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Well, it's our 101st issue, which means it's the anticipated 101 Dalmatians issue! Actually, I am only kidding. We were not able to find enough good 101 Dalmatians games to put that theme together, maybe next month we can do a 102 Dalmatians issue, though don't hold your breath.

Now back to being somewhat serious now that I got the Dalmatians thing out of the way. Dan Iacovelli attended this year's CGE and will be writing up on all that went down, he's just been backlogged with other things, but it will be written up and included in an upcoming issue. That will be something to look forward to, as CGE is always an amazing experience.

In other news I was recently contacted by the Game Developer Research Institute at gdri.smspower.org looking for some info on subcontractors during the early 80s. They have a really neat website that contains information on games developed by companies behind the scenes. Many of these companies that made games for big companies like Parker Brothers, Coleco, Sega, etc. never received any credit for what they did, but in putting up this website, Game Developer Research Institute will finally be giving the companies that developed some of these classics acknowledgement. I encourage everyone to check out their site, since you might be surprised who really programmed the game that all this time you thought was done by Activision, such as River Raid for the C64 by Micro Projects Engineering.

Anyway, enjoy this month's issue of Retrogaming Times Monthly. Sorry it's not really Halloween themed, but it's still full of delicious treats!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Tecmo Super Bowl 2013 Released With Cover Athlete Ron Gronkowski

TecmoBowl.org, a fan site that is in no way affiliated with Tecmo so please don't sue, is celebrating the 21st birthday of Tecmo Super Bowl in a way that would make even Bo Jackson proud—by releasing a fully up-to-date version of the NES classic, fully for free.

Tecmo Super Bowl 2013 enhances the original 90s cult-classic with a fully updated roster (as of 9/2/12), giving fans the same great gameplay experience they've loved for years and years, with the added bonus of players who have been retired for years. Other key features include:

- 32 teams
- Classic NES coverart featuring Ron Gronkowski
- Adjustable quarter length
- In-game playbook editing
- Half-time stats
- Enhanced passing accuracy and control
- Other various bug fixes from the 2012 version

Tecmo Super Bowl 2013 is available for free at http://tecmobowl.org; you won't even need a Kickstarter account to get THIS reward.

EVENTS

Play Expo 2012
Saturday, October 13 | Sunday, October 14 (Manchester, UK)

Play Expo takes place at Manchester's EventCity on 13-14th October and is the UK's newest large-scale Gaming Expo, offering gamers the unique opportunity to experience all aspects of the hobby under one massive roof. The Expo is essentially four events in one:

now.play is a showcase of the latest games and innovations from some of the biggest names in the industry, including Nintendo, EA, Konami and Namco Bandai.

pro.play is a dedicated area for competitive multiplayer gaming. Our partners from the EGL will be running tournaments on the likes of FIFA, Call of Duty and Super Street Fighter IV, with cash prizes to be won.

re.play celebrates the history of gaming with over 300 classic consoles, home computers, arcade and pinball machines. Everything from Pong to the PS3 will be available for visitors to play, with special themed areas, competitions, giveaways and much more.

cos.play is a dedicated area focusing on Cosplay, Anime and Japanese Gaming culture, with masquerades, skits and contests throughout the weekend.

We want Play Expo to be the ultimate celebration of gaming and believe it is the ideal opportunity for online communities to meet 'in real life' in an environment perfectly suited to their hobby! With plenty of hotels, shops and nightlife nearby and excellent transport links, Manchester is the perfect location for the Expo and for community meets.

You can connect with Replay Events and Play Expo via the popular social networking sites. We are running weekly giveaways on the Facebook page so please pop along and 'like' us!

Visit us on the web at http://www.playexpo.net/.

Houston Pinball Arcade Video Game Expo

Friday, November 2, 6:00pm - 2:00am | Saturday, November 3, 10:00am - 2:00am (Houston, TX)

Houston Arcade Expo 2012 has been scheduled for November 2nd & 3rd. 200+ Pinball, Arcade & Console games on free play.

Again this year we are adding additional cash prizes for our tournaments. The Pinball Wizard tournament will start at $100 and increase with a percentage of the entry fees throughout the weekend. We're adding a top qualifier prize of $50 this year along with cash prizes for winning the DMD, 80's and EM pinball tourney's of $25.00.

The Arcade & Console tourney prize starts at $50 and will also increase like the Pinball Wizard tourney.

The top 8 cash pinball tournament scores play a head to head single elimination playoff starting at 6:00 pm Saturday. Should a qualifier be unavailable, the remaining players will move up one ranking and the next highest qualifier will play instead.

Trophies awarded for winner and certificates for runner up finishes.

Be sure to check us out at http://www.arcadecenter.com/ for more info.

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.

High Score Monthly!

by Paul Zimmerman

Halloween

Due to high demand, High Score Monthly is back! This is a monthly high score contest with incredible prizes. Each month I will pick a random retro game to play. I will also take your requests if you have a game/system in mind, so email me your requests. They can be anything from the 70's, 80's and 90's including coin-ops, home consoles and computers.

The detailed rules can be found by clicking here.

Prize:

1st Place:

Recognition in Retrogaming Times Monthly. We will publish a quick bio of the winner along with their picture (if they would like) and a website link to their site if they have one. In addition, a link to their YouTube submission will also be included.

Game Description:

"The game where HE comes home!"

"Will you survive the night HE comes home? WIZARD VIDEO GAMES presents the HALLOWEEN VIDEO GAME, for your ATARI 2600 or SEARS Tele-Game Video Game System.

A homicidal maniac has escaped from a mental institution. On Halloween night, the killer returns to his home town to wreak havoc! You are babysitting for a family in a large, two story house. Somehow the vengeful murderer has gotten inside! Can you protect the children and yourself from the fury of his knife?"

Halloween, released by Wizard Video Games in 1983 is based on John Carpenter's classic movie with the same name. The game came out 5 years after the movie. It is a very rare game with 2 label variations: one with an interesting picture and the other with no label at all, but instead with the word "Halloween" written on the cartridge in black marker. I don't have the game, but it looks good. It contains some pretty nice colorful animated characters, as well as a rendition of the movie's theme song. Play as the babysitter, save the kids, find the knife and turn the tables on Michael. The occasionally top floor blackout is a nice effect, and the pumpkins representing your lives are also a nice touch.

Play the game then go see the 1978 classic!

Cabinet Fever

by Tony van de Graaf

In Search Of A Better Saw

Here I am inside a shed with a pile of wood, a set of tools and hardly any woodworking knowledge. How ever should I start? Well, first I get out my trusty ruler and pencil and draw the measured pieces on the board. With that done, the instructions now call for a square 4”x30 15/16” Inches.

What? Inches? But I live in Belgium and here we use centimeters and so do my rulers! Nobody said it was going to be easy. So I went to my computer and downloaded an app for converting inches to centimeters and did all the calculations on my printed layouts and wrote them down.

Again: Draw a square of 10x75 cm. That looks better.

Then I had a thought. Let's cut off the top 21 inches so the board is easier to handle. Good plan. So I put on my dust mask because the MDF (Medium-density fiberboard) makes a pretty big mess when sawing. I then clamped a ledge to guide my saw, grabbed my saw, and started sawing.

It was a lot of noise and I was pretty excited because this was really it, my first cut!

My excitement didn't last long because my saw couldn't handle the board. It just didn't have enough power, as it was a cheap saw which proved to be of no use for a job like this.

I went inside the house and my wife asked why I looked like I was ready to burn it all down. To make a long story short, we got in the car and visited out local tool store. When we got there, I saw it! There was the perfect machine for me: a Black & Decker saw combined with a circular saw for a very acceptable price.

Before I thought just the saw table was going to be enough but now I had a circular saw as well which turned out to be a very good thing, as it’s my most used tool! With a new saw and renewed confidence, I headed home with the house now safe from any potential burnings.

Back home I quickly unpacked the two saws and went back to my board. What a difference it was, this saw went through the MDF as if it was nothing!

My excitement was back and when I put the 21 inch piece away I felt really proud.

I treated myself to a nice cup of coffee, after which I went back to my board and continued drawing. First the square pieces, as I still needed some practicing and the side panels were too complicated for me at this point.

After finishing with the drawing of the first sheet (except for the side panel) I put the 21 inch piece on the table and got ready to cut out the ‘Top Control Panel’ and one of the ‘Castor Strips’. One of the things I learned was that I had to calculate the thickness of the saw in the measurements.

For the first few pieces it took a lot of time to put the ledge for guiding the saw perfectly right. Later, because of the experience I developed, and because I wrote the default calculations on my prints, it was faster. And, most important: I really enjoyed myself playing carpenter!

I took a couple of pictures of my accomplishment at this point because I'm keeping a kind of diary of my progress for Facebook. If you see the reactions there are lots of people who sympathize with my adventure!

Now it was time to put the big part of the board on the table again. In addition to the 'Side Panel' were the ‘Back Control Panel’ and the ‘Control Panel Base’. With the circulair saw I cut the latter two, still keeping the Side Panel for later when my self-confidence grows a little more.

Meanwhile over on Facebook a lot of people were telling me they were really surprised that I took a (woodworking) challenge like this! They never thought I was able to do this, but they all really liked it and asked if they could come and play on the cabinet when it's finished.

A friend of mine was so inspired by my work that he bought a cabinet on the internet and plays on it at home. I guess I infected him with my enthusiastic talk about the cabinets and the old (retro) games like Pac-Man, Donkey Kong, etc.

Although his cabinet has been made pretty professional I found a few little mistakes and things I would do different. That must be a good sign.

All the reactions from the many people about my progress made me even more enthusiastic, but now another problem arose: the weather. It is in the middle of the summer and although Belgium is not a country with usually bad summers, this one is different. The temperature gets to almost 40° (100F). So the next few weeks I am only able to work until around 11am, after that it is just too hot. Not that it's a bad thing, I really like summer, but for working it's just too much. Good thing I didn't set myself a deadline!

Next time, the horrors of the Side Panels and routing (or how I became an overnight Facebook celebrity)...

Take care and lots of Retro Fun!

The Business Of Gaming

by Jonathan H. Davidson

The Market Crash Worsens

This has been a very challenging article to write. After about the first half of 1984, there was virtually no coverage of the video game industry in the business press. The market was collapsing, and so nobody was interested in reading about it (much less investing in it). More significantly, the focus of the literature changed from highlighting sales figures, market share, and exciting new products to more critical comments about the failures of corporate leadership.

Introduction

While 1983 was a difficult year for video game developers and manufacturers, 1984 was an even worse year. While the total size of the market for video games, home computers, and home entertainment software was estimated at some $7 to $8 billion for the year, it was a much different market from two years before. Game consoles continued to steadily lose ground to home computers, and some software publishers even began to shift their focus away from games.

Consoles

The huge surplus of games that did not sell in the previous year continued to haunt manufacturers and retailers alike: "[Atari Chairman James] Morgan took a big swipe at reducing inventories this year when he dumped some 20 million video game cartridges at about $2 a cartridge, well below the $15 to $19 Atari normally charges at wholesale for new cartridges. […] Other manufacturers, including Activision Inc., dumped products during the first quarter, helping to fill the market with stale, cheap games. The glut is expected to last through year-end".

Despite having sold 2 million Intellivision units in 1983, Mattel was steadily losing money. By the end of October 1983, losses totalled $283,527,000. The Colecovision was very rapidly eroding its market share (and number 2 position behind Atari), and the price of the console fell to as low as $50 in some stores. On February 3, 1984, Mattel formally exited the video game business. It sold its entire video game business unit (including unsold inventory) for $20 million. An industry analyst commented that "Mattel failed to consolidate its position by upgrading its product. […] Without either a strong player or video game position, Mattel ended up as a victim of industry price wars".

After its sudden (and unexpected) departure from the marketplace, Mattel was sued by one of its Pennsylvania-based distributors. The distributor argued that Mattel breached its contract when it claimed that, despite its recent losses, it intended to remain in the home video game market, and that it would continue to support its vendors with new products and advertising. The distributor wanted Mattel to take back the unsold merchandise and refund the purchase price. The court ultimately held that Mattel had done nothing wrong.

By October of 1984, the retail price of the Coleco Vision game console had fallen to only $99, and Coleco was then including a (free) Cabbage Patch Kid with every purchase. This was an odd marketing ploy, especially considering that there was a shortage of the dolls at the time.

Home Computers

Total sales of home computers were expected to grow 30% in 1984, to 6.5 million units. A market research firm predicted that "a computer will be found in nearly one of three American households by the end of 1985, and in eight of them by the end of the century".

While an April 1984 study found that 66% of computers in homes have been used to play games, in June it was reported that “as much as half the software for home computers sold today is either for education or what is called home productivity – software for word processing, doing taxes, or keeping track of the household budget”.

Both Atari and Commodore announced plans in 1984 to enter the increasingly important (and competitive) IBM PC clone market. Details are scarce, but it appears that these clones would not replace their aging 8-bit product lines.

Sales of the Coleco Adam improved over its abysmal performance in the prior year, but the system was still not making a profit. An industry insider commented in April that “There is a vacuum in the home computer market, following the departures of Texas Instruments, Mattel, and Timex. But whether Coleco can win the trust of the software community and the public to take advantage of the shortages is still in doubt”. In June, another analyst commented that “...the software community has little confidence in the models from Atari, Inc. or Coleco Industries, Inc., neither of which has made much of a showing in the market”.

In 1984, Coleco was sued by many of its shareholders who claimed that the corporate executives intentionally made false claims about the potential of the Adam computer; that they “knew that Coleco had not yet solved serious engineering problems which remained before [the] Adam could be sold as represented. Despite these difficulties, Coleco continued to deny or minimize these troubles publicly, and to reaffirm the delivery deadlines”. The shareholders were successful on a preliminary motion, but the ultimate outcome of this case is not known.

Rumors and Trivia

As of April 1984, at Atari, video games sales were down to about 3 million units annually, from a high of 7 million units in 1982.

In July 1984, Atari announced the $79 MindLink controller, described as “sort of a joystick-in-a-headband” that used biofeedback to control games. “The initiated player, say Atari enthusiasts, can whisk the object across the screen simply by willing it.” Perhaps not surprisingly, this device never made it to market.

Also in July 1984, it was reported that Atari had been in negotiations with N. V. Philips for more than a year to purchase 50% of Atari. Philips was the manufacturer of the Odyssey 2 console (and also the subject of a successful copyright lawsuit by Atari in 1982).

Sources

I have reviewed all of the issues of the American magazines *Business Week* and *Fortune* for 1984. Neither of these titles are available online – they can, however, be found at most major academic and public libraries on microfiche. If someone needs a citation or a specific reference, please contact me for the details.

Gaming Tetralogies

by Jeff Wittenhagen

Top Genesis Games To Play On The Everdrive MD

This month is going to be an evolving list of the best games to play on the Everdrive MD. This list will primarily focus on the best custom hacks, prototypes, English translations and bootleg games that you can play on your console with this device. I'm not going to cover games that are commercially available unless they are ultra rare or unreasonably expensive. As the Everdrive MD has the capabilities to play 32X directly on the cart albeit with the 32X device, I will also include applicable games from that system as well. I'm going to keep the list in alphabetical order and note any updates with the date to make searching easier.

About the Everdrive MD

The Everdrive MD is a single Sega Genesis/Mega Drive multi-cart that has the ability to play ROMs and store game save data to a SD card and restore it up reloading the game automatically. You can spend hours playing any game such as a role-playing game, then save the game in the normal manner. Even after you flash other games to play, your save game is still available and intact. The Everdrive MD is the first Genesis multi-cart to allow for Master System games to be played directly on the system. It also has the ability to play 32X games with the use of the 32X add-on. To put icing on the cake you can also add in Game Genie codes either manually or with a text file.

Bare Knuckle III
The ultimate version of Street of Rage 3. This is a must play as the difficulty is actually playable as well as having no censoring.

Knuckles the Echinda
A ROM hack of Sonic the Hedgehog that essentially allows you to play as Knuckles in the original game which is something that the Sonic & Knuckles add on should have allowed.

Mega Man X3
X3 is an unofficial conversion of the SNES game on the Genesis. A few of the levels are missing however it is decently faithful and worth checking out.

Pier Solar (Demo)
Official demo of the 2011 released Genesis/Mega Drive RPG Pier Solar. Amazing game and this demo will give you a taste of what you will get when you purchase it.

Prince of Persia 2
Unreleased sequel to Prince of Persia on the Genesis. It plays almost the same as the original and brings more stressful time constraining fun.

Pulseman
Basically a Mega Man clone that is a pretty fun game, although not too original.

Rockman Mega World
Japanese version of Mega Man: The Wily Wars which is an updated version of the first 3 NES Mega Man games. The original Japan version works on the Everdrive so that's why I have it on the list.

Squirrel King
This is basically Chip 'n Dale: Rescue Rangers 3 without the Disney license. Plays just like the classic and should not be missed.

MAME Reviews

by Mark Sabbatini

Quantum

Ever "discover" a great and original game that's totally obscure? Like an unknown hole-in-the-wall restaurant that's a thrill you and a few others share?

Ever know the letdown of discovering your "find" isn't so original? Like discovering your favorite musician's songs are covers of stuff written and made popular by someone else decades earlier?

I've gone through the cycle a few times due to my warped affection for computers that were laughingstocks in the marketplace, although at least I never mistook ports of Robotron, Q*bert and Araknoid as originals (a sin reviewers for "esteemed" publications were guilty of with dismaying frequency back then).

The newest revelation undid about 30 years of childhood smugness although, upon further review, maybe I can continue stoking my ego in peace.

My "secret" gem is Doubleback, a 1982 cartridge for the humblest of Radio Shack Color Computers (a meek machine in any configuration), requiring a mere 4K of memory. Basically, it involves drawing lines around pixelated kiddie-toy objects. But, as with the best of those simplistic classic relics, proficiency requires skills that will tax the most hardcore of teenage gamers.

The, cough, "other" game is Quantum, an Atari color vector coin-op that debuted months earlier. The concept of drawing lines around objects is similar, but the objects are atomic particles. Befittingly for a game invoking quantum physics, the rules and objects' behavior are far more complex.

Hard to believe such a nuclear-charged concept bombed at the arcades (although I can see a former flame with a 170 IQ and e-mail handle of "a3strangequarks" getting charged up by it). But these days it's one of the most in-demand games among collectors seeking out the fewer than 500 made. Rotheblog lists it among the 15 most valuable classic arcade games of all time, and the price guide at Arcade Classics notes a quality unit sold recently for $6,800.

Those of us not in the "one percent" (or perhaps just among the 47 percent who are leeches) can, of course, download and play the ROM in MAME to our criminal hearts' desire. Unfortunately, unless you're part of another small minority group – those owning a trackball – the experience may be less than energizing as I haven't found any alternative that effectively replicates that controller used by the arcade console.

Two things detailed below make Quantum at least worthy of igniting: The coolest attract-mode feature ever and the coolest high-score board feature ever. Two other things that might put quick meltdown on your enthusiasm: Learning the game is tough and – getting back to the leeching thing – a strategy by that name allows essentially unlimited (and mind-numbing) play by circling everything immediately when they appear at a

fixed spot at the beginning of every wave.

That said, time to seek illumination on two points: 1) does Quantum short-circuit my childhood favorite and 2) Is it worth an extended power trip if you're stuck with a mouse, trackpad or joystick?

I'm pontificating on Doubleback since it's an easier way to grasp the essentials and probably a good training tool for Quantum's more advanced challenge. Radio Shack's cart, playable in any CoCo emulator including a browser-based machine at www.haplessgenius.com/mocha, is something a tot can succeed at immediately with no danger of encountering mean and scary things that pop up unexpectedly on advanced players.

In Doubleback the player controls a line that can move in any direction. Objects, all moving themselves according to various behaviors with a few inanimate exceptions, appear on the screen one at a time and contacting them with the guiding tip of your line is fatal. While your line's maximum length is fixed, it can also move along at anything from a standstill to a sprint depending on the aggressiveness of the player's "drawing" gestures. Remaining motionless gives enemies only a single pixel to target (which they'll usually do quickly since you're a sitting duck), while ultra-slow speeds can be essential for maneuvering between two close objects.

Circling objects causes them to disappear, with points awarded based on the complexity of their behavior. The key to the game is circling more than object at once multiplies their cumulative point value by the number of objects circled, and reaching higher levels with more bountiful items is based on your total score. So a skilled player waiting until the on-screen maximum of 19 objects appears at the beginning of the game with, say, a cumulative value of 2,000 points will immediately be escalated to a level of challenge that would take an eternity with the one-at-a-time approach used by the kiddies.

There are a few other elements, but that covers most of what you need to know.

Now, as for Quantum: The same principle of circling stuff, the more at once the better, still applies. Unlike Doubleback's pastel-hued cuteness, however, the setting is a somber black backdrop with objects that literally radiate danger. There's actually fewer types of objects than Doubleback, but they can mutate and later bond to form drastically more intense perils. The overall pace of gameplay is much quicker. Furthermore, Quantum's foes increase in speed and number as waves progress, whereas in Doubleback each item's behavior is consistent (speedier and more cunning foes appear upon reaching certain point totals). Finally, whereas in Doubleback the maximum length of your line remains the same, the length of your trail in Quantum continuously decreases as you reach later waves.

Memorizing the names of Quantum's baddies (Electrons, Nuclei, Photons, Positrons, Pulsars, Splitters and Triphons) is draining enough before you try to do the same with their behaviors. But intrepid novices can take their first proverbial step without investing a single quarter thanks to the awesome attract mode, which allows prospective players to use the trackball to circle sample objects.

The other super-cool featured mentioned earlier is the high score board, where the all-time champ is allowed to "scribble" his/her name using the trackball. Frankly, I'm amazed this got by the suits at Atari, considering the obscene potential of such a method. On the other hand, The Killer List of Video Games notes "to achieve visually pleasing results requires considerable practice," which probably wasn't likely for anyone who didn't own the machine.

Adjusting Quantum's difficulty and other settings is a little more involved than the usual tweaking of DIP switches. Instead, there's a DIP switch that puts the game into operator mode, where settings and controlled with the trackball and two start buttons. Choosing "operator settings" in the main menu allows the setting of difficulty, starting lives and how many points are required for extra lives. As a bit of useless trivia, there's also a cocktail mode setting although Atari reportedly never made any sit-down machines (rumors of a prototype persist).

Starting an actual game brings up the level-select screen Atari featured in a number of games beginning with Tempest,

with higher levels available based on a just-completed game. Waves progress quickly and, for about the first ten, there's no immense challenge as singular particles move about at increasing rates of speed. The initial foes consist of particles such as nuclei (slow moving, but cut off the player's tail if they cross), triphons (four small diamonds in a larger diamond-shaped cluster that are also slow, but leave deadly tryds in their wave), and triangular photons that spin across the screen from the edges.

But eventually particles start bonding via a non-destructible (but ever-resizing) line between them. The player can pass through bonds without harm unless they're pulsating red, in which case they're fatal. The bonds initially form between two particles at a time, but eventually linkups between multiple particles in increasingly geometric patterns appear. As you might guess, they also pulsate red with far greater frequency. Those latter waves are very dazzling to watch, and very, very dangerous. In a way bonding invokes a strategic element similar to the pulsars in Tempest, and being able to survive them is the dividing line between a skilled player and a somewhat talented amateur.

By the way, Quantum does have its own type of pulsars in latter waves, which expand and contact as they hunt down the player. Another latter foe is the splitter, which multiplies if not destroyed.

That's the theoretical. The reality for MAME players is I couldn't find a mouse, trackpad or eight-direction joystick setting that achieved playable results no matter how much I tweaked the settings. Mostly my line would move in unpredictable directions, either in very tiny or very large spurts. I don't have a 360-degree, non-centering analogue joystick, but since that's the default controller for Radio Shack's CoCo (and therefore Doubleback) I'm guessing it'd be a useable second-best option.

The other killer feature (in the bad sense) is that leeching technique, which will surely extinguish the hopes of point warriors hoping to compete with all-time best via legitimate means. Essentially, beginning on wave nine the player can draw a tiny circle around a precise spot exactly at the exact moment a wave begins, capturing a mini "big bang" from which all the particles explode into position a moment later. If the player is successful, the next "bang" occurs at the same spot almost immediately afterward. While the timing must be exact, the tactic is more about developing and maintaining a reflexive motion with the trackball for an extended period of time.

The screenshot showing this tactic isn't much use since the player is drawing such a tiny loop (toward the upper right of the playfield, in this instance). There's multiple YouTube videos of the technique, which invoke memories of the time I spent six hours killing an endless procession of pterodactyls on Joust. I haven't played that game since.

Is Quantum a better game than Doubleback? Probably, since it's more intricate, has more advanced graphics and sound, and will almost certainly appeal to a higher percentage of modern-day players. But is it more fun? Not in my opinion, since I find Quantum has less personality and more frustration than its CoCo counterpart. But youthful biases can be stubborn, so that's hardly the final word.

Instead, the closing word (quite a few of them, actually) is a bit of trivia: Quantum actually wasn't programmed by Atari. It was designed by General Computing Corporation as part of a settlement in a copyright infringement lawsuit stemming from an unauthorized speed-up chip for Missile Commands called Super Missile Attack. GCC was also required to program two other games, resulting in the minor classic Food Fight and never-released Nightmare. While Quantum did reach arcades in limited numbers, many disgruntled operators ended up returning the machines to Atari, who sold those and unsold units largely to its employees, according to The Killer List of Video Games.

Apple II Incider

by Donald Lee

Fore!

Today is September 25th and it's hard to believe that the 100th issue of Retrogaming TImes Monthly came and went so quickly. Additionally, it's hard to believe that the summer has also come and gone as well. I spent most of my summer playing basketball for two teams. Unfortunately, my teams finished with a combined 4 wins and 11 losses. This past weekend, with the summer officially gone, I participated in my first ever softball tournament. I've played recreational softball but never in live competition. Overall, my team didn't do too well (2 losses / 1 tie). I did well offensively but defensively was a little shaky. I'm just not used to playing the field in softball.

All in all you may be wondering why I am talking about all my sporting activities. As I thought about what to write today, my mind was drawing a blank. I was a little sick this past week and with the softball tournament, I was a little tired as well.

I sifted through a list of games and played through a few, but none caught my attention. It wasn't until I came across this game that I PERKED up a bit. The game was called Fore! and published by Green Valley Publishing. Sadly, there was no mention as to what year it was published.

Why did I perk up to look at this game? The first reason was that I knew the game was a golf simulation. I personally play golf though I am not particularly good. The second reason was that I had played a golf game back in the 1980's. I seem to recall it was part of the Softdisk (or something similar) collection that I had from the old days.

After playing Fore! for a little bit, I did not know for sure if this was the same game. However, for a mid 80's game, it played fairly well. You could have multiple players competing (up to 7). Additionally, you could select the wood or iron depending on how far you were away from the hole and determine how hard you wanted your swing to be. You could also select your handicap along with four courses to play, though some of them seemed to be mainly for practice.

While the game played well, don't expect too much in terms of graphics and sound. The graphics seem to utilize the Apple II's low resolution graphics mode. While colorful, the ball, hole and obstacles are all blocky in appearance. Don't expect to see any fancy graphics of the golfer swinging or landing in the course as you might see with Tiger Woods golf on your current generation systems. Sound is not really present in the game either.

While game play is decent, you do have to get used to the system of hitting the ball by entering the angle (0 to 359) degrees. It took me a few tries to get the system down.

Beyond some of the downsides, this game is interesting and definitely fun for a multi-player environment. Definitely worth a look for those who like golf and also want to get some friends involved in an indoor golf game!

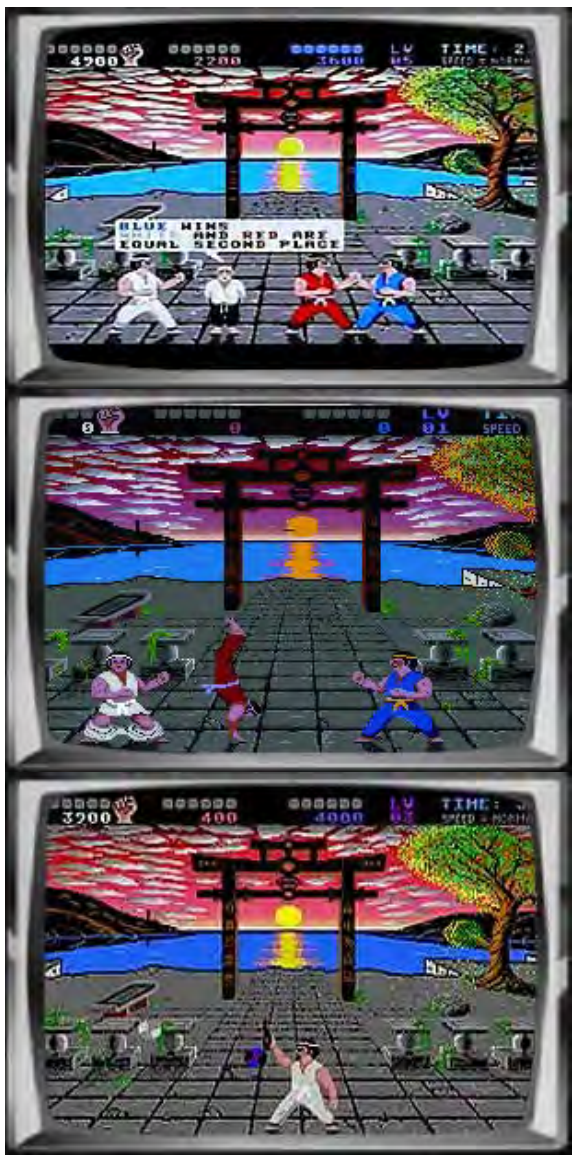
Electric Reviews

by Tony van de Graaf

International Karate +

Release date: 1987
Developer: System 3
Designer: Archer MacLean
Platforms:
Original: Commodore 64, Amstrad CPC, ZX Spectrum
Ported later to: Atari ST, Amiga, Amiga CD32, Game Boy Advance, PlayStation, Virtual Console

There won't be many people that know this great game, even though its successors are the world famous Street Fighter, Mortal Kombat, and Tekken. This is actually one of the pioneers of the "fighting" games.



This game was created by the legendary programmer Archer MacLean, who is known for his pioneering efforts in the early period of (home) computers. To name a few: Dropzone, Jimmy White's Whirlwind Snooker, and World Karate Championship. His last known game is Wheelspin, a futuristic racer for the Wii. As a side note, he also writes a monthly column for Retro Gamer Magazine.

IK + is a typical game that is still fun to play. It's 25 years old now, but in terms of playability, it’s timeless! I especially like the Amiga version but before I had an Amiga, I played it on the Commodore 64.

The game takes place on a beach somewhere in the far east, three karatekas are fighting each other, two of which can be player controlled. The third guy is always a computer opponent. The idea is that you win by being the first to get 6 points from either kicking or hitting as many opponents as possible within the time range.

If you are in first or second place you will go through to the next round. After a few rounds you will get a bonus level where you have to bounce back balls with a shield or kick bombs away. The latter is especially difficult, as the bombs explode when they are not kicked away on time.

The goal of the game seems simple, but it keeps you coming back for more. This is because it’s so beautifully crafted. The environment is awesome, with the setting (or rising) sun, along with lots of fun extras, such a Pac-Man appearing over the background. The graphics are obviously not comparable to those of the modern fighting games but the overall atmosphere is so good for its time. Even in 2012 this is a very fun game to play.

Archer, the programmer of the game, had a good sense of humor and it is evident from the fact that he has put all sorts of fun "secret" extras throughout. For instance, if you type the letter 'T', the trousers of the fighters fall down with surprised response!

Today's fighting games use the concept of IK+ 1-on-1 pretty much. This shows that a game stands or falls with

playability. If the game idea is good enough you can have just a simple colored square on the screen and still provide hours of entertainment. It’s not the graphics that matter, but the heart and soul of a game, and this one has plenty of it!

Lots of retro-gaming fun!

Encounter Rate

by Nathan White

Chrono Trigger

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.

Chrono Trigger is a video game that requires no introduction. Universally acclaimed for its visual beauty, strong narrative, and revolutionary design, Chrono Trigger still sits high on the list of the most revered and respected Japanese role playing games ever created.

While it did not cause quite the same cultural watershed as Final Fantasy when VII erupted onto the PlayStation a few years later, Chrono Trigger none-the-less represents a definite high point in video game design. The scope of Chrono Trigger and the presence of the mature themes within the narrative most certainly had a hand in shaping the development of the Final Fantasy VII juggernaut.

A key difference between Chrono Trigger and many of Square's own games that followed it is most apparent in the tone of the game. Chrono Trigger comes across as light hearted and bubbly on the surface, thanks in part to Akira Toriyama's colourful character designs. Punctuated throughout, however, are moments of true heart-wrenching drama; a mother mentally scarred and left crippled by a terrible accident, a friend both shamed and cursed with a failed dense of duty, the death and (totally optional) revival of a main character.

Why exactly does Chrono Trigger frequently appear on lists among the greatest video games ever made, even 17 years after its initial release? What has a franchise been built on the strength of a angle game and its one non-continuous sequel? Why is Chrono Trigger so beloved? The answer to that question is difficult to pin-point. The development of Chrono Trigger began in 1992, three years before its eventual Japanese release. Hironobu Sakaguchi, visionary creator of the Final Fantasy series, Yuji Hori, mastermind behind the Dragon Quest games and Akira Toriyama, creator and illustrator of the Dragon Ball manga joined forces for the precise purpose of creating a game unlike anything else released.

As you can see above, there are different endings to be had!

Unlike so many other games that are retroactively considered masterpieces, Chrono Trigger initially received critical acclaim and achieved high sales, thereby all but insuring it would be remembered as a legendary and landmark achievement.

Chrono Trigger is best described as a masterpiece of cohesion; a myriad of elements that work so well together that it elevates the experience beyond expectations. The sprite work, some of the finest in console gaming, brings depth and beauty to the highly refined combat mechanics. The unbelievably atmospheric and rousing score compliments the volatile, emotional and decidedly non-melodramatic story.

All the individual parts of the game are so refined and polished, and there relationship to each other so meticulously crafted that the sum of parts truly becomes greater the whole.

In contracting Chrono Trigger, the creators were able to cast off the same-old, same-old of the console RPG and transcend the medium, placing it far above and beyond its contemporaries.

Multiple endings, worthwhile side quests with emotional and thematic consequences, unrivalled character development, and endless satisfying combo battle mechanic; so much of Chrono Trigger is perfectly executed that perhaps the more constructive exercise is not to examine why Chrono Trigger is so perfect, but instead why other video games don't consistently strive for the same greatness.

The Thrill Of Defeat

by Mark Sabbatini

Awe Inspiring ZX81 Games - Part 2

Let's pick up from where we left off last month, in looking at some recent ZX81 games that are really showcasing what this little computer could do in the right hands.

Two coin-op classics by Paul Farrow

There are 1.32 million versions of Pac-Man and Donkey Kong for the ZX81 (that's an estimate, based on personal playtesting), the best of which are merely "OK, given the machine's limits." The thought of loading another of each induces the sort of dread that sends one scurrying to the internet browser to surf for illegal MP3s, baby-trapped-in-washing-machine videos, fetish porn or anything more socially redeeming.

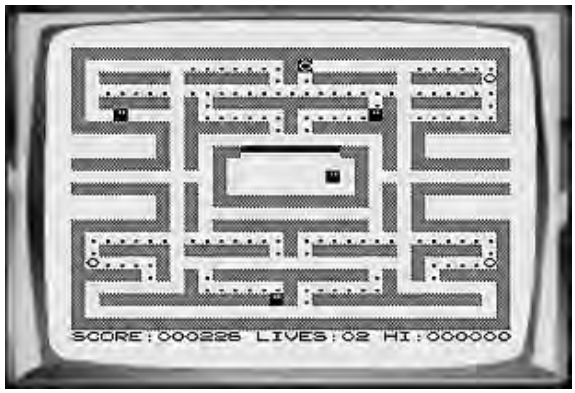
But look at the promotional animations of Paul Farrow's port of Donkey Kong and you'll rediscover your video game morality in a hurry. It is unquestionably the finest conversion of a coin-op game on the ZX81. His version of Pac-Man is a step down in quality, but still better than any other effort I'm familiar with.

Just seeing – literally – either game is a programming miracle since they were originally released for Sinclair's ZX80, a computer without a fixed video display. Feeble as the ZX81 is, it's a powerhouse compared to the ZX80 which, among many other things, blanks the screen when the computer is processing anything. So while a text adventure or chess game is possible, if you don't mind the seizure-inducing flashing on the screen, any kind of action game is theoretically impossible since the computer is processing data continuously. Which isn't to say some laughably bad attempts did reach the market.

But, as with the ZX81, somebody figured out how to make the ZX80 do the "impossible" and a few decent, if simple, action games graced the computer during those teething days of the early 80s. But by then the ZX81 had taken the Brits and other strange lands by storm, so the ZX80 was shoved into closets (and if they're still there, they'll get a far higher price on eBay today than their successor). Had Farrow's games hit the market back then instead of 2010 (updated versions were released in 2011), they'd almost certainly be a universal choice for the best ZX80 titles on the market.

It's a bit of a shame to start with Pac-Man, lest it dampen your enthusiasm to try Donkey Kong, but just to make sure the former isn't overlooked…

ZX81 Pac-Man (C+)



The grade should tell you a lot about the general awfulness of ZX81 Pac games. The reason Farrow's version ranks as the best is because all the others have at least one wince-inducing handicap, whether it be bugs, poor gameplay and/or "creative" changes with almost always negative results.

Farrow's version does what I figured I'd see someone do back then, but proved maddeningly elusive: keeps the same maze layout, puts the dots and energizers where they ought to be, has four ghosts patrolling with something more intelligent than random movement, and displays bonus items under the ghost pens occasionally. It's absurd there wasn't a single programmer back then able to include all of these simple fundamentals.

There's also a lot of nice touches giving the program a polished and professional feel lacking in far too many commercial games from those early days. There's some familiar animation on the well-done title screen, although the intermissions during the game are absent. You can choose from three pre-configured control options. Defining your own keys is always preferable, but anything not requiring you to use the diabolical 5-6-7-8 row that's the default for so many games is a huge plus.

The ghosts, while not exhibiting anything close to their arcade behavior, chase you aggressively without honing in with computer-perfect precision. They also have a scatter mode when vulnerable and the animation of their eyes returning to their pen when consumed is preserved (although the game comes to a halt while it's happening).

Unfortunately, Farrow's Pac-Man suffers from numerous problems, most notably excessive speed. This makes smooth control of your Pac-Man all-but-literally impossible on a real ZX81 keyboard and only slightly less so on an emulated machine. You'll frequently miss turns into passages and you can forget getting through them quickly when trying to elude ghosts. (I dealt with this by slowing down the virtual CPU in my emulator – by a whopping 50 percent – and it made the game vastly more enjoyable, but sadly I can't issue grades on that basis).

Even if you can navigate perfectly it won't help you ditch a ghost right on your tail as both you and the ghosts move at the same speed, including through the tunnels. The only escape is eating an energizer, which speeds you up while making you the hunter. By the way, a key point about energizers: the ghosts are cleverly depicted with inverse quotation marks and their "eyes" blink when they're vulnerable. But the only way to tell they're about to revert to their normal state is by watching your Pac-Man (depicted by an inverse "O"), who flashes briefly a few times when he's about to become vulnerable again.

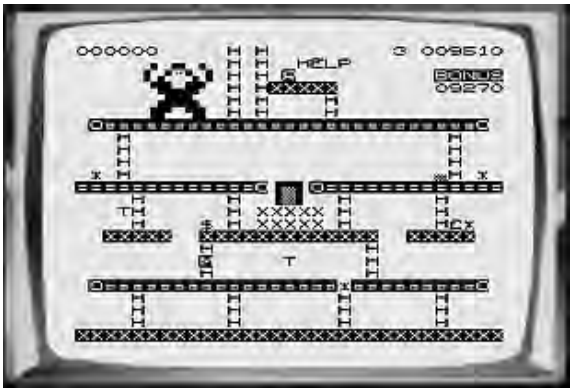
The other major problem with this game is the various gameplay elements such as ghost/Pac speeds, energizer times, etc. remain the same throughout the game. This isn't a problem if you can't get past the first or second screen due to the speed issue (which is why that's the biggest flaw), but is a massive issue when progressing beyond that by means artificial or not.

Other hitches are minor, but irritate me because they seem easily avoidable. The lack of a pause key is annoying. There are only three types of bonus items and they all appear at random from the beginning of the game, awarding either 30, 50 or a random number of points. Having seven items appearing in a progression with arcade-true point values doesn't seem like a huge programming feat.

Speaking of arcade-true point values, pretty much everything in Farrow's Pac-Man strays from them. Dots are worth a point, energizers are worth ten, and consumed ghosts are worth 100, 200, 400 and 800 points. The only accurate number is the 10,000 points required for an extra Pac-Man, which obviously is a lot harder to obtain, especially given the speed/control issues. I had about 3,000 points after clearing the fifth maze, for instance, although I was being somewhat conservative chasing ghosts in order to ensure my survival.

Despite the hitches, the key thing to remember is this is a straight conversion of a game for the ZX80, where it would probably score a full grade higher. I'm guessing Farrow could avoid a lot of the flaws I've mentioned if he wrote this as a ZX81 title from scratch, but having this limited version is definitely preferably to not having one at all.

ZX81 Kong (B+)



Almost everyone who programmed a version of Donkey Kong during the 1980s, especially the official releases, should be required to play Paul Farrow's version for a few hours and feel the deep pains of inadequacy. It has all four levels from the coin-op, all the introductory and intermission animations, and plays more closely to the arcade version than most of the console and computer ports from the eight-bit era.

The might seem hard to believe looking at the screenshot with its block graphics and ASCII characters ("'M' depicting Mario?!" you're thinking), but plenty of retrogaming blogs and publications besides this one have

given it rave reviews. There are definitely some flaws, hence the less-than-perfect grade, but it's a near-perfect example of what arcade titles should have been like when the ZX81 was on the market.

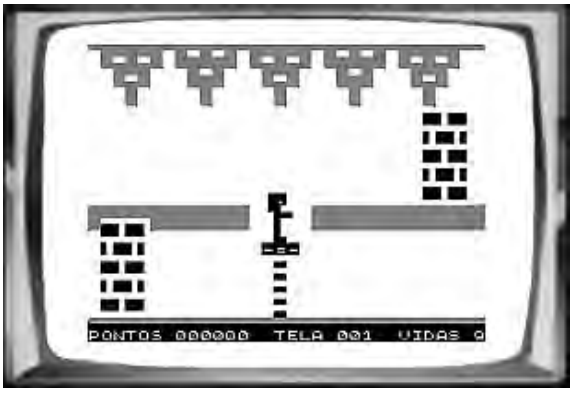
Watching Kong do his opening ladder climb and stomp, followed by the familiar "How High Can You Get" screen, sets expectations pretty high. Seeing Kong reach for that first barrel that drops straight into the oil can (omitted from most home versions) keeps them there. Purists will note slight deviations. The first hammer is on the third girder rather than the second. The bonus timer starts higher and decreases quicker. Fireballs don't behave quite like they do at the arcade, moving faster and less erratically. But otherwise everything you do when paying quarters applies here (and for some reason I found it amusing to watch Mario whack away with the capital "T" that represents his hammer).

Progression is in the Japanese version's order (barrels, conveyors, elevators, rivets) which, while not my personal preference (reaching the conveyors for the first time on the U.S. version feels like a reward), seems like the best option here since it allows players to see all the screens quickly. There are no significant differences between ZX81 Kong and the real thing in the conveyors and elevators screens, but the behavior of the fireballs behavior does affect the authenticity of the rivets screen. Watching Kong pound his chest before falling and Mario's reunion with Pauline helps make up for that somewhat.

It's almost scandalous the only eight-bit versions that feel truly authentic are for the obscure Amstrad CPC and Color Computer 3 (and the latter is a homebrew title released in 2007). Playing Farrow's version tempts me to remove the "almost" from the equation.

Treasure Hunter by Tadeu Curinga da Silva

Treasure Hunter (B+)



"Suicide Pitfall" might be a better name for this platformer that, while initially resembling a simplified version of Activision's megahit, is larger, has a broader range of challenges and is hard as balls.

There's 313 screens to conquer, for which you're bestowed a seemingly generous nine lives. But that proved insufficient for frustrated players who flocked to a hacked version with infinite lives. I heartily recommend the latter since this is a great game to play for short stints, save your progress and come back when your frustration ebbs enough to tackle a few more screens with a clear head.

There's also some great info about this game on the Web, which I'll get to shortly.

The player controls Kid K. Sador who, while probably not a blood relative of Pitfall Harry, shares his affinity for clutching vines, leaping holes and running like he got branch lodged in his backside. Kid, however, is more fragile and somewhat dumber since he can't survive falls into underground tunnels and doesn't know how to climb up (thankfully, the wildlife or native savages have learned how to make hydraulic lifts). Also, he doesn't get to choose his path in life (and frequent death), as winning requires staying on a rightward course to reach an actual destination (along with collecting all the treasures, of course).

Some hazards like crocodiles, scorpions and rolling logs (boulders, officially) are familiar in appearance and behavior. Many, such as spiders, crushing walls and creatures that are a dead ringer for the sneakers in the Atari 2600's Fast Eddie, are not.

Successfully completing the last screen, a cave that's apparently a giant skull (not being a spoiler – it's in the instructions), and the player gets "a nice surprise." The instructions also mention if you wait 20 seconds after losing all your lives the game enters a demonstration mode that is "very useful to catch cheats."

I've despised nearly every sequel and ripoff of the original Pitfall, thus I dragged my heals before trying Treasure

Hunter, but it does a nice job of preserving Pitfall's general feel while adding worthwhile new elements. The ZX81's inferior graphics are more than just a visual impairment, since there are usually fewer elements on each screen (two crocodiles instead of three, etc.). But after a few initial easy screens Treasure Hunter's challenge gets steadily tougher than Pitfall – not to mention there's constantly new variations unlike Activision's monotonous quest.

Treasure Hunter would easily merit some sort of "A" grade if not for a couple of big problems. The first is sometimes imprecise and unresponsive controls. Handling two keypresses at once (i.e. for running and jumping over pits) isn't something the ZX81 handles flawlessly, so expect a lot of undeserved deaths. The unlimited lives hack offsets this enough to make me willing to keep plodding on, but unfortunately every time you die the game goes through an unnecessarily time-consuming screen-filling animation. Similar delays are a nuisance throughout the game, including the long and non-skippable introductory screens. I got in the habit of loading the game and then making a cup of coffee or something while waiting for the opening ego show to finish.

But calling those animations the sign of a bumbling amateur is comical considering the rest of the package from Tadeu Curinga da Silva, who wrote Treasure Hunter at the age of 15. As noted at the beginning of this article, he talks about programming in magical terms (comparing it to Mickey's dreams in The Sorcerer's Apprentice at one point), but his techniques are similar to some of technical feats of the best programmers of the era. Each of the 313 screens, for example, is compressed into 10 bytes. That's not quite as compact as the four bytes David Crane uses for Pitfall screens, but there's also more objects and behaviors in Silva's game.

Silva originally released the Treasure Hunter in 1986, but apparently it disappeared from the ZX81 scene until a tape with the game was recovered by a collector. That led to Silva being contacted in 2006, when he agreed to let the game be distributed free on the internet.

He's written a lengthy explanation of the development process which, along with providing his original notebook containing his hand-written code and sketches of his designs, is available at http://muriloq.com/ebdt/ebdt-en.html. The site also features a nice overview of the game and links to numerous reviews and similar articles. Silva's narrative is in his native language of Portuguese, but Google Translate does a good enough job that anyone not needing every last technical detail will find it sufficiently comprehensible.

Two Free Platform Games by The Mojon Twins

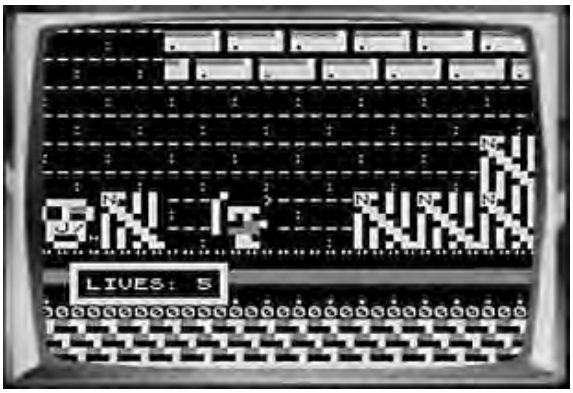
It takes a lot to go from one of the most-hated gaming developers to one of the more respected. That's what this pair of games achieves, turning my opinion about this company completely upside down to the point I changed my opinion about the large collection of games they've written for other computers.

That first impression came from a colossal tragedy of an iPhone app featuring an emulated collection of their arcade and adventure games for the ZX Spectrum. Note I'm not saying the games are necessarily abysmal. There's no way to tell with this app by Zenobi because the touch-screen interface is nearly impossible to use (some of the games are, in fact, impossible to play because not all of the controls for them are implemented). Serious shame on The Mojon Twins if they approved the app. Luckily, I didn't immediate associate the company with the two recently released ZX81 platformers reviewed here, because they may be the best low-res games in that category.

The Speccy games, which I'm finally playing on a real emulator after trying the ZX81 titles, are middling to decent efforts I imagine would be lost in a very large crowd outside of their homeland of Spain (their review scores tend to average around 80 percent at sites doing modern-day write-ups). A number of their games, including the two reviewed here, were also released for the Commodore 64, Amstrad CPC and others (the UWOL game, in particular, has been ported to a bunch of platforms). Reviewers for those versions generally offer steady, if not rapturous, praise.

But good Speccy/C64 games become outstanding ZX81 titles when the gameplay not only remains fully intact, but is improved in some ways (plus all the levels are different than the originals, giving fans of those new worlds to explore). Sure they look a lot more primitive, but I found them every bit as charming – sometimes more so. The authors make good use of block graphics and text characters to create objects much larger than on other machines, and enhance the sense of exploration by using scrolling windows to offset the zoomed-in environment.

Nanako in Classic Japanese Monster Castle 81 (A-)



If I were picking the one title likely to be played longest by most gamers it'd be this strategy/arcade platformer. Not because it's the most fun, although it's a definite top-five contender, but because it's engaging despite being hard as a bastard.

It resembles one of the countless mobile games where you manipulate your environment by moving stuff around to get through levels, although its roots far predate such diversions. Released in May of 2011, it's a remake of a 1991 ZX Spectrum game that itself was remade a few years ago for the Speccy, Amstrad CPC and Commodore 64. As mentioned above, the ZX81 version has different – and more – levels, so those familiar with old versions still get a new challenge.

The goal is to navigate Nanako through the scrolling 30-level Monster Castle by moving and stacking boxes in ways allowing you to get past obstacles and monsters. Your maneuvering and box-placing skills are impressive, such as the often-essential ability to jump and drop a box in midair (as Bugs Bunny famously said, "I know this defies the laws of gravity, but I never studied law").

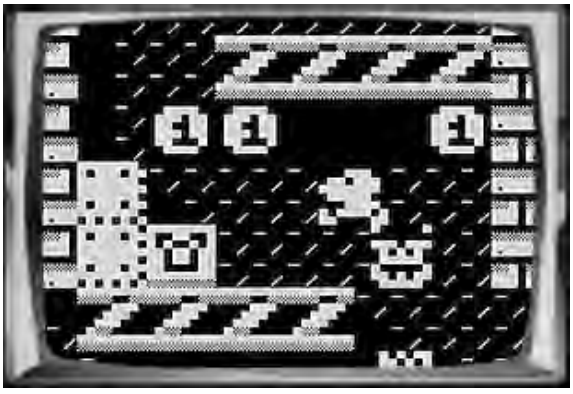
The monsters (Karakasas) patrol haphazardly back and forth on platforms when there's room to do so, and touching them is nearly always fatal. The "nearly always" bit refers to the fact you can stand on top of them, using them to reach higher or otherwise inaccessible locations. But their movement is random and staying on one is akin to the ancient rolling log challenge. Frequent deaths from falling off the creatures was one of the few criticisms by reviewers of other computers' versions. Instead you'll need to drop boxes one at a time to narrow their path until they're wedged between two obstacles and then walk over them

The block graphics aren't as charming and/or effective as some games, including The Mojon Twins' other title below, but are clear enough to play without confusion. There's no time limit to complete levels, but it is possible to get trapped in impossible situations were the only solution to to commit suicide and restart the level. To add even more complexity, the monsters can appear in different locations each time you attempt a level, with some configurations bordering on nearly impossible.

You start with five lives and they vanish very, very fast at first. Once you figure out box placements and proper timing for dealing with monsters on a level it's far easier, but fortunately the program also provides passwords each time you complete one so you can start new games where you left off. Keyboard controls aren't customizable, but the defaults are logically configured and easy to use even on a real ZX81 (not a given even these days).

Tackle this unassisted if you like, but I strongly recommend watching a one-minute YouTube video showing the solution to the first level (assuming the monster is in the position it most frequently appears), which is at www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-ZohQNbxsQ. It'll give you a sense of the kind of actions and strategies you'll need to cope throughout the game.

Uwol, Quest For Money '81 (B+)



This is a simpler, cuter and more immediately enjoyable quest, even if it involves the far-too-familiar goal of jumping around platforms collecting coins (which gamers still apparently love, since I haven't yet seen a negative review of Uwol on heftier platforms ranging from the C64 to Sega Genesis) . This is not at all a familiar activity on the ZX81, however, so seeing how The Mojon Twins presents it in this March 2012 release qualifies as a novel and entertaining diversion.

The player controls Uwol, a stumpy guy apparently wearing only a t-shirt, whose simple goal is collecting at least 150 coins from rooms in a 28-level pyramid. You start in the room at the top of the pyramid and

choose a descending path by selecting one of two arrows to exit through when you gather all the coins on a level. If you reach the bottom without enough coins you'll need to return to the top and choose a different path, since the rooms already visited will be empty. Some rooms have more coins and/or are more difficult than others, so success depends heavily on plotting the right path.

There are three types of patrolling enemies that, as the instructions put it, "follow pretty simple linear paths" horizontally and vertically. They're not too tough to avoid except when two or more are close, making precise timing a must. But by far the biggest threat is a fourth enemy known as Fanty, which looks exactly like a giant Pac-Man ghost, which apparently the other creatures "occasionally summon." Practically speaking, it happens when a timer at the top left of the screen reaches zero (stay alert and move fast, because it counts down very quickly). Fanty is bad news because he's huge, fast and hones pretty much directly on where you are. If you're familiar with the rapid end that typically happens when the hall monsters in Venture enter a room you'll at least be prepared for the near-certain funeral awaiting your beloved Uwol.

A nice touch is the game is somewhat forgiving when you collide with a foe. Uwol loses his shirt, which appears somewhere random on the level (don't get too excited/distressed about the full nudity, as his pixelated being makes the women in Custer's Revenge look like Playboy centerfolds). If he can touch the shirt before a foe all is well again, if he touches an enemy naked he loses one of his five starting lives.

There are all kinds of touches that make this game a pleasure, beginning with the simple requirement of pressing the jump button to begin a new level or restart the current one after you've been killed (no pause, but things are zippy enough it's hard to imagine needing it often). Control of Uwol is exceptional for a ZX81 game, essentially replicating the Marioesque ability to control the height of jumps, change direction in mid-air and such. Screens scroll vertically, while moving off the left or right of the screen causes you to appear on the other side (a useful strategic tool, as well as your only chance to survive any length of time if Fanty appears). Mostly, though, it's just how this game somehow exudes personality that makes it so charming.

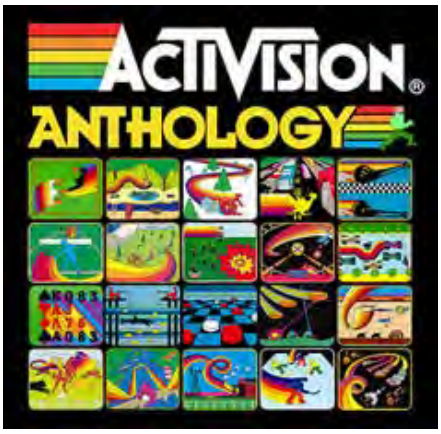
The only reason the game doesn't climb into "A" territory is there isn't enough of it. The room layouts are the same for each game and mastering enough to get all the necessary coins can probably be done in a long afternoon. The original for the Speccy has more depth, with collecting 255 coins in a 55-room pyramid necessary for success, but it also requires 128K compared to the 16K for the ZX81 version. That certainly qualifies the latter as an achievement to be appreciated – you'll just wish you could do so longer.

iDreams Come True

by Mark Sabbatini

Activision Anthology For iPhone/iPad

One of gaming's bigger letdowns these days is Activision's release of Pitfall! for the iPhone. The elation of seeing the landmark title turned to crushing disappointment and anger when the description revealed it's just another mediocre clone of the 3D endless runner Temple Run.



I was going to write a review warning anybody with a fondness for the 1982 classic to stay as far away from this as every other dreadful cash-in sequel except Pitfall II: Lost Caverns. You'd think they'd at least have the decency to change the name but, true to Activision's modern obsession with eliminating fun and creativity in the quest for ever-increasing profits, suits in the Department of Wankering obviously decided that might not sell as well.

Fortunately for everyone, Activision redeemed itself in a big way only days later.

The original Pitfall! and 44 other Atari 2600 games by Activision and fellow third-party legend Imagic are included in the iOS version of Activision Anthology (a version for Android with the same features was released simultaneously). The presentation is largely similar to other retrogame multipacks, most notably Atari's Greatest Hits, but more flexible control options elevate it a step beyond the norm.

It's not perfect, primarily because there are still control problems that are increasingly plaguing iPhone/iPod users as the larger-screen iPad gains popularity. Most notably, you'll frequently find your fingers covering parts of the screen that are vital to gameplay no matter where you place the virtual controls. There's a tilt option, but it's nowhere near quick or precise enough for typical Atari 2600 games. The app is compatible with iCade controllers for those lucky enough to have one.

The other thing is this is essentially the same collection Activision has released for numerous other platforms including Macs and PCs, Gameboy Advance and Playstation Portable. The main differences are 1) Imagic's Dragonfire is included for the first time, while Baseball (minus Pete Rose's name, apparently for licensing reasons) is an exclusive omission; 2) a handful of homebrew games in the computer and GBA versions are omitted; 3) the pricing scheme is different, with Kaboom! available free and the remaining titles sold as in-app purchases.

Licensing issues also keep some of Activision's latter 2600 releases out of the package such as Double Dragon (definitely no loss), Ghostbusters (ditto) and Rampage (OK, I think it's safe to say the omissions may be a plus rather than a minus). And for some reason Cosmic Ark, one of my favorites from Imagic, is missing. Luckily, a seemingly accurate unlicensed remake exists that's free and satisfies the craving just fine (albeit with the same problem of your fingers covering up the action).

All of the games include zoomable scans of the original documentation, which is definitely a plus for purists if not always the easiest way to read them. Controls can be configured for each game individually or all at once, and things like virtual D-pads can be resized and placed anywhere on the screen. Those into collecting Activision's game patches for achievements are awarded digital versions here.

Overall it's a pretty sweet deal at $7 for the complete package even if, like me, it's something like the tenth time you've

paid for a legal version of many of these titles. There's also an option to buy four 11-game packs for $3 each, but you need to be a fan of timeshares or payday lenders to consider that a good option (Pitfall! and Pitfall II, for instance, are in separate packs).

Gamers who aren't hard-core retro fanatics will do well to try Kaboom! before paying for the rest of the package since it's an excellent indicator of how you'll feel about the overall playability of many of the other titles. Some forum chatters rave the tilt or finger-drag controls make the game equal to or better than the original (although there's disagreement about which controls are effective). I didn't have much success with any configuration since 1) the tilt option responds too slowly and imprecisely to get past more than a few waves and 2) all of the touch-screen choices meant being unable to see my buckets and/or the falling bombs. The games also take up the entire screen on an iPad, but users say border areas (such as Activison's rainbow) are large enough to use virtual controls there without impairment.

I'm still enthusiastic about the package since, like Atari's collection, I'm willing to accept playing the games that work for me while not needing to play the others "this instant or else." Demon Attack and Enduro play fine, H.E.R.O. and Pitfall II acceptably if somewhat frustratingly, and Stampede...well, I've always sucked at that game anyhow. As one of the few fans of Space Shuttle, probably the most complex 2600 title ever, I have mixed feelings about some swipe up/down and left/right gestures replacing the levers on the real Atari 2600, since a misplaced finger on the virtual D-pad can inadvertently trigger a mission-wrecking action.

Another mixed blessing is the pause option, which only sometimes allows you to resume a game if you switch to another app temporarily or power down (other times the app simply restarts). Since a lot of mobile gaming is done in short snippets, I'm a big advocate of a reliable pause (or even save) feature even for retrogames that were typically short in duration by nature.

The bottom line is competency is about as much as I hope for from the likes of Activision (and many other major developers) these days, and their Anthology collection well exceeds that. While it's easy to be overly nostalgic about the old days, it's not like there wasn't a lot of crushing disappointment back then. Seriously, how many times back then did people pay $40 (about $100 today adjusted for inflation) for games like Chopper Command which, denialsim aside, really weren't all that good?

Well, there you have it, another issue of RTM and we managed to hold off on any 101 Dalmatians talk until now. I was talking with one of the columnists and he mentioned that there were a number of 101 Dalmatians games out there, but none of them were any good. Does anyone out there know of any good 101 Dalmatians games, or are they all cursed from that dreaded problem where a game is made from a movie and it by default has to be bad?

Speaking of which, I wonder what the percentage is of good movie licensed games to bad ones in the classic gaming era? I know that many were done just to capitalize off of a hot movie, and were probably rushed out the door before they missed the window of opportunity to capitalize on it. One game that I fondly remember playing would be Aladdin for the Sega Genesis. I'm not sure if most share my opinion on that, but it kept me entertained quite a bit! I'd love to hear any movie based gaming memories you might have. Feel free to send any comments my way.

See you all next month!