great shooter that had an entire Hudson Soft carnival centered around it! Recca comes flying at you with speeds that no one thought the Famicom was capable of. There are multiple modes of play and are all based upon “carnival” rules, which means top score in a set amount of time. In the days before bullet hell shooters, this was manic as hell!



Crisis Force - Nintendo Famicom

Like Recca, Crisis Force was never released outside of Japan, yet this Konami masterpiece should have. Konami never fails to impress and with this game they innovate yet again. Not only can you upgrade your ship, but you have three different forms you can morph into and each have their own arrangement of firepower. There is also a golden power up which once you collect five allows you transform into a mega ship. Add in the fact that you are given 2-player simultaneous gameplay and this game has it all!

Gun-Nac - Nintendo Entertainment System

Compile is known for creating some of the best shmups on any system and Gun-Nac is no different. While the graphics and sound aren't quite on the level of a Crisis Force, the gameplay is heads above the competition. You have five different main weapons that can be powered up and you also have special attacks with their own unique styles. Something has to be said for so much variation combined with spot on gameplay.

Power Strike - Sega Master System

Another great game by Compile, this is where the Aleste series begins and it is a great initial venture into the series. If Power Strike can be described as one thing, that would be fast. Being a port of the original MSX Aleste, although it is missing the story scenes, Power Strike ups the ante by throwing tons of enemies at you making this one of the hardest shmups of the 8-bit era. Originally only released through a mail-order offer in America with a blue and white cover, it was later released with a full color cover in other regions.

Retro Collecting 101

by Jeff Wittenhagen

Interview With Sivak, The Creator Of Battle Kid 1&2

Can you give a brief introduction about yourself and how you originally came up with the idea for Battle Kid?

My name is Jordan Ordorica. I am 29 years old. I currently live in Japan, studying the Japanese language. The idea for Battle Kid was inspired from the indie game I Wanna be the Guy as well as other classic platformers.

Was there any certain focus or aspect that you wanted to concentrate on while making Battle Kid 2?

Mostly just building on and improving aspects of the first game. I feel the difficulty is better balanced and things that some reviewers mentioned have been addressed. For example, there's an in-game map now. Basically taking the first game and trying my best to make a better game.

While developing the sequel, what was easier and what was more difficult than when you were creating the original?

Making the game engine was way easier because I knew exactly what I needed to do and wanted to do right from the start. The general engine took about 2 weeks, while the first game's engine probably took 2-3 months.

Were there any surprisingly difficult things that popped up during the development/post-development phase?

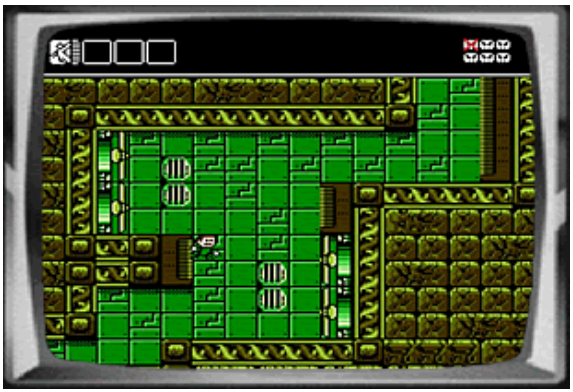
The development phase was mostly just waiting and obtaining graphics I needed. Plotting out some of the cutscenes also took some time in getting the right feel. The intro scene has a small incidental music score to it and I wanted to get it all to look right. The ending is also similar.

Post-development, I actually saw a major graphical bug in the intro scene that I rectified and had tested on a real system to ensure it was gone. Other than that, just taking time away from programming to relax sometimes lasted

longer than I would have liked.

Is there anything else you would like to share about Battle Kid 2?

The game is about 25% longer than the first and has more bonus features for beating it on the higher difficulties this time around. Three special stages for those who like a good challenge.



Do you plan on making this series a trilogy or are you done with all things Battle Kid after this?

A third game would definitely be something I would want to do, but it's too hard to say I will definitely do it right now. I want to take a break from programming for a while.

Would you like to give any advice to other people who might be considering creating their own homebrew game?

I would say if someone really wants to try something like this to start simple. Don't try a largescale game for a first project. There's no shame in doing something easy to make sure you've learned the ropes about NES programming (or whatever console you choose to try).

Now a couple of non-BK2 related questions.

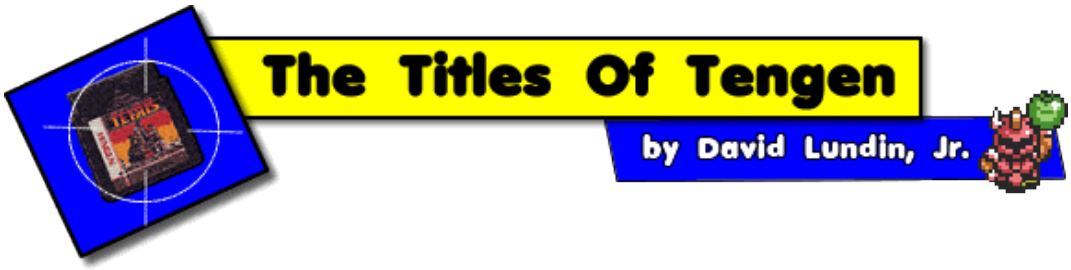
What is your favorite retro game or series of all time?

Mega Man

What do you consider the "Gem" of your game collection?

I don't really have anything particularly rare. I do still have my original Super Mario Bros/Duck Hunt from when I got my NES all those years ago as well as the same system. A somewhat expensive item, however, is my copy of Snow Bros. with manual though.

Thanks for your time and I know I can't wait for Battle Kid 2 to be released as the original was a blast to play!



Super Sprint Revisited

For this 100th issue of Retrogaming Times Monthly I wanted to do something special both as a feature to the columns I've staffed over the years and as a thank you to you, our readers. I was a frequent reader of the original Retrogaming Times for about as long as I can remember being online in what is considered a modern capacity. When the original newsletter finally came to a close I was very pleased to see a continuation born from it, what we all know as Retrogaming Times Monthly. After a few months the call went out for new contributors for the reborn newsletter. I contacted then chief editor Adam King with my idea about writing a column that would compare NES arcade conversions to their original games. The column would be similar to Alan Hewston's amazing and long running "The Many Faces of..." series but rather then comparing every release of a particular game against one another, this would strictly focus on the NES release against the arcade original. In addition it would be less technically detailed, as the column I was pitching would approach the games from the perspective of someone simply pulling the game off the shelf because they enjoyed the arcade original. To begin with some familiarity I decided to focus on one of my favorite publishers and developers on the NES, Tengen, the home console division of Atari Coin. "The Titles of Tengen" premiered in Retrogaming Times Monthly issue #7, back in December of 2004.

Although the entire Tengen NES library that featured an arcade counterpart was eventually covered, the column got off to a fairly rough start. I was unsure how to approach the material so I decided to use the same format as I do when writing a game review for my website. Unfortunately this wasn't a good match for an article that was supposed to compare and contrast two versions of the same game. By the time the second entry in the series was published I had abandoned the original format in favor of a more flowing comparison. It still took awhile to completely shed the underlying bullet point style and although the column began to break out of that structure earlier, I'd say Fantasy Zone in RTM #24 was the first example of a Tengen column that fully stood on its own. How the visual differences were represented was another sticking point that took a long time to get standardized. I suppose Road Runner in RTM #15 was when the more unified screen shot style began to be implemented but it wasn't until after the Tengen column ended that things became cleaner and more standardized as a whole. By the time NES'cade began I had worked out most of the kinks in my presentation style concerning arcade to NES comparisons and visual representations became consistent issue to issue. The most important thing in that pair of screen shots is that I capture the same action in both the arcade original and the NES version. Graphics are far from everything in a game, but when you're dealing with a home version of an arcade game there should be an air of familiarity regardless of the hardware differences.

The last sticking point with the evolution of the two columns over the years has to do with crediting publishers and distributors as developers. I never set out for the Tengen column to be a tour de force of knowledge concerning video game history. The original idea of approaching the games much in the same way as you would when they were originally released is the foundation of both The Titles of Tengen as well as NES'cade. However, during the Tengen days I would often credit Tengen as a developer on some games in which they simply localized an already existing Famicom version of a game. Additionally, quite often in the NES era a developer-for-hire would program a game for a publisher without crediting themselves. Micronics is one such developer that did a number of home conversions including Ghosts 'n Goblins and Tiger-Heli, previously featured in NES'cade. As NES'cade got under way, unless I was dead sure of who did what, I wouldn't award development credit to anyone. Of course I could spend hours digging through known developer records and publisher catalogs but such things go far beyond the scope of either column. The point was and still is to look at the NES version of an arcade game in the mindset of its original release. With that I present a one-off revised look at what is still my favorite of the Tengen published and (as far as I've been able to ascertain) developed NES arcade conversions, Super Sprint.

The Sprint series is one of the oldest racing game franchises in history. In fact if you were to consider early game series as franchises you could say that the Sprint games are one of the oldest video game franchises, racing or

otherwise, predating even Space Invaders by two years. Early arcade driving games such as Gran Trak 10 and Le Mans gave way to Sprint 2, released in 1976. The game allowed up to two players to race against computer controlled drone cars on a number of tracks from a top-down perspective. Sprint 2 would be released in a number of formats, each changing up the amount of allowed players, including the massive and outrageously entertaining eight player Sprint 8. In 1986 the nearly forgotten Sprint series was revived with a serious presentation upgrade. Super Sprint added high resolution graphics and moved the viewing perspective down a little to better convey depth and realism. The game was housed in a massive cabinet and allowed up to three players to compete against one another in a four car race, with any non-human controlled car being operated as a computer controlled drone. The four position gear shift of the earlier Sprint games was removed to create better accessibility, leading to more frenzied gameplay. A new upgrade system was introduced via wrenches that would appear at random spots on the track. A skilled driver could trade in collected wrenches for upgrades to their car's traction, acceleration, top speed or alternatively cash them in for additional points. If a driver was to have their car destroyed by falling from an overpass or jump or becoming involved in a high speed accident, a replacement car would be provided by a recovery helicopter with no penalty other than lost time. As long as a player was able to finish ahead of the drone cars play would continue on a different track, eight circuits in all. Each loop of the eight circuits would add obstacles ranging from oil spots and barriers on the surface of the track to tornadoes that would lazily drift across the screen. The game was insanely popular in arcades, so much that a sequel was released in the same year, Championship Sprint. Championship Sprint would condense the game down to two human players but present new tracks and a new upgrade option to increase the speed of the recovery helicopter. Essentially Super Sprint was the perfect arcade racing game with easy to understand controls and objectives, the option for a group of friends to play together, and a frantic pace that made for an enjoyable time.

To capitalize on the success of the arcade original, Tengen developed a home port of Super Sprint for the NES three years after the arcade release. At the time I can remember the arcade version still pulling in solid crowds and earnings so although the game wasn't anything new at the time it was still a relevant title for arcade gamers. Of course there would have to be some changes since the two platforms were very different in terms of graphics, controls, pretty much everything. When moving a driving game to a home experience the first consideration has to be the control input. Super Sprint is primarily remembered for spinning the steering wheel around frantically and power-sliding your Formula 1 car through tight turns. The arcade version really is a full body experience as that spinning of the wheel at the right time, catching it, spinning it the other way, making some quick adjustments, spinning it around another corner and so forth is a big part of the game. Some would say that's the entire game in essence. Although some analog driving controllers had existed in the home prior to the NES, they weren't an option here. Instead the standard control pad is used for steering control. By holding left or right on the control pad your car will rotate either counterclockwise or clockwise. Some players find this a very difficult concept to grasp but the key is to place yourself as if you were sitting in the driver's seat. If you were to press left, you would turn left, or rotate counterclockwise. The same for pressing right, except in the opposite direction. As long as you can keep that notion in the back of your mind steering will be an absolute non-issue with the NES version of Super Sprint. The A button controls the accelerator, holding it down to simulate the pressing of a pedal. Lifting off of the A button will cause your car to gradually decelerate and stop. This is an attempt to simulate the accelerator pedal of the arcade version and in my opinion the NES version does a very respectable job of this. Your car's steering arc gets tighter as you lift off the accelerator and reduce speed which is just as it was in the arcade. I've heard a lot of complaints about the control system in Super Sprint on the NES over the years but I simply don't agree. After a little time with the game you can begin to lift off the accelerator at just the right moment to take intentional apexes through corners just as in the arcade and as in real racing. I can't imagine a better way to do overhead racing controls on the NES with just the standard controller. The cars are skid more than they stick but this was true with the arcade version as well. Only two players can complete at the same time with the computer controlled drone cars filling in the rest of the field, similar to Championship Sprint.

Arcade Original

NES Version

With the control being accomplished through different yet still extremely solid means on the NES the next point of consideration is presentation. Super Sprint in the arcade is a beautiful, detailed, vibrant showcase of the hardware of the time. Both very modern in detail yet very rooted in the simple design of Sprint games of the past. There are some expected compromises such as diminished color depth and resolution. The four cars themselves aren't even immune to the color limitations with the green drone car from the arcade now being colored white. The lower resolution means that everything appears to be much flatter than it was originally giving the game much less sense of depth and dimension. There are still representations of some of these things like shadows and walls with diminishing curves but gone are the rolling hills and banked turns of the arcade version. Even the shadows around the edge of the track on the NES version feel rather flat and don't really make things stand out as well as they did originally. Still you can tell that a real attempt was made to give the game as much depth as possible with the limited color palette. The cars themselves rotate smoothly as they turn and speed around the track although they are much less three dimensional then in the arcade original. I suppose the flatter cars go with the flatter environments so at the very least the visual presentation is consistent. The overall design of the racing circuits themselves has been altered as well, presumably due to hardware limitations. Super Sprint in the arcade featured shortcuts through the barriers on some tracks that would periodically open and close throughout the race. This would further mix up the racing order and even the computer controlled racers would attempt to take the shortcuts when they were available. The opening and closing barrier shortcuts do not exist on the NES version and I would assume that the reason has to do with not being able to program the drone cars to properly navigate them. Of the eight original arcade tracks, five make the jump over to the NES along with two from Championship Sprint for a grand total of seven. The tracks from the arcade version that make their way to the NES are recreated for the most part with the exception of things like the aforementioned banked turns or jumps. While the jump shortcut of one track remains in the NES version, the cars don't get airborne like they do in the arcade. Instead they simply drive through and over the barrier. The jump physics are also why my favorite track from the arcade version is not present on the NES, which would be the track with the large open jump in the center. Additionally the complex track from the arcade is left behind, as is the track that featured three opening and closing barrier shortcuts. To make up for the missing tracks the NES version features two tracks from Championship Sprint, the arcade sequel to Super Sprint. These are the figure eight type track as well as the twisty circuit with a large shortcut through the middle. One of the tracks from the arcade version that featured an opening and closing shortcut makes its way to the NES however it is devoid of the shortcut all together. This is the same with the figure eight type track from Championship Sprint that featured two of the opening and closing barriers. There are also a number of slight animation changes such as no recovery helicopter when your car explodes, instead having the replacement car appear where the original was destroyed. The bonus flags that randomly appear on the track fold open in the arcade version while in the NES version their point values just appear instantly and the wrenches are missing their shadowing detail on the NES.

After each race in the arcade the player is presented with a statistics screen showing point allocation for race position, lap timing, as well as the finishing order. On the NES the post race animation has been changed to simply show the winning car with a "Tengen Vision" signboard in the background. The driver in the car turns and gives a thumbs up, very similar to what your driver does when you drop a coin in at the continue screen of the arcade version. Also in the arcade version if the player was to come in fourth place he would be shown working on the wreckage of his car. If you lose on the NES version your car is simply shown at a "race again" and / or "game over" screen which also takes place in front of the "Tengen Vision" signboard. Although you could always pump credits into the arcade version to continue

play with all previously acquired upgrades, you only have two continues on the NES version. Another missing visual element from the arcade is a screen that allows you to select your starting track. Lack of this screen doesn't hinder the game in any way but it's nice to see the different tracks the game provides in the arcade, although most people start with the easiest track anyway. While not bad the audio mix is a bit of a downgrade from the arcade original. The cars don't have the same deep wail they have in the arcade version but the NES engine sound is passable without becoming too annoying. Sound effects from spinning out or picking up items are nice but the tones and compositions are just different enough to make things sound a little less authentic and come across as muted and dull. The little musical tunes that play during the winner's circle sequence have been replaced by the same music as the song that plays during the NES version's title screen. In fact the only music in the NES version is what plays during the title sequence. I do miss the music from the continue screen of the arcade version, accompanied by the sound of an engine revving once a credit has been accepted. Nothing sounds out of place on the NES but at the same time nothing sounds all that great.

It has been a long time since I originally played this game both in the arcade and on the NES. Heck, it's been eight years since I originally covered the game for Retrogaming Times Monthly. Yet after all that time I still really enjoy Super Sprint for the NES as it captures the essence of what made the arcade original fun. The NES version is still a great way to lose a couple hours with a friend. The slight alternations to tracks from the arcade versions will give Super Sprint fans something different to experience. The game still draws a crowd, as was evidenced by a pair of Super Sprint cabinets almost always having a full three players each at the California Extreme arcade show a couple months ago. Growing up, this was my favorite Tengen NES game and was a frequent weekend rental at the local video store. My enjoyment of the NES version hasn't diminished one bit over the years. If you couldn't play it in the arcade this home version was a respectable substitute and I still feel it holds up as a solid conversion of a still popular arcade game. I only wish that more tracks could have been added to this version. In all honesty I prefer Championship Sprint to Super Sprint as I enjoy the track design more and although my favorite track in the series is in both arcade games, it's one of the tracks missing from the NES version. I'm still waiting for someone to revive this series with an updated celebration featuring all the tracks from the entire series, including the tracks from the Sprint and pre-Sprint games of the 1970's, with eight player support. If four player Pac-Man can do well in current arcade environments then how about a game like I just described? Design them to be four sided cocktail cabinets, steering wheel and accelerator pedal on each side, that can be linked to one another for eight player racing and call it "Tournament Sprint." Now if that happens one day I expect some design royalties.

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

NES'cade

by David Lundin, Jr.

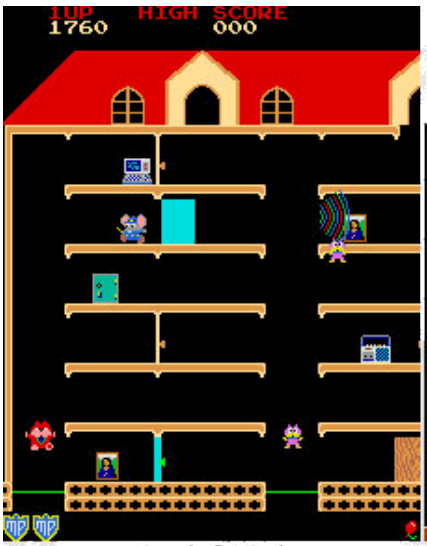
Mappy

Twice in the past we've looked at Famicom exclusive arcade conversions and both were revealed to be competent recreations given the early nature of the hardware. Although open to debate most would agree the reason both these titles, Galaxian and Dig Dug, were left in Japan was due to the passage of time between the Famicom's original launch and the NES's rising popularity in the United States. Too many years had passed since the games were originally released and both series had continued on with follow up games, both of which were released on the NES as Galaga and Dig Dug II respectively. Namco released a bunch of their early arcade games on the Famicom, making up the majority of their initial eighteen releases on the hardware. Some of these games were original Famicom developments but most were arcade conversions and depending on the title Namco may have acted as the developer, publisher or both. Many of these games were brought over to the NES with a few glaring omissions and a couple nonsensical inclusions given the nature of the NES market at the time. Unfortunately Mappy falls into the former category of a Famicom game that was sadly left in Japan.

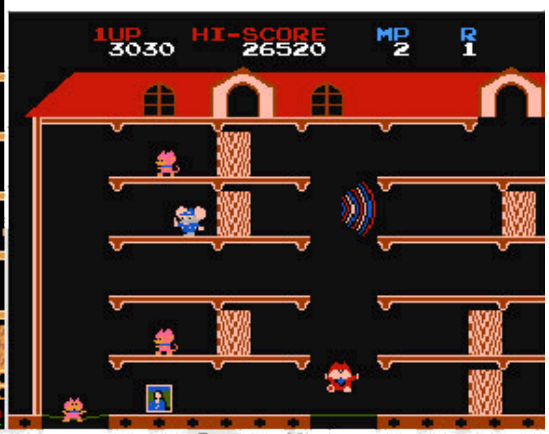
Released to arcades in 1983, Mappy could be considered a moderate hit in the United States. Plenty of cabinets were produced and the game developed a strong legion of players. Still, it never reached the fame of other early Namco properties outside of Japan, where a game like Xevious is looked at as legendary and Dig Dug's protagonist Taizo Hori is revered as a national working-class video game hero. In Mappy the player assumes the role of the titular character, a police mouse on the trail of a gang of thieving cats. The Mewkies and their leader Nyamco have packed their mansion with stolen goods and it is Mappy's duty to recover the merchandise. Although a police officer, Mappy has little in the way of defense against the gang, after all they're cats and he's a mouse. Mappy is able to open doors throughout the mansion from either the front or back and this actually ends up becoming one of his primary defenses. Doors can also be closed to block the progress of the cats as when they go to swing them open from the front they will be knocked back and temporarily stunned. Additionally doors can be used either to knock Mappy back into a cat, stunning it temporarily, or slamming the door open into a cat for the same effect without knocking Mappy over. When flashing doors are opened a "microwave" is released in the direction of the doorknob that travels across the screen, catching any cats in its path for bonus points and temporarily removing them from play. Trampolines are used to travel between the mansion's floors and allow Mappy to pass through the cats without getting caught however they will wear out and eventually break after repeated use. If Mappy falls through a trampoline without another trampoline on a floor below it to catch him, a life is lost. Worn but unbroken trampolines will regenerate as long as Mappy moves off onto a floor before jumping on them again. After all the stolen items in the mansion have been recovered the next level begins.

With these early arcade conversions I like to begin by looking at the overall presentation of the game. After all the home version should at the very least resemble the original title it was based upon. Presentation concessions could be considered a reason why some of these games were never localized for the NES hardware. Mappy originally used a vertical display and as has been shown in the past converting vertical games to the horizontal aspect of a regular television can sometimes have an overt effect on gameplay. In the case of Mappy the entire screen was simply squished down to fit the change in aspect. For the Famicom version the remaining lives and current stage icons are moved from the bottom of the screen up to the top and displayed as plain text on the same line as the score. The entire screen is then shifted down to fill in the newly gained real estate. The playfield is then squished down to fit the vertically shorter display area and stretched horizontally to fill out the rest. Rather than deforming the graphics by simply stretching the previously viewable area in its entirety, more of the stage is visible along the horizontal axis. This reduces the amount of required horizontal stretching to fill the picture although the perspective has been noticeably altered. This makes the characters feel a little chubby in comparison to how they originally appeared in the arcade. The color depth takes a pretty big nose dive in the home version with everything appearing rather muddy and dark. It's almost if a nice neutral light brown color couldn't be decided upon so the entire game was coated with dark brown

instead. Even the microwave blasts are missing the bright colors of the arcade, only making the Famicom version appear even more muddy. I suppose if you could think of the arcade version with the color green turned way down you would get something close to what the game looks like on the Famicom. Green does exist in the game, it simply isn't used to brighten up the objects and effects which is why you get browns and whites instead of teals and greens. It does a lot to detract from the cartoony and vibrant visual style the game is known for. Visual presentation is pretty solid, it just looks rather dreary and dead compared to the vibrancy of the original.



Arcade Original



Famicom Version

Almost as an effort to make up for the visuals the audio package is far more faithful to the original. The Mappy background theme is nicely recreated for an early game, this being Namco's fourth Famicom release. All the sound effects are present and sound like they should including the trampoline bouncing and microwave effects. The bonus stage music is also nicely recreated as well as the songs played during game over and when Mappy gets caught. In fact the only piece of music the game is missing is the tune that plays during the high score entry screen as there is no such screen in the Famicom version. Simple arcade controls of a two direction left / right joystick and single button to both open and close doors is replicated perfectly on the home hardware. Input is handled quickly and accurately, always a big plus in a game such as this that requires fast reaction.

So at this point we have a home conversion with nice audio and decent graphics impaired by a dark and bland visual presentation. Thankfully gameplay is where Mappy can pull its act together and deliver a great experience on the Famicom. Everything that worked so well in the arcade version is present on the home hardware. The Famicom version is built upon the exact same rule set as the arcade version, one of the most important aspects of a successful arcade conversion. There are two of each stolen item on each stage and collecting them in pairs one after another builds up a bonus multiplier. Starting out with the lower point value pairs and working your way up to the higher value ones once the multiplier is high is a basic strategy for high scores. Same goes for the Famicom version, right down to the matching item of the one last picked up flashing on screen. Nyamco will hide behind an item he runs past and collecting the item while he is behind it will yield 1000 bonus points, this too works exactly as it did originally. After every few stages the player is taken to a timed bonus stage filled with balloons and trampolines but free of any enemies. The objective of the bonus stage is to pop all the balloons before the music stops, including a big balloon at the end with Nyamco hiding behind it. Success in the bonus stage comes from careful planning as often a single control mistake or poorly planned route will rob you of precious time and prevent you from obtaining the maximum bonus. Mappy's bonus stages are my favorite part of the game and one of the most unique takes on a bonus stage in gaming history. Rather than corralling enemies to open paths to items, the bonus stages require you to blaze your way to the end as precisely as possible. Bouncing against walls to wear out the trampolines as quickly as possible is the most basic strategy to figure out the shortest route to each balloon. These stages reuse the assets and basic rules of the game world in a completely different way to fulfill a completely different objective. I find this modification of what is expected of the player extremely clever and the bonus stages are a fun diversion more akin to a puzzle game instead of the run and chase action that makes up everything else. These bonus stages are very nicely recreated on the Famicom version and play just as fast and smooth as they originally did in the arcade. Even touches like Nyamco floating up and popping a balloon above him after being released are present on the Famicom.

After each bonus stage additional Mewkies join the fray making the game more and more demanding. Additionally a new feature is added to the mansion after each bonus stage. The first additional feature comes in the form of the attic of the mansion opening up. This creates an additional floor to run around on although it doesn't have any doors and may not be reachable from every trampoline. Later on the attics are fitted with bells that can be released by bouncing up into them from a trampoline. As the bell falls it will stun any cat in its path and award bonus points. As the Mewkies tend to cluster to the outer trampolines when Mappy is on them this can be an effective way to stun all the cats at once. After that small areas of the floor will be replaced by flashing panels. After Mappy runs across these they will disappear and any cat in pursuit will fall through to the floor below and become stunned. Shortly after being opened the holes in the floor will be filled in with standard flooring. In addition to these little additions and changes, the mansions themselves become more and more complex with each level. Trampolines that only cover a few floors, dead ends, long winding corridors with only one way in or out, and stolen items in hard to reach places make each level more and more difficult. Figuring out how to move about a level, where the safer routes are, areas to avoid and the best time to use the microwave doors become essential for progression. Once again all of this carries over onto the Famicom just as it did in the arcade.

When I approach an arcade conversion for home hardware the primary thing I look for is if the game in question either adequately replicates or enhances the original arcade experience. That's the whole reason for playing an arcade conversion, to have an arcade experience at home. While Mappy on the Famicom lacks the vibrant visuals of its arcade counterpart it makes up for them by having everything else wrapped up in one satisfying package. If there is one early Namco release that I feel NES gamers really got cheated out of it has to be Mappy. You don't get a dumbed down version of an arcade title with a modified rule set and missing features here, you get the whole game and along with it all the excitement and fun of the original. So many home versions of arcade games during this era like to proclaim how they play "just like the arcade game" with mixed results but Mappy would deliver on that promise. This game is a tremendous missed opportunity for NES gamers, possibly one of the biggest missed opportunities concerning arcade to NES conversions that never were released outside of Japan. I've heard outdated visuals mentioned as a reason why this game never had an NES release but the console only sequel, Mappy-Land, was localized and released on the NES. While Mappy-Land is a decent game that attempts to combine Mappy with the style of a platforming game, the visuals are enough to make your eyes bleed. The concept of a Mappy platforming game was better realized in an even later Famicom exclusive, Mappy Kids, which also should have had an NES release. I'm getting off point but if you enjoy Mappy or classic Namco arcade titles then you owe it to yourself to give the Famicom version of Mappy a try. Once you get beyond the muddy coloring you'll find a surprisingly enjoyable and accurate conversion of a game that really should be better remembered.

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

Mother

Encounter Rate is an ongoing series that strives to explore the 8 and 16-bit Japanese RPGs that not only define the genre as a whole, but also paved the way for innovation in video game design as we know it today.

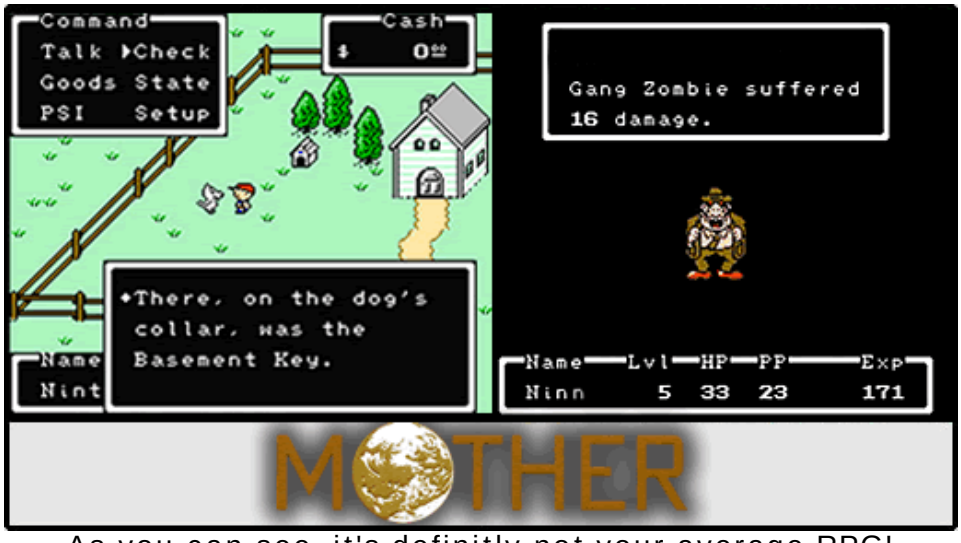
Mother was released exclusively in Japan in 1989 for Nintendo's Famicom. Designed and directed by famed Japanese essayist and humorist Shigesato Itoi, Mother was, at the time, a radical departure from the typical Japanese Role Playing game.

Eschewing the common theme of setting role playing games in medieval fantasy worlds, Itoi instead set Mother in an idealized version of modern day America. Mother begins in the town of Mother's Day, a quaint microcosm of the USA circa 1988, complete with malls, drug stores, and hospitals. Needless to say Mother ended up being a video game experience unlike any other.

The game itself does little to expand upon typical JRPG conventions and is essentially a Dragon Quest clone; static screen turn-based encounters, experience points, level grinding, high difficulty curve. Rather than swords and dragons, you equip baseball bats and frying pans, heal your party with hamburgers and pizza, and you rush your fallen friends to the closest hospital for revival.

What truly separates Mother from most other 8-bit JRPGs is that the game was written with a combination of humor and self awareness. Not a funny or goofy game out-right, Mother instead carries a distinct light-hearted tone, that above all else never takes itself too seriously. Shigesato Itoi was not trying to break new technical ground when designing Mother, and to deride the game for its lack of evolution within the genre is to miss the point completely.

In 1989 the console RPG genre was still in its infancy, but regardless of its age the release of the first Dragon Quest game proved to be a cultural watershed in Japan- with each subsequent release sales exploded in pace with the audience's expectations. Mother was more about testing the limits of the JRPG formula and teasing the preconceptions of gamers. And by encapsulating a Japanese-tinted version of modern day Americana, Itoi succeeded in giving game players something fresh and different. Altering the setting to modern day and having children as main characters was enough of a spin on the conventional JRPG archetype to stand out. Remember, this in long before Final Fantasy started almost exclusively using tween antagonists.



As you can see, it's definitly not your average RPG!

The fact that Mother was a different type of RPG was further exemplified in the game's marketing. Mother's designer, Shigesato Itoi's was heavily used to market the game. While not unusual by today's standards, Mother was released in 1989; a time before celebrity game developers; a time when video game players barely differentiated between video game companies, let alone the designers behind the titles themselves.

Being an RPG born of the Dragon Quest era, Mother is not without its failings. The game's difficulty is at the least punishing and at times totally brutal. Spoils, such as experience points and monitory rewards are cheaply doled out. Despite Mother's high rate of enemy encounters, serous grinding is required to get strong enough to venture into new areas. The experience overall is rewarding, but the journey is seldom easy and many parts of the game are frustrating and needlessly difficult.

Mother is more remembered today (and rightly so, perhaps) as the predecessor to the Super Famicom classic Mother 2, which we got on the Super NES as Earthbound. Earthbound has been firmly entrenched in video game history as a bona fide masterpiece and is the video game definition of a cult classic. None-the-less, the original Mother and its unreleased official English translation stand as true originals, and are certainly unique amongst RPGs of the era.

The Magical Quest: Starring Mickey Mouse

IRM Corporation and Japan Capsule Computer Ltd, forerunners to Capcom—the creator of The Magical Quest—began distributing and manufacturing electronic game machines in Japan in 1979. Capcom was established in 1983, “Capcom” being a combined abbreviation of “Capsule Computer”.

By 1984 the company was firmly established and soon won a reputation for applying its technology and software to videogames. The first videogame created by this company was an arcade game named Vulgus. This was followed in 1985 with 1942 for the Nintendo entertainment system.

Capcom created 15 multimillion-selling games series. A few games to remember from this company are: Megaman series, Street Fighter, Resident Evil, Devil May Cry, Marvel Hero series, Ghosts ‘n Goblins, Viewtiful Joe and many Disney games including Toy Story, The Lion King, The Jungle Books, Aladdin etc.

Capcom now has offices worldwide including in California, England, Germany and Hong Kong.

Overview

The story starts featuring Mickey, Goofy and Pluto playing catch in the park. Goofy throws the ball way too far and Pluto goes after it. Pluto gets lost and Mickey goes to find him. Mickey follows Pluto’s footprints which lead him to a magical world filled with strange creatures and dangerous plants.

On his way to rescue Pluto, Mickey encounters a friendly magician who tells him the evil emperor Pete has kidnapped Pluto. Mickey decides to be brave and work his way into Pete’s castle.

Controls & Features

Before I start explaining this game to you round by round, here are some things which you should know. Mickey has a health indicator at the top of the screen represented by hearts. In easy mode you have five hearts, in normal mode three hearts, and in difficult mode two hearts. The hearts deplete as you lose energy. If you suffer one hit from an enemy, one of your hearts will be fully drained. If all your hearts deplete, you lose one life. But in some cases you can gain a bonus heart.

In order to help him succeed in his rescue operation, the magician and Goofy offer Mickey a few costumes which give him some advantages in his task:

- **The wizard costume:** If you press button Y Mickey is able to throw magic from his finger! The longer you keep the button pressed, the more powerful the energy Mickey can produce! But every time Mickey uses magic, he loses some of his magic power. There is a level indicator at the bottom of the screen which tells you how much magic you have left. Be sure to take a look at it from time to time! If you don’t want it to be depleted, you will have to look for magical lamps which will replenish your magic power. When you see one, simply jump on it!

- **The fireman costume:** By using button Y while wearing this costume, Mickey will be able to shoot a powerful burst of water from his hose! It’s so powerful that you are even able to move blocks! Just as with the magician costume, this time Mickey will have to find fire hydrants to replenish the water indicator. When you see one, just leap on it.

The mountaineer costume: You will obtain this costume when you reach level four. Goofy will give it to you so that climbing this level is easy-peasy for you! The main feature of this costume is that you have the help of a grappling hook. You can throw the hook in all kinds of directions and even swing from it! This is the only costume that does not require any special objects to replenish its energy.

Secret Stores

Occasionally throughout the game you will see an open door. Keep your eyes peeled for these because these are entryways to stores where you can buy some valuable things! Sometimes you will have to move some golden blocks out of the way in order to get inside.

In the stores you can buy things which will enhance the characteristics of other objects you obtain along the way:

- **Magic turban:** When Mickey wears this turban while in the wizard costume, his consumption of magic power is cut by half.
- **Magic hose:** When using this hose with the fireman costume, your water consumption will be cut by half.
- **Small heart:** This will refill one of your empty hearts in your health indicator.
- **Big heart:** This will add one extra heart to Mickey's health indicator. So if you are in hard mode with two hearts, and you obtain a big heart, you will then have three hearts in your health indicator.

Magical blocks and treasure boxes

The friendly magician has used his magic to place blocks and treasures along the way throughout the game. Mickey will be able to use them to reach difficult places or beat his enemies! The blocks are as follows:

- **Grey blocks:** You can climb on them.
- **Golden blocks:** These act as platforms. You can climb on, grab or even spin them.
- **Red blocks:** These have the same features as the golden blocks, only that they reappear the moment Mickey lets go of them.

Treasures and special objects:

- **Treasure boxes:** These can contain all kinds of treasures, and sometimes big or little hearts.
- **Magical lamps:** These will replenish almost all your magic.
- **Fire hydrants:** These will restore almost all of your water supply.
- **Coins:** These can be spent to buy objects in shops that are hidden and scattered along Pete's empire.
- **Apples:** These will add up to 500 points to your score. When you see them grab them!
- **Blueberries:** You will obtain 200 points if you obtain these.
- **Mickey's doll:** This will offer you one more chance to find your friend Pluto.

Having said all this, you're all set to come along and follow me round by round! Are you ready? Let's go!

Stage One: The Treetops

Level 1: Mickey has to find his way among these incredibly high treetops! Some fruits will help you climb the tree if you spin them! Grab them again and you'll get a free ride to the tops of these trees! The main enemies you will encounter here are some types of ladybugs and chickens!

After a few jumps, you will immediately come across the magician who will inform you of Pluto's whereabouts. He also warns our hero that Emperor Pete's powerful magic has never been defeated. The magician carries on with these words: "Do not attempt to rescue your dog. Save yourself." Mickey replies: "No!! Pluto is my pal. I won't give up!"

The magician tells him to follow the Emperor's statue one after the other. This method will lead him to the castle. The magician offers to scatter magical boxes along Mickey's path so as to help him with his journey. The magician finishes his speech by wishing him luck and warning Mickey about Pete's magic.

The next things we see are the magical boxes. Here you will notice the golden and the pink ones. And another enemy comes our way: a soldier obeying Pete's orders! A few jumps on his head will do! You can also escape using the fruit previously mentioned, or even blocks to stun him!

Be careful with clouds: You can step on them to reach the next platform! But be quick or they will vanish from under you and you will fall into the thorny brambles below! Bees will also be in your way, and they sure get mad! They will pursue you ready to sting you!

Level 2: In this level you will encounter a big, big tomato; what you have to do is jump and run on it! It will help you avoid those nasty thorns! Repeat this procedure until we find . . . what is this? An evil winged demon! Jump on his head as soon as he flutters on level ground! After a few hits, the demon will hang up on a tree like a bat and will throw some little devils at you! Again, jump on them and you'll be able to use them as weapons against the enemy while they are stunned!

Level 3: There is some water in this level. Mickey can swim but you have to keep an eye on his oxygen or one of your hearts will be drained for spending too much time underwater! If Mickey starts choking, surface or get to land immediately.

Our new enemies here are some jumping frogs! But Mickey jumps much higher! If you time your jumps and hit these frogs, you will be able to get past one of the ponds without getting soaked!

The next enemy is a beaver. Watch out! That's him swimming right behind you! And just when you think you are on safe ground, you will see some stars. But wait! They move! And they seem angry! Watch out!

Level 4: In each level four, you will come across a final boss. This time you will have to fight a snake with big fangs! To help you, you have two pink blocks that you can attack the snake with. The snake on the other hand will

turn red for a few seconds and will counterattack by swinging its tail!

Every time you hurt the snake, it will lose part of its tail until there will be nothing left but its head! But this is not the end—the snake will pursue you now with more energy than ever! Keep using those blocks and jump on its head and it will soon be over!

STAGE 1-4

Stage Two: Dark Forest

Level 1: Here comes the magician again! And he's offering us the magic turban!
He explains that with the turban, you will be able to perform magic and remain under water for a very long time!

Some of the trees in the Dark Forest grow in such a way that can help you jump even higher! There are some leaves that appear harmless but that actually turn into enemies! Use your magic power to defeat them!

This time, where there are ponds, you will have to watch out for the fish. If you're not careful, they will grab you and pull you to the depths causing you to lose one life!

Other enemies you will find are plants which release thorns, some archers, and crescent moon enemies swinging on the trees! Again, some magic or jumping on them will do!

The last step to make to finally finish this level is to jump on some big leaves to avoid falling into a pit.

Level 2: You will have to use your magic power so as to beat this level. For starters, you will have to get inside a tree, and for that, you are in need of an oxygen bubble! The enemies inside this tree are some crabs and green worms! Some will come out from little holes in the tree, so you will have to either destroy them or go past them when they retreat to their holes!

Your big enemy now is a kind of bean-shaped savage dressed in a grass skirt! He will throw some thorns to hurt you or even use his skirt as a boomerang, but being dressed as a magician, there is nothing to be afraid of! Simply use your magic and you will soon be rid of him!

Level 3: After a long jump, you will come across some dangerous trees armed with big clubs. If you're not wary, you will receive a powerful blow!

This level is pretty short, so this is all I can report to you!

STAGE 2-2

STAGE 2-3

Level 4: In this level you will have to jump using the tree branches while avoiding those crescent moon enemies I mentioned before.

After using a leaf to break the fall, you will meet our next boss, a giant spider! When the spider is completely vertical, you will have a chance to jump on its head so that it will receive a few hits! The spider will also release spider webs and if you don't avoid them, Mickey will soon be surrounded and tied up!

Stage Three: Fire Grotto

Level 1: Here you are going down, down, into a cave . . . At the top of your screen there is a sort of rocky ceiling covered in spikes or stalactites. This level is designed in such a way that this threatening, spiky ceiling follows you while you are trying to make your way through the depths of the cave. Some nasty bats will try to hurt you too!

Finally, the platform you are on will settle. As it does, be prepared to fight another big enemy: It is very similar to that bean-shaped savage, only that this one is red, dressed in green and has a big hammer as a weapon! He will use it to hit the ground, and as he does this, some parts of the ground will rise and may carry you to the stalactites in the roof of the cave. Sometimes this evil creature will throw fireballs at you! Use your magic powers to defeat him!

Level 2: As soon as you move on to level two, one of the magic blocks falls on and breaks a glass and then Mickey receives the new fireman's costume! Now you are able to extinguish those flames that walk and pursue you, as well as being able to move grey blocks or even bigger ones with the power of your hose! There are some platforms here to help you go past the flames. But be careful, as some of them are already in flames and you will have to use your fireman skills!

Level 3: In this level the procedure is about the same as in the previous one. You will have to move blocks with the help of your hose and sometimes duck so that the flames don't burn your very skin!

Level 4: You have to jump on a platform that will lead you to the next boss: an angry flaming head! And what would be better to defeat him? You're so right! Your fireman costume! Aim at this head and fire at will while you also try to keep in balance with the moving platforms you are on. Duck when you reach the bottom of the screen or you will lose a heart for crashing right into the angry head!

The head will throw fire at the platforms so that beating him has a certain difficulty. If you extinguish those burning platforms, you will receive fire hydrants so that you don't run out of water! But don't worry, the more you spray him, the more it will cool and soon the fire flames will be extinguished!

Stage Four: Pete's Peak

Level 1: Here we meet our good old friend Goofy who tells us that he still can't find Pluto. He's looked everywhere but up. That's why he offers us the next costume: the mountaineer costume! Cool! As Goofy says: "You can even use these snazzy climbin' britches and this rope."

Some enemies we encounter here while we work our way up are some soldiers armed with shields (use your hook to disarm them) and bird's eggs. Winged, flying grey blocks will also help you to reach your goal.

Level 2: The main change in this level is that there are some very strong winds that may blow you off the cliff and cause you to lose one life! Other than that, this level is very much the same as the previous one: use your hook skills and you'll be fine!

Level 3: We encounter an empty nest—but where is the bird? Watch out! Quick! Hang on to those blocks with your hook as the bird swoops on you! The bird's main weapon is a big egg he carries in his claws. It will open and you will either have to deal with some little birds which pursue you, or some yolk! The bird will soon change its color to pink, letting you know there are a few hits left before you finally defeat him!

(Note: there is no level 4 on this stage)

Stage Five: Snowy Valley

Level 1: I have to admit, this stage is one of my favorites! Mickey will have to slide down these snowy hills while avoiding furry creatures and frozen flowers that will slow him down. You will also come across some platforms that are similar to a sleigh, so jump on and have a ride! When you see ice balls, use your fireman costume to shoot them with water. As you do, platform edges will form on the side, and you can climb your way up and get coins or other prizes on the top!

Level 2: This is one of the shortest levels in the game. It will probably take you two minutes to complete it! The objective is to jump on the sleigh platforms so that you reach the next platform and so on. That's basically it! It's fun!

Level 3: This time Mickey will have to defeat a very big ice skater! Watch out for the blades and the snow balls that he shoots from his mouth! The skater will keep on doing his moves on this U-shaped platform. Use either magic or water to free yourself from him!

STAGE 5-3

FIREMAN MICKEY ABOUT TO DEFEAT THE BIG SKATER BOSS!

Stage Six: Pete's Castle

Before we enter the castle, we can see a sequence of Mickey reaching it and stammering a little bit. But as soon as he hears his pal's barks, he regains his confidence and decides to find his way inside.

Level 1: As you enter the castle, you'll see Pete's troops are everywhere! Don't fall into the water or those nasty fish will catch you! Instead of grey blocks, you will encounter winged-headed knights! Jump on them so that you reach the next platform!

This level is somewhat of a maze with many exits. If you make a mistake, you will have to defeat previous bosses you have encountered or end up in some other parts of the level. Mickey will have to find the correct door which leads to the next level. (The correct door is the one that you can reach by using a magic carpet.)

Level 2: Put an enchantment to this red carpet and let's go! But watch out for those spikes! You can control the carpet by using either left or right directions. Time those directions carefully, or again the carpet will lead you right into those spikes! Be careful too with those winged-headed enemies!

Level 3: The new enemies here are some flaming cauldrons that can fly and one new Pete soldier—this one uses a cannon! Watch out for the bombs!

This level is also a labyrinth; so again, you will have to find the correct door so as to carry on!

STAGE 6 INTRO

MICKEY HESITATES AT EMPEROR PETE'S GATES..

FINAL BATTLE

FIREMAN MICKEY FACING OFF WITH FINAL BOSS EMPEROR PETE!

Tip: When you see one of the exits, look for a block that moves, jump onto it and you will be given two new doors to choose from. The one on the left is the correct one!

Level 4: And here we are! Finally face-to-face with the evil Emperor Pete!
He will use his magic to enchant cauldrons or even make the walls move and jump towards you! Use your fireman powers to negotiate these enemies and challenges!

As soon as Pete turns red, you will have to watch the castle floor, as blue fire flames will attack you!

When Pete is finally defeated, you will see your friend Pluto! Mickey welcomes his beloved pal: "Oh boy, you sure are a sight for sore eyes! You're gonna be just fine." Pluto runs to him and starts to lick Mickey's face, and the castle disappears.
"Aw, Pluto, cut it out, that tickles!"

The next image we see is Mickey in bed. Donald peeks through the window: “Hey! Get outta bed, sleepyhead. Let’s all go play catch!”

It has all been a dream!! “On my way, Donald,” replies Mickey. And soon we see Mickey and all his friends playing catch under the warm lovely sun.

Conclusion

Before reaching my overall grade for this game, let’s consider first a few aspects.

First, the background and graphics you will encounter during your play will be a delight to your eyes. There is no doubt that this is a Disney game and that’s definitely reflected here: the scenarios are simply beautiful.

On the negative side, the levels are extremely short and barely challenging at all. The enemies don’t get any harder as you progress through the game; they are still killed in the same way, by jumping on them (which is similar to Mario games; and also in that you can collect coins!). The only real challenges are the bosses, especially if played in the difficult mode, as they need more hits to be defeated.

The costumes that you get as you move along sure make things playable. For example, needing your magic turban so as to be able to breathe longer underwater or to make your way through a hollow tree! Or when you need your fireman costume to move blocks and create platforms that will help you finish the level!

Regarding the soundtrack, it’s not really distinctive or catchy as it is in some other games. Sadly, the tunes will not stick in your mind!

Overall, weighing the brevity of the game and its relatively easy challenges (we have to bear in mind this game was mostly designed for kids) against its beautiful backgrounds and settings and charming costumes, I would rate this game...

7.5 stars out of 10 possible ones

De-Making It!

by Mark Sabbatini

2600 Super Mario Bros. & Pixel Land

Remember those hoax screenshots of an Atari 2600 version of Doom? One of these days somebody's going to program the real thing the way these "can't be done" projects are going.

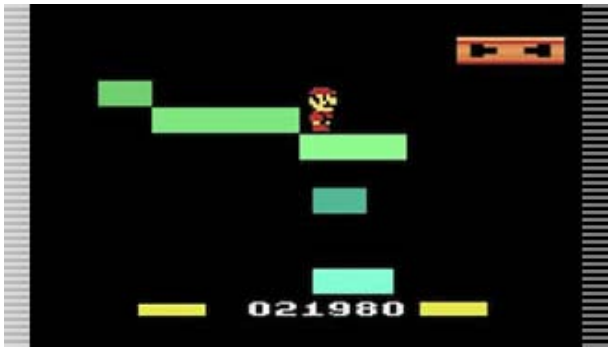
Earlier this year somebody did the impossible, at least in the opinion of Howard Warshaw (the Yars' Revenge mastermind), and unveiled a 2600 version of Star Castle. But that has nothing on a playable demo of Super Mario Bros. now under development that's jaw-dropping for more than just the authenticity of gameplay.

Equally impressive, if only because it's fully complete, is an iPhone emulation of a game topping my Christmas list last year: A handheld Super Mario Bros. on an eight-by-eight LED screen. But instead of paying $45 for a do-it-yourself kit requiring soldering, the iPhone version is a mere 99 cents and offers extras that will be most welcome by those not obsessed with owning the original unit.

How well do they resurrect the addictiveness of first playing SMB on the NES? Last night, for about the first time in about 20 years, I found myself humming one of the chippier Super Mario tunes. Worse, I can't figure out which Mario game it's from and I'm wondering if I'm going to have to replay all of the classic 2D titles (Game Boy included) just to get that damn ditty out of my head.

Luckily, I can do so soon, since neither of these new SMB demakes takes nearly as long to complete as the original. Levels bear an unmistakable resemblance to the original in look and play, but are condensed in every sense of the word. But, as will be seen, that doesn't mean the challenge and fun is diluted.

Super Mario Bros. (Atari 2600)



This may be a contender for the best Atari 2600 game of all time if the programmer delivers the game as described.

Right now only a one-level demo is playable, with two more levels featured in a YouTube video. The pledge is the 32K final version will feature 16 levels (Worlds 1-1 through 4-4) with a boss battle at the end of each.

Purists could find dozens of things to criticize from the always-black backgrounds to not-perfect physics to only one enemy being on the screen at a time (but, as the programmer notes, there's always an enemy so the limit might not be obvious).

But if anyone's actually griping, I say get real: What's there is incredible.

Mario looks remarkably similar to the NES original and all of his moves (i.e. ducking when large) are intact. Same for the Koopa Troopas, whose shells can be used as weaponry and who sprout wings in later levels. The smooth side scrolling will have those who know something about the 2600's hardware shaking their heads in disbelief.

Other enemies and graphic elements are hit and miss. The platforms and special bricks in particular are bland since they're drawn with those large playfield blocks. But I'm not downgrading the game a bit for that since it'd be a terrible

waste of CPU resources trying (probably futility) to improve the platform graphics at the expense of gameplay. Not to mention it'd turn what's a mostly flicker-free game into visual chaos.

Sounds and background music are similarly impressive, staying true to the original's form within the upper limit of the 2600's capabilities. Controls are smooth and, best as I can tell, there's no glitches with what you can play so far.

Obviously I'm not going to seriously grade the gameplay or any other aspect at this preliminary stage. But It's unquestionably got strong A+ potential and anybody with an interest in the 2600 should take a look at it (and participate in its development, details of which are below). The download link is at www.atariage.com/forums/topic/201426-super-mario-clone-world-1-1-playable-demo.

Plenty of announced titles that sound great have turned out to be vaporware every since the Atari 2600 has been on the market. But I believe this one will actually come to fruition because 1) the game engine seems reasonably complete, so now it's about designing the levels and 2) the programmer is constantly online at AtariAge discussing updates with a receptive and helpful community of players and programmers (he's doing so again as I write this, getting feedback from someone about the design of specific sprites and how much grief he can expect from Nintendo if their lawyers learn about the project).

While the programming details may be the least interesting aspect of this game to many readers, there's a fascinating thing (or two) even those who've never written a line of code ought to know.

Most notably, the game is written Batari Basic rather than the assembly code used by commercial programmers. Batari is a fascinating language that allows relative newbies to write Atari 2600 programs without wrestling with the usually huge challenges of things like display timing, not to mention learning assembly language. Anyone who's dabbled in BASIC code on various computers from the 1970s and 80s should be able to at least get started in Batari without too much trouble, and there's a huge amount of built-in tools (to handle tricky things like six-figure scores) and online assistance.

The drawback, not surprisingly, is Batari isn't as flexible or powerful as writing in the 2600's native language. Some decent homebrew game have been written for it, some even selling as cartridges, but most efforts range from tepid to lame. Using Batari to write something like this Super Mario Bros. port is nearly as amazing as the existence of the game itself.

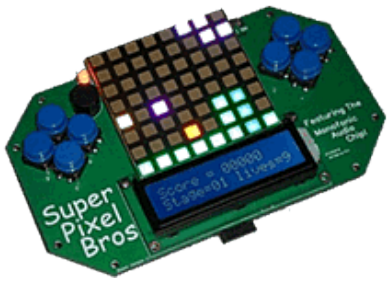
It's also perhaps why the game escaped the attention of most 2600 fans (and Nintendo lawyers?) during the initial weeks after the demo's release. The programmer, known only as Sprybug – (s)he even puts "not telling" as gender in a user profile – posted the demo in the Batari discussion forum at AtariAge, so the only people likely to know about it were other fans of the language. It's not the first time this has happened, as some of the best games written in Batari are only found in that forum and, of course, they're all free. So while you're visiting the site to grab the SMB download, seriously consider browsing through the board for some of the other cool stuff.

The other cool possibility is the ability to edit levels and gameplay settings since Sprybug is making the source code available. It's not hard to image him/her or others releasing numerous "hacks" featuring other levels from this and other SMB titles, plus whatever unique designs they come up with.

Pixel Land

This is, without question, the ugliest version of Super Mario Bros. you will ever play. And if you aren't thrilled by it you may need to turn in your SMB fan credentials.

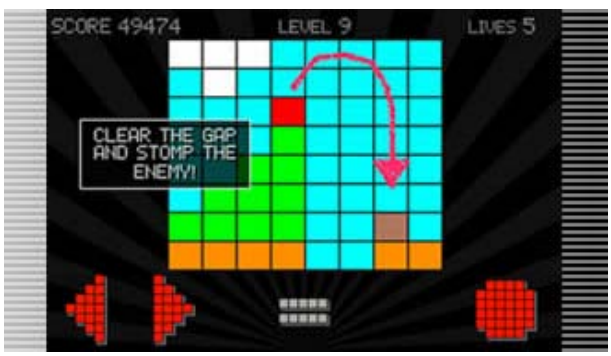
For this is a true case of beauty radiating from ugliness as Pixel Land recasts the SMB world in an eight-by-eight multicolor LED universe. That's about the same resolution as a text character on computers of the mid-1980s (it might be enough for a comma on today's machines). The result is a cute, often humorous and – dare I say – visually appealing novelty. That and a kick-ass gameplay experience.



For anyone missing my column last December (a.k.a. everyone who reads RTM), Pixel Land is the iPhone version of a handheld game called Super Pixel Bros. It whetted the kind of gotta-have-that-toy neurosis I had as a kid, even though it was a built-it-yourself kit likely to tax my limited skills. Actually, that was part of the appeal, but I lamented then that it would definitely keep the game out of the hands of the masses. Details about the handheld, as well as the iPhone version, are at www.bradsprojects.com (hardware hobbyists beware – there's lots of stuff here to consume your insufficient leisure time).

At that time I also had an unstated hope the programmer, Brad Slattery, or someone else would offer a software version of the game since it seems like something everything from Web browsers to mobile devices could handle with ease. As it turns out, Slattery translated the handheld's program (written in something called Swordfish Basic) into iOS code and released it earlier this year.

Playing Pixel Land is the quintessential Impressionist experience of video gaming. If you've played the original SMB you'll have no trouble "seeing" familiar lands, power-ups, foes and castles. Whereas some might criticism the blocky landscapes in the Atari 2600 SMB, here a great deal of the charm is seeing how things like lava pits and sky-high islands are displayed. Also, while the Atari version's background are all a bland black, here the various levels and worlds get the full rainbow treatment.



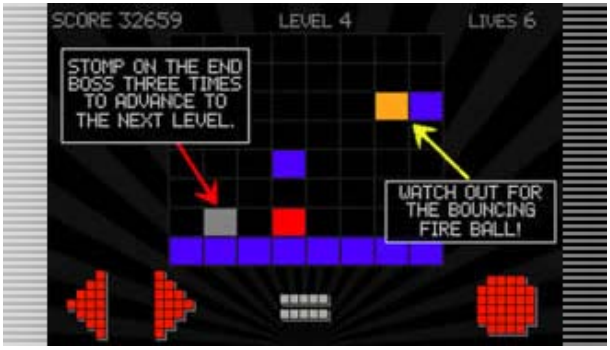
Speaking of charm, check out the size of the engagement ring Pixelman gives Pixelwoman in the introduction/tutorial. The same size as they are (no wonder Pixelwoman's response is "Wow!). So when the next frame says she and the ring are kidnapped by a gang of bad pixels, I've got to wonder if she's actually the object of desire.

The tutorial (the "about" option on the title screen) does a good job of explaining things while giving you a good idea of how it's pared down from the real SMB. There's only a few types of enemies, for instance. Also, the controls are limited to left, right and jump. That obviously means no descending pipes into the underground, beanstalks to climb, fireballs for Mario to shoot or walk/run speeds.

There's plenty of other omissions from foes to end-of-level castle flags. But, even more than the Atari 2600 SMB, appreciation is about what's included.

There's six four-level worlds (OK, technically it's one big world with a boss stage every four levels), which start easy and get tougher with an ideal difficulty curve. Movement, physics, speed and challenge are, um, as pixel perfect as such a display permits. Various gameplay elements are simplified, such as special bricks releasing power-ups randomly (either big Mario, invincibility or a 1UP). But "hey, I recognize that" touches are plentiful, such as being able to break through the top on the screen on level two and run invisibly through much of the terrain unimpeded (alas, no warp zone, unless I'm really overlooking something).

Slattery also opted to add a few flourishes not possible with the LED hardware portable. Your health is represented by a trio of hearts at the



top of the screen, with one disappearing each time you take a hit. Run out of hearts or take a fall and you lose one of your lives (you start with five). There's also a continue option, but doing so costs 20,000 of the points you've accumulated. Annoyed as I might usually be at limited continues on an iPhone game, here I can deal with it since it's not going to take all that long to complete this game even with a few (or many) full restarts. A reasonably competent gamer can probably do so in a couple of hours, a less talented one in a weekend – and, yes, you might actually find yourself hooked into a marathon session until you prevail.

There's no background music, but the deliberately primitive beeps and blips get an upgrade from the one-bit soundchip in the hardware version. Also, this being an iOS game, there's Game Center features such as an online scoreboard and achievement to attain (i.e. complete the first four levels without dying, find all the power-ups on certain levels).

There's some unavoidable pitfalls, most notably the imprecision of movement. Most of my deaths are from falling since it's all too easy to move a block too few or too far. Long jumps over gaps are a particular challenge since you can't push the run button and quickly jump while standing on an edge (you'll instantly start moving forward into your plunge of doom), and timing running jumps from a pixel or two back is tricky. The imprecision can also be a bit of challenge initially when timing your jumps on/over enemies, but then becomes overly simple once you become proficient.

Yeah, you get a lot more gameplay for a buck buying something like Angry Birds, but if that's your standard for entertainment value I'm not sure why you're reading retrogaming columns. Also, even if you're one of those cheapskates who won't fork over a dollar because you figure it'll be free some day (depressingly common), consider that 50 percent of the profits are being donated to Compassion, an organization providing help to children in poverty.

The Thrill Of Defeat

by Mark Sabbatini

Awe Inspiring ZX81 Games - Part 1

It's the world's second most-feeble computer, but for over 30 years (1981-present) has claimed the trophy for the greatest programming achievement of all time. As that pearl anniversary has now passed, however, there's an insurgent using those same feeble circuits with potential to claim that honor.

It's among an avalanche of new programs released on or near the 30th birthday for Sinclair's ZX81 that's redefining the computer's gaming standards. As RTM's resident fan of unknown and/or unloved machines, I've written scores of reviews for Sinclair's little weakling leading up to this 100th issue. But the huge assortment of new releases in this centennial column is the first time I've seriously thought I need to go back and lower all my previous grades for this machine (something I won't actually ask our esteemed editor to do).

A sneak preview of the potential throne-topper for those in the know: Hi-res, full-screen games in 1K. For the rest, a brief bit of history to explain how astounding those words are and prepare you for the remarkable quality of other games from modern programmers.

Back in 1981 a ZX81 computer chess game written in 672 bytes of code (about the same number of keystrokes as the first two paragraphs of this column) took the world, or least a lot of hackers, by storm. It looks primitive and is hardly the strongest opponent – one of my many humiliations is acknowledging I'm an even match for it – but is entirely playable for even novice computer users and ranks second on a fan poll for the best ZX81 program of all time. To summarize my raves from previous RTM columns: Try merely writing the rules of chess without exceeding the length of those first two paragraphs and see how far you get.

A few games during the ZX81's retail years also left jaws hanging, as the programmers literally brought sound to the deaf and sight to the blind. Again, for the uninitiated, a few words about the seeming limits of the computer are warranted.

Debuting in the U.K. in 1981, it was the first consumer computer cheaper than £50 ($100) – and even less if you bought the do-it-yourself kit (which sells for far more than pre-built machines on eBay these days) – and instantly became a huge hit despite absurd limitations. It's not much bigger than a cheap paperback. It has 1K of built-in memory (shared by programs and the display, so a full screen leaves maybe 200 bytes for programs). There's no color, a "graphics" resolution of 64X32 blocky pixels and no sound. Each of the 40 minuscule "keys" on the flat membrane keyboard performs as many as five functions via a confusing shift/function process (I must admit I find vast amusement and irony in flat keyboards being all the rage these days thanks to the proliferation of iPads and similar devices).

The ZX81 runs far slower than any computer ever sold unless you use a "fast" mode that blanks the display when the computer does anything. It has the slowest and most unreliable cassette file storage ever, with a 16K program taking up to 10 minutes to load – and often several tries before reading the tape successfully. Sinclair's RAM pack expanding the ZX81 to its supposed maximum of 16K is so wobbly the computer generally crashes at the slightest nudge or movement.

What on Earth was and is its appeal?

"People could not imagine what it was like to sit in front of a machine like the magnificent ZX81 and be transported to another world, a world within a television screen," wrote Tadeu Curinga da Silva, a Rio de Janeiro resident who wrote one of the landmark games reviewed here at the age of 15. "The user is now the king and his kingdom is inside the TV, a realm that can be constructed, operated, created, modified, lived. A kingdom of commands, instructions,

confusion, riddles, puzzles, diversions and, finally, an 'enchanted kingdom.' The realm of fantasy."

Not everyone shares that opinion, of course.

"I had one of these, and you couldn't pay me to use one again," wrote a former user calling himself The Grim Reefer, in an online forum discussing the ZX81's 30th. "Well you could, but it would have to be a hell of a lot. I can understand why people would be nostalgic about a C64, or even a TI-99/4A. I had both of those too. But I don't really remember much to like about the ZX81 … Some things should just be allowed to die and be forgotten."

Another user, SuperKendall, considers the ZX81's cheap and kludgey ways an essential part of its appeal.

"The cool thing about the ZX81 in particular (kit version) was how when you built something from scratch you really felt not a care at all about modification to it," he wrote.

Those modifications sometimes reached the limits of absurdity. In addition to add-on hardware modules providing color, sound, hi-res graphics, keyboards, control models for things like room lights and robots, and other things, I remember an ad advertising a 1MB memory boost, achieved with a ridiculously high stack of RAM modules (the cost, I believe, was about the same as buying a PC clone with the same amount of memory). These days hardware hackers of more modest means have ZX81s running Web browsers and acting as online servers, presumably just to show it's possible.

So maybe it shouldn't have been shocking when software-driven music composition programs surfaced for the ZX81 even though it has no sound chip, or games with 256X192 hi-res graphics appeared that didn't need a special display add-on. Most are better technical showpieces than entertainment, but a few titles like Forty Niner, Rocket Man and a version of the classic platformer Manic Miner would be worthy gaming on a Sinclair Spectrum (that's a compliment, all you Commodore 64 fans).

The ZX81 never completely disappeared from the hacker scene, especially in places like Britain and Spain where it was popular, with homebrew titles of varying quality appearing over the years. But sometime around the 25-year anniversary (2006) and beyond the quality and quantity of titles has increased significantly. Details and links for a sizable collection of latter-day titles, including many reviewed here, are at www.rwapsoftware.co.uk/zx81/zx81_software.html.

I am, with one notable exception, reviewing only games that don't require add-on hardware. That's both in the interest of purity (hard to credit a swimmer winning a race because he's wearing fins) and to ensure maximum compatibility with gamers using emulators. Besides, most of the best modern games still use "traditional" lo-res graphics and text, so don't overlook them even if the screenshots don't impress you. The games tend to look far more impressive in motion and, trust me, you'll be absorbed enough with the gameplay to pay much attention to trifling things like pixelation.

Many modern ZX81 programmers and developers have released multiple titles, so I'm grouping them accordingly here. I'm still assigning grades based on how fun they are compared to all ZX81 titles but, as mentioned above, it's a bit messy comparing them to earlier reviews since the new titles have raised the standard. That said, old classics like 3D Monster Maze will always remain top-rate entertainment, so browse one of those "top 10" polls and spend some time with those titles if you haven't already.

So, at last, here are the reviews, starting with that potential all-time best programming effort.

1K Hi-Res Game Pack by Dr. Beep (A-)

Dozens of 1K game compilations were released back in the ZX81's retail days and, as I've noted in several previous RTM review columns, nearly all are beyond terrible. Has this cassette landed on some blurry-eyed magazine reviewer's desk back then, it might have changed the course of history in a *Back To The Future* kind of way (at least on Planet Sinclair).

Not all are particularly great for their gameplay, but even the least impressive titles would have sent reviewers into a

reality vertigo if presented individually without the context of the other games. The best, however, could compete against a roster of decent short-term diversions on my iPhone.

However, there's a big caveat (two of them, actually). The games require a special third-party chip that essentially manipulates the ZX81's built-in video hardware, much like the software-only hi-res graphics on 16K games. So while it's not replacing the ZX81's built-in capabilities it does mean they're basically on steroids. More importantly from a practical standpoint, it limits the number of emulators able to run the games without crashing (EightyOne, generally considered the best and most-popular emulator for Windows, handles them fine).

The latter problem delayed the release of these games for months, since "Dr. Beep" was trying to arrange a sales agreement, with proceeds from the $10 download going to a cancer charity. But the company balked at dealing with a large number of customers struggled to run the programs, so the package has been posted as a free download at http://minigamecompo.weebly.com/zx81hires.html, with the author urging those who like it to make a donation to the charity of their choice.

"Dr. Beep" is the pen name of Johan Koelman, a Netherlands resident who's been doing exercises in minuscule programming for decades. For the past three years he's been in charge of the annual Minigame Compo, which gets some amazing submissions in the 1K, 2K and 4K categories for a variety of computers and consoles. In interviews by phone and e-mail, he said it was that competition that got him interesting in ZX81 programming in the first place.

"My roots (are) on a ZX Spectrum, hence the name Dr. Beep," he said. Among his projects for that computer are a ZX81 emulator he spent two years writing in the mid 1990s and a collection of minigames, some of which were converted for his 1K ZX81 package.

He took hi-res techniques developed by others and advanced them to make playable 1K games possible. To greatly simplify, since the technical details are lengthy article in themselves, he essentially uses the Atari 2600's method of drawing a single scan line at a time. Not only does this allow the display of hi-res pixels, but a large portion of the screen can be used than would be possible using the built-in text and block graphics.

Just to offer a taste of his technique, the following is his unedited "tricks used to code in 1K" written description (for those unable to discern a word of it, I'm working on something reasonably layman-like for next month):

"1) use linebuffer as programcode in lowmemory
2) use BASIC-call to machinecode as screen (only used once)
3) use data as code or clever data (BLOCKY is a block so I can check bit 7 or Bit 0, must always be set during a test)
4) choose your data at places were the address is easily calculated or the address can be used as part of decoding
5) know what an opcode does with flags.
6) use all kind of dirty tricks to save space like hidden commands in opcodes etc.
7) use selfmodifying software."

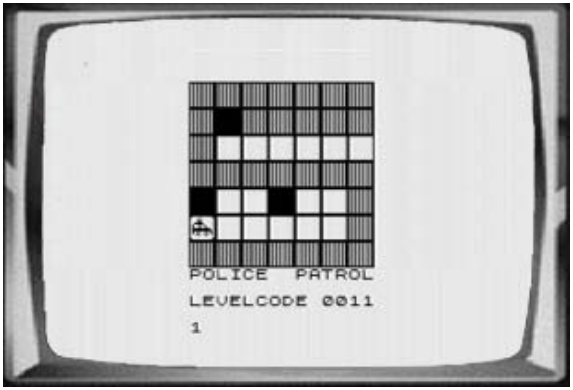
Retrocomputing geeks will get a thrill from additional details Koelman has posted online, including a PDF manual explaining the programming concepts for each game and listing the source code. If you're among the .01 percent with some grasp of assembly language, it's an intriguing case study.

The bad news is those just wanting to play the games get the short end when it comes to instructions. It's possible to figure most of them out from the manual, YouTube videos Koelman's posted (link on the downloads page) and a discussion forum at www.rwapservices.co.uk/ZX80_ZX81/forums/games-f4.html. But be prepared for a little trial and error, especially when it comes to figuring out what keys to use.

Koelman said he's working on additional 1K ZX81 projects, including two-player versions of Pong and Outlaw, and is soliciting other ideas from forum chatters. So this looks like the beginning, not the end, of a "new" generation of infant-era computer games, as at least a few of the many still-active ZX81 hackers are likely to try their hand.

In the meantime, here's a look at some of the games from that initial package, beginning with the biggie I've started hyping many hundreds of words ago:

Police Patrol (A)



This is the game in the package that's a legit rival to 1K Chess. It's an engaging strategy maze game with 100 levels and a passcode option so you can start at previously completed levels. Those are bona fide modern mobile device specs, but Koelman takes compression to new lows (in the good sense) to make this fit into roughly 900 bytes.

The player controls a police car that must patrol all the vacant locations in a town – a seven-by-seven grid with some locations already blacked out – without visiting any of them twice. You move the car (Q, A, O and P keys) to where you want to start patrolling pressing "Z." The car now leaves a grey trail (smog?) as it moves. Getting trapped with vacancies remaining means restarting the level. As with any good puzzler, solving initial levels isn't too hard, but there's some real brain busters as you progress. It's not a unique concept, but definitely one that can absorb lots of time if you're into these sort of games.

The only concern I had was the ZX81's finicky keyboard might make control too imprecise, causing your car to move an unintentional space too far. But there's a well-timed delay in repeat-key movements, so things move along at a good speed without causing frustration.

Aside from the lack of instructions, the only (very minor) criticism is the graphics, except for the tiny police car, aren't that impressive. Then again, like Othello (which shares the same core routine), it's not a game where much flash is possible or necessary.

Koelman said he squeezed the game, a conversion of his Spectrum game of the same name, into 1K by reducing the data from each level to two bytes instead of three (again, I'm skipping the detailed technical stuff). Those two bytes determine which blocks can't be visited when drawing the initial grid, and the extra compression came from reusing certain portions twice.

Displaying the car, which "also doubles as the board," takes 89 bytes, Koelman said. (No, I'm not entirely clear yet how that's done.) The passcode option is an algorithm whose calculations are based on the current level. The remaining memory is used for the gameplay code.

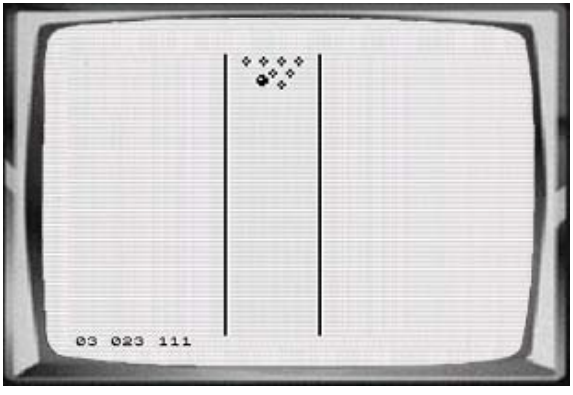
So before moving on to Koelman's other games and those by other programmers, let's settle the big question: Is this the game that replaces 1K Chess in the Hall of Programming Fame?

Short answer, no, because of the "steroids" asterisk.

There's no question Police Patrol offers more fun and longevity than 1K Chess, and the graphics obviously triumph in a rout. If it didn't offer an all-around gaming experience I didn't consider feasible on a 1K ZX81, even with a bit of a boost from that extra chip, it wouldn't even make it to the judge's table (this is, after all, the year a man with two artificial legs was allowed to run in the Olympics).

But 1K Chess programmer David Horne didn't have any institutional knowledge of the ZX81 to rely on, was dealing with a far more complex set of game rules (not to mention the AI for the computer opponent) and effectively had 200 fewer bytes to work with. So while the game looks crude and plays an utterly predictable game (oh, the shame of all my losses), it deserves to retain the legendary status it's enjoyed for decades.

Bowling (B-)



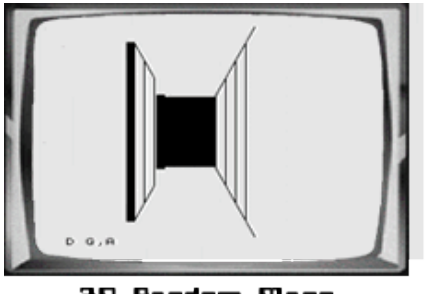
This is Koelman's favorite game of the bunch and it's getting good feedback in forum chats, so the grade may seem (and be) a little harsh. But also consider the reason it's Koelman's favorite is because "I always wanted to make my version of this Videopac/Odyssey2 game." So what you have is a good port of a lousy game (the O2 version gets an "F" from The Video Game Critic – even though the cart also contains basketball game – and his grades, like mine, are relative to other titles for the system).

But it's a decent and challenging diversion for a few games until you master the timing. The ball moves back and forth at the top of the lane until you press the "7" key, after which you can use the "5" and "8" keys to control spin as it speeds towards the pins. All the usual rules and scoring applies.

Koelman includes a nice extra with a slow/fast difficulty setting the beginning of the game (press "9" or "0," respectively). Also, those who enjoy this sort of thing can always impose limits on themselves, such as launching the ball from somewhere other than their usual "strike" spot so using the spin keys becomes necessary.

One of the VGC's complaints with the O2 version is the pins simply vanish, so there's no chance of flying pins knocking down spread formations like splits (which he apparently gets a lot of), and that applies here. Otherwise, the only real hitch is the inherit gameplay limits of pretty much all computer bowling simulations in relation to other games.

3D Random Maze (B) & Mazeddy's Castle Revisited (C+)

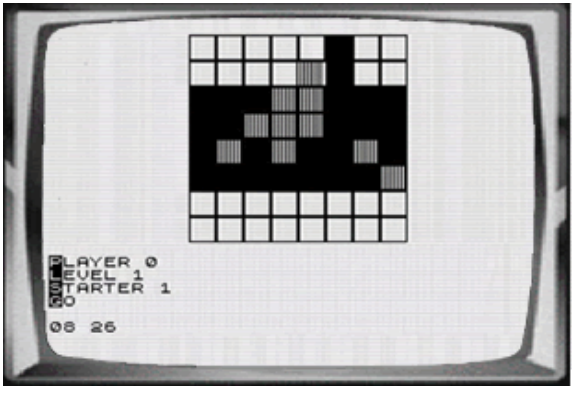


3D Random Maze

Mazeddy's Castle Revisited

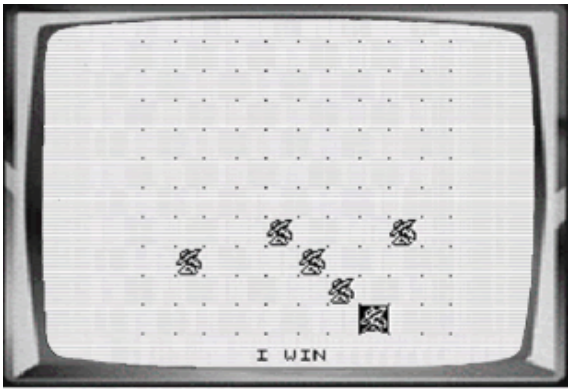
Two crowd-pleasing winners, as 3D wire-frame maze games often were in computing's early days. The object in both is to escape the maze, drawn impressively within a vertical quarter of the screen. 3D Random Maze is superior because the mazes are larger and varied (Mazeddy is the 3D version of a simple overhead 2D maze game also in the pack). The narrow view can be a bit disorienting, but since we're not talking about huge maps a little extra challenge isn't a bad thing.

Othello (B-)



Many playable versions of one of the easiest games to program have been squeezed into very small amounts of memory, so I can't really give Koelman's version a higher grade. But it's a good effort nonetheless. There are two levels of difficulty and, while skilled players should have little trouble with the hard level, even rank novices should do well against the easy level since the corners are the last spaces the computer checks for vacancies.

Spy vs. Spy (B-)

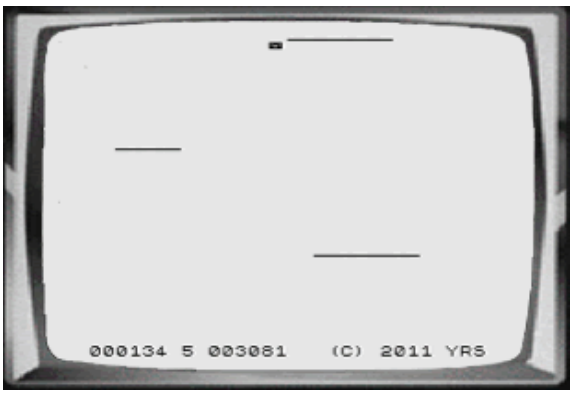


Not to be confused with the split-screen action/strategy classic from the 80s, this is purely a strategy board game. You might salivate in anticipation upon seeing you get five white spies to do in the lone black spy. But unlike the Mad Magazine battles, the black spy isn't equally obsessed with spectacular carnage, just escape.

Your spies start at the bottom of a 10X10 grid and you can move one a single space each turn, after which the black spy tries to get one space closer to escaping from top to bottom. If that sounds like a quick novelty you might attempt with a checkerboard, it plays pretty much like one.

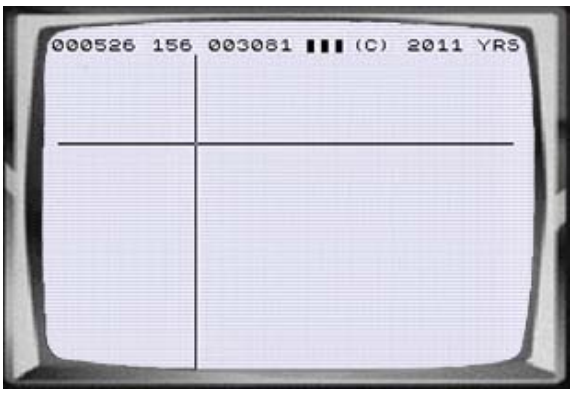
Like a lot of early computer strategy games, this is fun until you figure out the computer's moves. But there's an undeniable extra jolt of sadistical satisfaction trying to wreak havoc with those infamous spies instead of some generic icon.

Blocky (C+)



This feels a bit like a stripped down version of the mobile classic Doodle Jump (and is based on Koelman's Jumper game for the Spectrum). You walk off platforms that are scrolling up toward you, falling rather than jumping, but the sense of trying to land on the too-rare platforms without falling off the screen is similar. Blocky isn't exactly an impressive-looking protagonist, since he's just a tiny box with eyes and a straight-line mouth. The vertically scrolling platforms would have certainty shocked an unprepared player back then, but you could program this game entirely in the ZX81's native lo-res graphics and it wouldn't affect gameplay significantly. Games tend to be short and have a "one more time" quality, but it's still rather monotonous (whereas Doodle Jump just got a kick-ass – literally – ninja upgrade).

Ghost Hunt (D)



Sorry, but this is an unplayable mess. You control full-screen crosshairs trying to target ghosts that flash on the screen occasionally. And by "flash" I mean just that – they're there for one screen cycle. So you're just wandering around at random until one appears in your crosshairs. The graphics would be impressive if none of the other games in this package existed, but they do and so this is the only real miss of the bunch.

Four brainy arcade hits by Bob Smith

All four of these games by Bob Smith, written in 2010 and later, are worth spending quality time with. They're highly polished, playable and challenging, and you'll see some of the titles when reading forums debating the best ZX81 game ever.

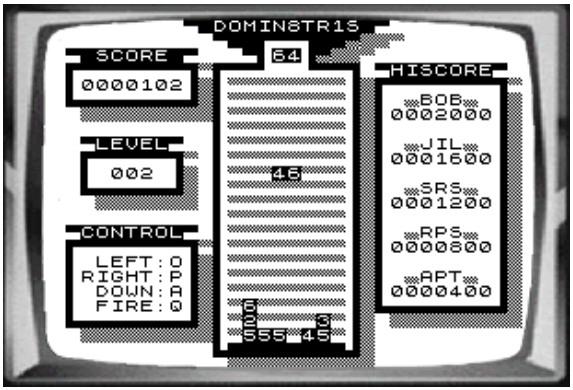
The only reasons they don't get top grades here are 1) the low-res graphics, even though they're ingeniously done and I'm personally happier with them that way, and 2) the games are clones or derivatives of overdone classics like Boulder Dash. Still, I haven't had this much fun playing Boulder Dash since the first time I played it 25 or so years ago.

Bob's games are highly user-friendly, with simple menus allowing tweaking of control keys, saving games, and adjusting numerous starting/difficulty parameters. Some allow cheat codes, which were far harder to find on the 'net

than I expected, but this is an increasingly rare instance where I've resisted the usual temptation and for now am persisting on mastering – or at least achieving competence – on my own merits. The games, along with a collection of original Spectrum titles, are at http://bobs-stuff.co.uk/index.html.

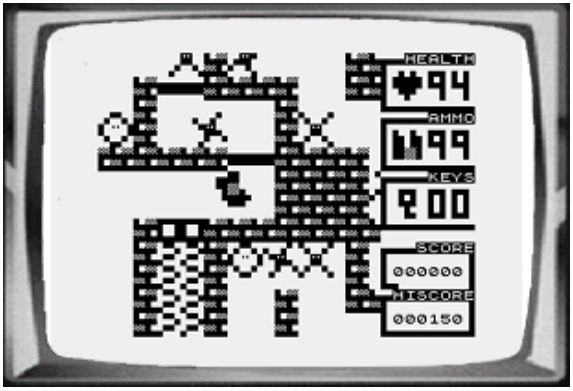
The games, in order of release (meaning worst comes first):

Domin8tr1s (C+)



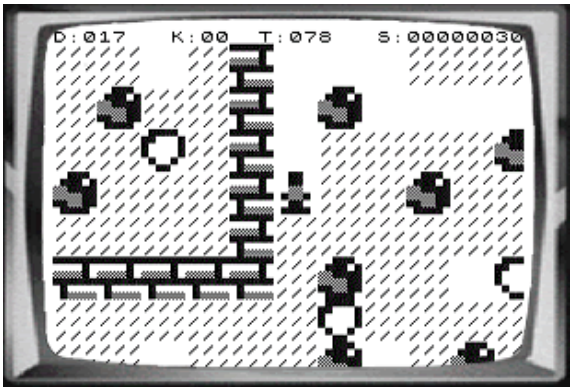
You'll want to flee (I certainly did for a while) seeing the words "Tetris-like" to describe anything, but stick around long enough to play a few games of what appears to be a unique twist. Bob's first game has you lining up numbers instead of shapes, and you'll need to connect the same number of digits as the digit itself horizontally and/or vertically (three 3s, six 6s, etc.) to make them vanish. I thought the game was going to be devilishly impossible, but on the default (easiest) setting it's about as challenging as regular Tetris. But Bob offers a few ways to make things more challenging than your taxes. The default setting features digits from one to six, but can be adjusted as high as nine. You can also start the game with up to nine rows of numbers already at the bottom of the screen. Finally (and not under your control), the game advances in levels similar to Tetris, so the action speeds up as you progress. The digits fall two at a time, so you'll need to rotate them to match up, and on rare occasions a pair of bombs will appear that can take out up to ten "tiles." There's a few small things missing from Bob's later games, including the ability to pause and quit games, but the vital stuff like defining keys is included (with a couple of odd ways rotate tiles if you so choose). Bob wrote a version of this for the Speccy which obviously has better graphics, but the humbler ZX81 version far surpasses it overall due to an expanded selection of gameplay options. I usually have a puzzle game or two in my regular play rotation and, while I can't see Domin8tr1s becoming one of them, it was addicting enough to play for an extended session when I loaded it for this review.

Virus (A-)



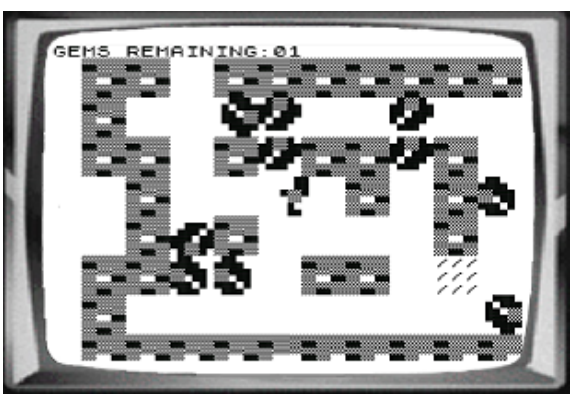
This relative of Gauntlet (and a closer one to the 1986 Apple II game Into the Eagle's Nest, released for the ZX Spectrum a year later) is probably my favorite of Bob's quartet. The essentials of top-down shooting, collecting keys to open doors, and finding stuff to nurture your health and firepower are presented gloriously in eight huge levels. That may not sound like much compared to the dozens or hundreds of levels in the Gauntlet coin-ops and home derivatives, but it's damn impressive for an inept computer with 16K. Believe me, you'll spend plenty of time getting through them. There's three levels of difficulty and – again, believe me – the hardest setting is an entirely different experience than the easiest. Get through all eight levels on the hardest setting without cheat codes and you'll have serious gaming creds even by today's standards. (SPOILER – CHEAT CODES (use spaces to fill out any words of less than eight letters): BACKHOME - Resets all cheats; CMACLEOD - Infinite health; COLANDER - Infinite ammunition; SKELETON - Infinite keys; ALPHA - Start at area 1; BRAVO - Start at area 2; CHARLIE - Start at area 3; DELTA - Start at area 4; ECHO - Start at area 5; FOXTROT - Start at area 6; GOLF - Start at area 7; HOTEL - Start at area 8.)

Boulder Logic (B)



I'd say the world hardly needs another Boulder Dash clone, but Atari 2600 fans in raptures over a recently released homebrew version for their machine – selling for $75 plus shipping – obviously disagree). So if you're going to do one, at least make sure it's really good. Bob's ZX81 unofficial port unquestionably achieves that goal with 32 levels and a bunch of options such as a practice mode, continuing a just-ended game and starting new games at higher levels using a password. One annoyance is the code for new levels is displayed indistinctly at the top of the screen until you make a move and for new players especially it's easy to miss. But once I started playing I was all but oblivious to the low-res, no-sound gameplay, getting the same enjoyment from figuring out the right solutions and encountering new gameplay elements I used to on a number of far more advanced machines. I'd say it's a "definite-try" title except for...

Miner Man (A-)



An Xbox 360 game on the ZX81. Just those words suggest its one of the best-ever demakes, especially since it plays like the original rather than a generic game with some vaguely familiar elements (ahem, Halo 2600). What's more, it's promoted as an official version by the developer of the original. But there's a big caveat. Miner Man, for those unfamiliar with it, is essentially an amped-up version of Boulder Dash. Boulders, rather than obeying the laws of gravity, roll in direction of their shadow (up, down, left or right). There's also extra touches such as mine carts that transport you between various locations on a level. The goal, similar to Boulder Dash, is to collect all the gems on a level and find the exit. The ZX81 version lacks many of the flourishes of the original such as a music soundtrack and Mario-style map where you move from level to level (as Bob puts it in slightly improper grammar, "it does take over 1100 times less memory to run"), but gameplay is amazingly faithful. There's 60 levels – the same as the Xbox – and they're generally similar in layout and challenge. As with Bob's version of Boulder Dash, you can continue games and enter passwords to skip levels. There's also a "save to tape" option, which seems far more troublesome than just using passwords on a real ZX81 (where the process takes about six minutes and is anything but reliable), but might appeal to those using emulators with a save capability. I struggled with the grade on this since it's very arguable something this vast that's flawless deserves a higher rating, but ultimately I held back since 1) Despite the extras, it's still a relative of Boulder Dash and 2) It's not exactly highly rated or a big seller in its Xbox form. Even so, there's no way retrogamers, especially ZX81 fans, shouldn't try this out unless they have such a hatred for the genre that the mere thought provokes severe allergic reactions.

Be sure to stop by next month, as we look at even more ZX81 titles that are pushing the machine to its limit!

The Pixelated Mage

by Jeff Wittenhagen

Soulless

Platform: Commodore 64
Developer: Psytronik Software
Release Date: June 2012
Genre: Platformer
Game Modes: Single Player
Tag Line: "8-Bit Mastery."

Synopsis

A powerful warrior King, tired of constant battle and the smell of blood declares peace on the land he rules ... But his generals crave war and plan to overthrow him. Enlisting the help of an evil wizard the King is cursed using unholy magic. His human body is twisted and deformed into a beastly form, his human soul is stolen! Locked away in a tomb the cursed King is all but forgotten while an unending war rages on for a thousand years ... Until one day a great quake shakes the land and smashes the wall of the Tomb holding the beast. Now he is free and is determined to reclaim his human soul and once again bring peace to the land.

From Georg 'Endurion' Rottensteiner, the maker of the smash hit C64 release Joe Gunn comes Soulless - a new arcade-adventure game for the Commodore 64 featuring stunningly detailed graphics by Trevor 'Smila' Storey! Soulless takes you on an epic quest around a huge exquisitely detailed map packed with objects to search and monsters to avoid as you desperately try to find your human soul.

Gameplay, Graphics and Sound

Exploration at its finest is what Soulless is all about. You control the King where you must escape your cell into a tomb and search for relics in order free your soul. Controls are limited as you can move left and right, jump with the button and up and down do tasks. Pressing up scans items for treasure which is reminiscent of Impossible Mission. Pressing down on certain obelisks will allow you to mark a checkpoint which is essential if you die during your quest. Apparently there are lives hidden around the world which are difficult to obtain, however necessary as you will need every life you can get. Jumping can be a little tricky to nail down when you first begin playing, however after a few minutes I had no trouble nailing the trickier jumps. Evasion from enemies and traps is your only option and I really would have liked to be able to at least earn some kind of attack eventually. Just getting revenge on all the enemies after dodging them for so long would have been bittersweet.

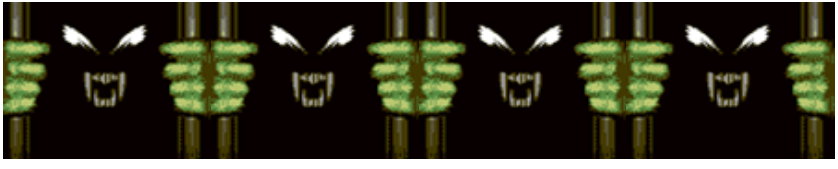
The graphics are crisp and well put together. Everything flows together nicely and you really get the feeling that you are rummaging through an old tomb. There is just a certain life that is brought to the world that shows that a lot of care was put into designing every aspect of the game. The music in Soulless is what is truly extraordinary! The Commodore

64 is known for some of the most amazing music in the 8-Bit era and Soulless takes that ball and runs with it. Every song is catchy and I can still hear the first level theme going in my head.

Why It's a Classic

While I do feel that if the King in Soulless had some kind of unlockable attack then this game would be perfect. However, it also would have taken away from some of the charm that it brings. Exploration due to limitation is what is brought to the table and it is executed nicely. The graphics and music are 8-Bit mastery and I can’t wait to play this game again when I fire up my Commodore 64.

Rating = 4 Caged Souls of 5



Freeware Alert

by Zachariah Nyne

Momodora

Welcome to Freeware Alert, a column about free PC games that capture the retro feel that we all love so dearly. This month we take a look at Momodora!

Momodora's Homepage - http://www.bombservice.com/rdein/

“In the land of Koho, common are the sacrifices of maidens in the hope of recreating the world as a better place to live.” Those are the first words that a player sees when he starts a new game in Momodora. And one almost understands why. The world is ravaged by bug-eyed creatures, deadly traps, and other horrors. This is how the protagonist, Momo, ends up entering a forbidden shrine. Her mother was sacrificed, and she desires to use the shrines power to bring her back.

Graphics - 4/5

Sound - 4/5

Momodora is a visual treat. The graphics are heavily pixilated, and surprisingly quite detailed in spite of each tiles’ size. This augments the charmingly simple graphic style that possesses a pleasing color palette, and monsters that manage to look both evil and cute. The music adds to the ambience quite well. Most of the songs are fairly complex, with dark undertones, yet they still manage to give off a pleasant feeling. Unfortunately, both are marred by occasional glitches. On some PC setups the backgrounds can “tear" when moving, a common issue among games created with GameMaker. And while the sound glitch has only hit me once or twice, when it does occur none of the music works at all.

Gameplay - 4/5

Momodora is an action platformer game that has strong ties to Castlevania and Cave Story. You basically run through a very linear gauntlet collecting weapons and items while fighting enemies with simple AI's. In some games this would be a flaw, but Momodora utilizes every enemy to its fullest. For instance, one of the enemies is a creature that stands in one spot, throwing a projectile in the same arc repeatedly. Not very tricky. But when you have to go through a narrow area that doubles back on itself twice, just a couple of these guys can cause you issues. The level layouts are optimized to make every enemy dangerous.

However, in a recurring theme, there are some slight issues with the game-play. Many of your weapons become redundant when a newer one becomes available. Additionally, cycling through your weapons can also be annoying, as the control setup is a bit clumsy.

The level design has occasional hiccups as well. Occasionally, you will receive inevitable damage due to enemy placement when you switch rooms. There is also at least one instance where you will have to restart the game, as you can fall into a spot that you can't jump out of.

Final opinion

There are many parts of Momodora that definitely make it worth playing. It has great graphics, sound, and the gameplay can be quite engaging. Unfortunately, it is short, and it does have some flaws that drag it down. However, these flaws are generally quite slight, and I believe that every gamer should give this one a try.

Overall Score: 4/5

A Pixelated 21st Century

by Paul Zimmerman

Happy 100th Retrogaming Times Monthly!! I'm so happy to be a part of this issue and Retrogaming Times Monthly! I was going to do a special edition "Pixelated 21st Century" covering Atari 2600 games, but for right now I'm going to hold off on doing that until a later date. Well, here are the highlights for the month of August. A very hot month, temperature wise and game wise, with the digital (and physical) release of New Super Mario Bros 2 for 3DS.

In other news, I'll be bringing back High Score Monthly, so keep an eye out for that in future issues. Now on to the retroware!

DSiWare

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

Play as the biomechanical robot named Nep2no to find Gaia energy stones in great depths. Find the stones and exit the levels before your light dims low. Do not crash into the narrow walls. Twelve levels, no extra modes, but good replay value for high score junkies. Great controls, style, music and a low price.

Vector Racing

Commando: Steel Disaster (Click here to see a video of the game)

Not the sequel to Commando. Also, not a game in the Metal Slug series, even though it is very similar. A run-n-gun that is also available in physical form, so if you don't have it, this digital download is a great way to own the game as it is much cheaper. Play as Storm and defeat Rattlesnake along with his terrorist organization. Sounds like an episode of G.I. Joe. Too bad you can't shoot diagonal with all weapons, but at least you can shoot up. Difficulty is high with no checkpoints (if you die you start at the beginning of the level). There is no high score, achievements to unlock, or extra modes. Also, this is not a 2-player game, unlike most run-n-guns. If you are a fan of the genre, this might be worth checking it out in digital form rather than the more expensive physical form.

The Lost Town — The Jungle (Click here to see a video of the game)

The sequel to the action RPG, Lost Town the Dust. In this challenging action RPG you play during day and night segments trying to survive. During the day you freely roam the map, rescuing villagers and defeating monsters. At night it plays like a tower defense game. As you get further into the game you can also go on optional quests, which the original did not have. If you are a fan of the original, you should enjoy this sequel. It is more of the same, in a good way.

Touch Battle Tank 3D (Click here to see a video of the game)

The title explains it all, maneuver your tank and shot at things. There are 50 levels with 20 bonus levels. Is this the new Combat? No. They don't even include head-to-head. I hear it is pretty awful.

VectorRacing (Video above)

Choose from six different vehicles to race with. There are 12 stages, plus four different modes, all in a retro vector

graphics style. You can play against a friend and there is an online leaderboard. No weapons or power ups in this game. This is pure racing vector-style!

Note: most of the videos for the games below are of the originals (meaning they not being played on the Wii). This is because the Virtual Console is emulating the original system and therefore they are identical.

Metal Slug X (NeoGeo) (Video to the right)

Metal Slug X (NeoGeo)

Here is the run-n-gun to buy for the month: Metal Slug X. This title is the upgrade to Metal Slug 2. There is very little slowdown compared to Metal Slug 2, and all other problems are fixed (problems?) and there are a few new goodies. If you don't have the game already on a collection or anything, buy it now!

Real Bout Fatal Fury Special (NeoGeo) (Click here to see a video of the game)

This 1997 fighting game is the 6th in the series. There is a more evolved two-line battle, improved power gauge system and no more ring outs. There are 15 characters from previous games plus four new ones. Again, if you don't have it in any other form, buy it now!

Toki Tori (Gameboy Color) (Click here to see a video of the game)

I've been waiting for this game! I love the wonderful WiiWare puzzle game and I always wanted to play the original. Avoid monsters and traps and collect all of the eggs before time runs out. There are 40 main levels with several bonus rounds. Looks beautiful and the music sounds incredible. I am going to buy it NOW!

As always, send me an email and let me know if you purchased any of these games and your thoughts on them. Also, let me know about any games I did not list that you feel should be included in a future issue.

I will see you next month for hopefully some more retroware goodies!

That concludes our monumental issue #100! I hope to see a #200 if we ever manage to make it that far. I also hope you all enjoyed RTM Invaders, the game at the top of this issue. I'm thinking that in the future I'll try and program more of these games for the fun of it. There's no way I could do it every month, but maybe every once in a while. It sure was fun and challenging at the same time. I now know what goes into programming your very own video game and what it must be like when you are under the gun to get a product finished by a certain deadline. While RTM Invaders is nothing fancy, it was my first game that I programmed from start to finish. As time goes on I hope to be able to create even more advanced games, but for now enjoy RTM Invaders, as it's my gift to issue #100.

There are two things I want to mention about the game. The first is that you can indeed save your high scores permanently by entering your name if you manage to make it in the top 5. Therefore, I hope to see that leaderboard filled in the near future. It should be interesting to see who can get the highest score. The second thing is that in true classic programming style, I included an Easter Egg! That's right, on the title screen before you start the game if you press the right key combination you will receive 50 lives and a special message! Now, I made sure that you could not save your high score when using the cheat, but it's fun to see if you can find it. I'll just mention that there is a two key sequence to activate the cheat and that they have to be pressed together. Also, one of the keys is a letter in my first name (Bryan) and the other key is not a letter or number...See if you can figure it out!

See you all next month as we put out our 101st issue! Maybe we should do a 101 Dalmatians themed issue...or maybe just review one 101 Dalmatians game and leave the rest of the issue alone. I mean, we wouldn't want to go overboard with the spots or anything!