



Printing Help



Retrogaming Times Monthly #103 - December 2012



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Press Fire To Begin

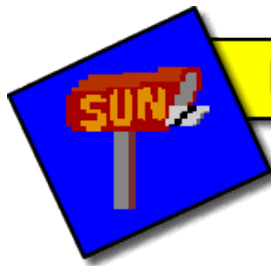
by Bryan Roppolo



It's December, so you know what that means...It's time for our annual Christmas issue again! Usually around Christmas the staff here at RTM try and give our readers a gift of some type. Whether that's a big issue filled with recommended Christmas buys or a contest for a free Homebrew cartridge on AtariAge, we have tried to do something every year. This year we decided to create an RTM Forum so that everyone (including the staff) could have a place to share information and talk with one another. The new forums went live in late November, and can be found at <http://retrogamingtimes.com/forum/YaBB.pl>. This is only the beginning of what we hope will be a fun gathering place for retro gamers. It took time to get the whole retro feel going with the forums, so we hope you like it! Feel free and stop by and chat with your fellow members of the RTM community. The topics discussed so far have been interesting, and they will probably only get more interesting as more and more people sign up.

The second announcement that I have to make this month is that we have a new columnist by the name of Rob Luther, one of "The Retro Junkies" over on Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/retrogamingjunkies>). The Retro Junkies have some great plans for the future, including a PodCast and website, so it's great to have this up and coming retro duo on board. Judging from his articles this month, he has a ton to offer!

I hope you all have a great Christmas and enjoy this issue of Retrogaming Times Monthly. If you are looking for Christmas gifts, the guys over at Revival Studios (<http://www.revival-studios.com/>) have lots of new homebrews for various systems to choose from. You can't go wrong with a new game for a classic system!



Retrogaming News

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Upcoming December Releases From Revival Studios

COLECOVISION: Astrododge

COMMODORE PET: Mayhem

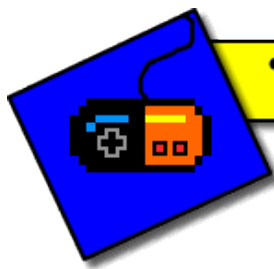
MSX: Astrododge

SEGA SG-1000: Astrododge

Dragon 32 Computer Library

A guy by the name of David Edwards is attempting to build the entire library of Dragon 32 software (the Dragon 32 was a Coco clone available in the UK and Spain from 1982-1985). The site is just one big catalogue at the moment but he has added all the Personal Computer News reviews too, so there's about 300 or so pages of content. Since we have our first Dragon computer article this issue, I figured I would share this bit of news with you all.

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.



The Retro Junkie

by Rob Luther



The Batman Effect

In 1952, Ray Bradbury wrote short story entitled “A Sound of Thunder.” It was about a hunter who travels back in time to shoot a Tyrannosaurus Rex. However, once the hunter sees the ferocious man-eater leveling trees in its path, he panics, steps off the carefully-designed walkway, and kills a single butterfly. Once the hunter returns to the present day, his entire world as he once knew it has been changed forever.

I often wonder what my life would be like today had I not experienced one of the most influential moments of my childhood. It was the Christmas of 1990—barely! It was about three in the morning, and I was tossing and turning in bed. I knew I couldn’t get up yet, because I didn’t want to upset my parents, so I just laid there wondering what could possibly be waiting for me downstairs. “Could it be a bike?” I asked myself, as I looked at the snow falling through my bedroom window. “...No.”



My Copy of Batman: The Video Game

See, Mom and Dad had just bought our first home in Gloucester City, New Jersey this year, and Mom repeatedly told me that since we didn’t live in Philadelphia anymore, Santa might not be able to find our new home. I tried to tell her that Santa knew where every kid lived, but she would just give me a sad look that I never quite understood until years later. Either way, I was just hoping I would get a few Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles toys. Or maybe some Transformers toys. ...Or maybe some Ghostbuster toys... I smiled and looked at the falling snow one more time before I drifted back to sleep.

“Rob!”

I heard a soft knock on the door.

“Rob! It’s Christmas!”

I leapt out of bed, surprised that I overslept! I opened up my door to see my sister, Rosanne, grinning from ear to ear. She and I raced through the hall. Along with the aroma of bacon and eggs, I could hear Dad singing along to Nat King Cole’s “Merry Christmas to You” downstairs. We practically slid down the steps when I saw the most spectacular sight I’d ever seen. There, right next to Christmas tree, was an entire sofa full of presents! Mom and Dad stormed in from the kitchen, Dad holding a video camera. “Merry Christmas, Kiddos,” He said with a grin. “Should we eat first, or should be open some presents?”

I held the first present in my hand and shook it violently. It was small, rectangular, and relatively light, but for the life of me, I couldn’t figure out what it was. Finally, I tore the Frosty the Snowman wrapping paper off in record time.

I couldn’t believe it. I couldn’t!

Batman: The Video Game for the Nintendo Entertainment System! The yellow Bat-Symbol beamed of my eyes when I came the realization that I just gotten a video game for Christmas. If there was there was a video game, there had to be



a ...

“Did Santa get me a Nintendo?” I asked, my hands trembling.

“Depends if you’ve been naughty or nice,” Dad was quick to answer.

An hour later, Dad was setting up my very first video game console: the Nintendo Entertainment System in my bedroom on an old-turn dial TV—hey, it was mine, so it was special! I was sitting at the edge of the bed when Dad turned around and asked a question I’d always remember—“So, kiddo, which game do you want to play first?”

Between Batman and Super Mario Brothers, I chose the Dark Knight.

So there we were, my Dad and I sitting on the floor together playing Batman: The Video Game. The levels were beautifully colored and designed, the music was amazing, and the cut-scenes were like nothing I had ever seen before. It was like I was playing a movie! Yet, what I remembered most about that Christmas morning in 1990 was how happy my Dad and I were together, protecting the citizens of Gotham, one Continue at a time!

I guess it’s about time to travel back to the present day: November 30th, 2012. As I write this column, I’ve got a smile on my face. I can’t help it! That Christmas of 1990—that seemingly trivial experience—changed my life forever. Much like the Butterfly Effect in Bradbury’s “A Sound of Thunder,” Batman: The Video Game had a monumental effect on my life. Batman got me into gaming and comics. Comics got me into reading. Reading got me into writing. Writing got me into English. English got me into teaching. And teaching... Well, you get the idea.

To sum it up, I’m thankful for the Batman Effect—and, even more importantly—the Christmas memory. I still have Batman: The Video Game. And every now and then, I fire it up, imagining Dad here with me once again cleaning up the streets of Gotham.

Merry Christmas!

Rob “The Retro Junkie” Luther

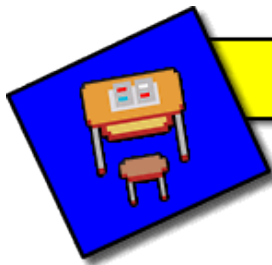
www.facebook.com/retrogamingjunkies

Image Credits:

Title Screen shot courtesy of http://www.vgmpf.com/Wiki/index.php?title=File:Batman_-_NES_-_Title.png

Batman vs. Joker sceen shot courtesy of <http://www.spacebooger.com/>





Retro Collecting 101

by Jeff Wittenhagen



Perler Mania!

There is something that my wife recently got me into and that is perler or melty beads. What are perler beads? Well, they are plastic fusible beads that can be placed on a solid plastic-backed peg array to form designs and then melted together with a clothes iron; alternatively, they can be strung into necklaces or bracelets, or woven into keychains. Fusible beads come in many colors and degrees of transparency/opacity, including varieties that glow in the dark or have internal glitter; peg boards come in various shapes and several geometric patterns. (That's enough Wikipedia for one article...)

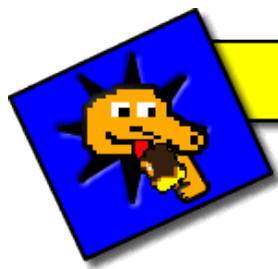
Anyhow, you might be thinking, "How does that apply to retro game collecting?" Well the answer is simple...



These awesome little contraptions lend themselves perfectly to creating 8-bit masterpieces! This is where things get crazy, as there are tons and tons of sprites that I would love to have. An entire sprite doesn't take too long to create, but you need to make sure you have enough of the proper colors. I recommend getting extra black, white and peach as almost every sprite I have done uses those three colors. You can also do more complex sprites but those require off colors, such as multiple shades of blue, and I have avoided them so far. So keeping this in mind, what type of perler beads would you want to have adding awesomeness to your collection? Post in the comments section or over in the RTM forums and let's talk!

Here are a few of the 8-Bit perlers I have recently done...





CoCoLicious!

by Brian Blake



It Takes Two, CoCo 2 That Is!

About a year ago, I volunteered to write articles for RTM based on my love of the TRS-80/Tandy Color Computer line. The last article I submitted discussed the various models of what has now come to be called the Color Computer 1, or CoCo1, and its clones. The article series seemed to be fairly well received, however, things in my life at that time quickly spun out of control. There were numerous real-life problems that prevented the follow-up article, in which I had planned to discuss the next model, the Color Computer 2.

Suffice it to say, I was not happy about these events, or the effect they were having on my life. However, I've spent the last year trying to work thru them and get back to a point where I could start enjoying life and my various hobbies again - as well as devoting a lot of time to the things I had neglected for so long - my family. To that end, here is the article I planned to write a year ago - finally...

The TRS-80 Color Computer 2

In September of 1983, Tandy/Radio Shack released another Color Computer; the Color Computer 2. The CoCo2 line has six distinct model numbers, and some of the models have an (A) and (B) version as well.

Before we get into the various models, I do need to stress one thing: all of these machines are at least 99.9% compatible with Color Computer 1 software and mostly compatible with Color Computer 1 hardware peripherals. The exception on the hardware side is that the CoCo2 *does not* generate or use 12vdc. Due to the lack of a 12vdc circuit, first generation floppy drive controllers *will not work* with a CoCo2. According to my info sources, these are the 26-3022 and 26-3029 floppy controllers. The rest of the floppy disk controllers work well with all CoCo models. Both of those controllers **WILL** work with your CoCo2 if you have a multi-pak interface, since it does supply the 12vdc the controllers require.

Like the CoCo1, all CoCo2's have two joystick, one cassette and one serial (bit-banger) port. They also have a 20 position (40 pin) cartridge slot on the right side of the computer. This myriad of ports and cartridge slot, in conjunction with a 6-bit DAC, allow the CoCo2 to interface with the outside world in innumerable ways. Like the last generation white CoCo1, the first CoCo2 models also had the 'melted' but improved keyboard. There were NTSC and PAL versions of the CoCo2 as well. Below are the full technical specs:

General:

- First Released: 1983
- CPU: 8 bit 6809E
- Clock speed: 0.89 MHz
- Bus type: Tandy Proprietary
- Data bus width: 8-bit
- Address bus width: 16-bit

Memory:

- System board initially offered only 16K

- Maximum on system board 32k (early models) or 64K
- Maximum total memory 64K
- ROM: 8 kbytes, containing the standard version of Microsoft BASIC. An optional upgrade to the full version of the Microsoft Color BASIC existed, pushing the ROM size to 16 kbytes

Ports:

- 40 pin bus connector/Cartridge connector for game cartridges and system expansion.
- Two analog joystick connectors.
- Tape player/recorder connector, 1500 baud interface.
- RS-232 serial (bit-banger) port
- TV connector (RF modulator)

Video:

- 9 colors were available:
The standard eight video colors plus orange. The displayed colors had to be selected from two predefined four-color palettes for four-color modes, and two predefined two-color palettes for two-color modes.
- No color switching was possible. Special variations of display modes were possible, by exploiting the 6847's flexibility

Audio:

- The CoCo II uses a 6-bit DAC (Digital-to-Analog Converter), controlled by the CPU. This allows for 64 different volume levels, and quite a bit of fancy sounds (speech and other samples, for instance). But, since the DAC was under CPU control, sounds taxed performance quite a lot.

Storage:

- Tape and Floppy

Operating System:

- Note that most CoCo 2s use version 1.2 of the Color BASIC ROM, and all Extended CoCo 2s use version 1.1 of Extended BASIC.

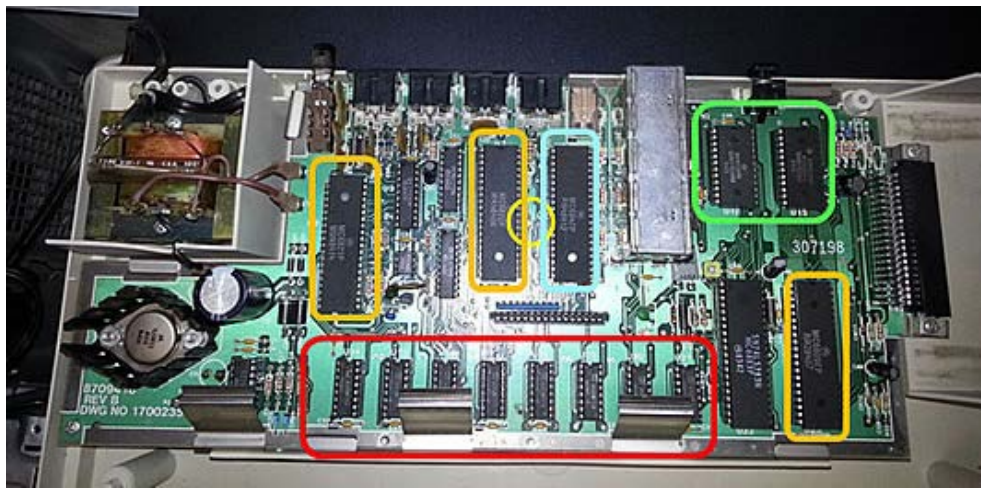
Enter the 26-3026 & 3027 (Made in America)

As stated above, the CoCo2 is compatible with the CoCo1. Really, the CoCo2 takes advantage of large scale integration of IC chips to lower the chip count, and reducing the footprint of the motherboard. So much so, in fact, the CoCo2's case is roughly half the size of the CoCo1. When first introduced, there were only two versions of the CoCo2, both American made, and available from Radio Shack stores with the following catalog numbers:

1. 26-3026 – 16k Color Basic (CB) listed price of \$239.95 (Radio Shack)
2. 26-3027 – 16k Extended Color Basic (ECB) listed price of \$319.95 (Radio Shack)

First appearing in the October 1983 issue of Rainbow Magazine for sale at Computers Plus, at the time a very popular computer mail order company based in Littleton Massachusetts. They carried a complete line of Tandy/Radio Shack computers, hardware and software (my parents ordered my first CoCo from them). They advertised heavily in The Rainbow Magazine. In fact, they offered 16k and 64k CoCo2 with ECB for \$245 and \$305 the first month the CoCo2 was available.

In completely stock form, both machines were identical in every way, except the ROM version. There are two possible versions (and 'A' and 'B') for each catalog number. The 26-3027B board is shown below.



The eight 16 pin IC's towards the bottom of the motherboard are the 4116C DRAM chips (circled in red) – note the socketed DRAM chips. Both catalog numbers could be upgraded to 64k by replacing these chips with eight 4164 DRAM chips; then soldering a small jumper to pads 'W1' (circled in yellow) to activate the 64k mode.

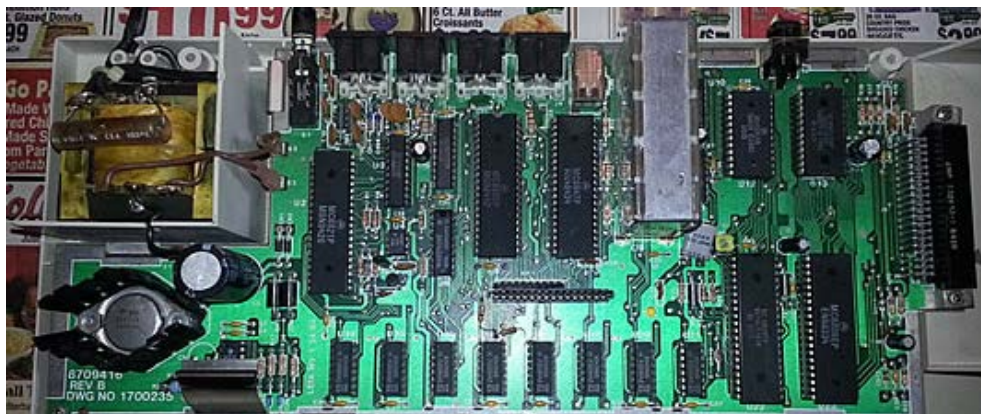
The main IC's that make up a CoCo2:

1. CPU – MC69B9E – circled in orange, lower right
2. ROM – CB & ECB – circled in green, upper right
3. VDG – MC6847P – circled in cyan, middle-right
4. PIA's – MC6821 & 6822 – circled in orange, middle-left & left
5. SAM – MC6883P – not circled, 40 pin IC next to CPU

The Factory Upgrade – 26-3127 (Made in America)

In the March 1984 issue of The Rainbow, Radio Shack began advertising a 64k ECB CoCo2, priced at \$259.95. (Computers Plus had been selling the 64k upgraded CoCo2 since Fall 1983. As of this issue of The Rainbow, they were selling it for \$210.00). This was the first 64k CoCo2 offered by Radio Shack. Along with 64k came an 'enhanced' full travel keyboard, from Radio Shack, on a Color Computer – finally... These are identical to the 26-3027 computers except for the inclusion of 64k and the full travel keyboard. However, there IS one difference – the DRAM chip are soldered directly to the motherboard as shown below – gone are the sockets that made it easy to upgrade the 26-3027. So, if you had to replace a DRAM chip for some reason, you had to cut out the old one.

(26-3127 American built CoCo2 - very similar to the 26-3027 shown earlier - note the DRAM chips are not socketed.)





(Above are exterior pics of my American built 26-3217B)



The area circled in red shows the installed 64k of DRAM. Note the covered area and missing IC's. This model CoCo2 could have 64k installed either with a daughter card or directly on the motherboard. This board design is labeled 20261058.



Also notable on this version are the white connectors. The daughter card plugs into these two connectors to provide access to the eight DRAM - 4164 - chips. Memory could also be provided by adding eight sockets directly on the motherboard (again, 4164's) or two 4464 DRAM chips in the sockets between the two connectors.

Mine is an admittedly late model 26-3127B with a rather high serial number. Earlier version 26-3127B's may be, and probably are, different.

The Korean CoCo Lines

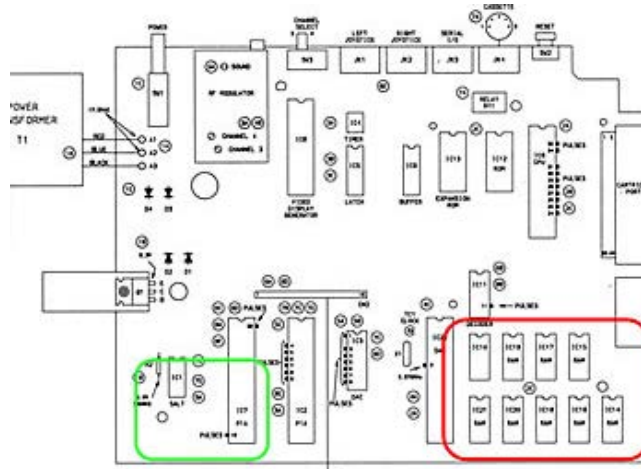
There's Much conjecture about the Korean made CoCo2's; well, for one model anyway. I'll get to that in a minute. With the exception of one board series, the Korean CoCo2's were very different than the previous designs. Radio Shack

catalog numbers list three models of the CoCo2 that were manufactured in Korea. Two of these had an 'A' and 'B' revision, while the third had only a 'B' revision.

The First Korean CoCo2: 26-3134& 26-3136

The first Korean CoCo2's were 16k machines, and virtually every component on this motherboard is located differently from any of the American made units.

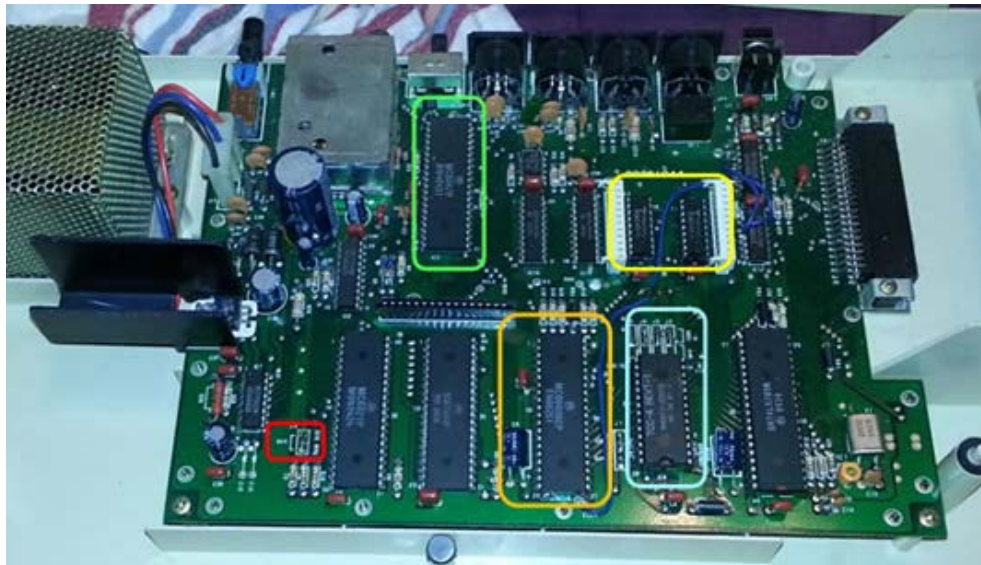
(Component placement according to Sam's Computer Facts for a 26-313 4& 3136 CoCo2)



(J1 'RAM SIZE' should be near IC 7 circled in green above)

What's the difference between the 26-3134 & 26-3136 models? Well, they are both 16k machines, both are upgradable to 64k by swapping out the 4116 DRAM chips (IC14 – IC21 circled in red above) with 4164 DRAMs. The difference is this: the 26-3134 is a Color Basic machine while the 26-3136 is an Extended Color Basic machine.

Below is a picture of my latest CoCo2 eBay acquisition. It is a 26-3134 Korean built CoCo2. The board number is 20461044. As you can see, the components are completely different from the 26-3027 and 26-3127 shown above. Based on information from Sam's Computer Facts and a few other sources, I think this board actually belongs in a different CoCo2 – the 26-3136A, as the component placement is radically different than what Sam's shows for the 26-3134 or 26-3136 (shown above).



The Korean 26-3134A & 26-3136A

Above is what I believe to be the motherboard from a 26-3134A or 26-3136A CoCo2. Component placement is very different from the non A or B models (not to mention the American CoCo2s). This one has been upgraded to 64k using

two TMM41464P DRAM chips. The case for this CoCo2 bears a sticker stating it's a 26-3027. Component highlights:

1. J1 'RAM SIZE' jumper circled in red – lower left
2. MC68A09EP CPU circled in orange – lower middle
3. a. 28 pin ROM socket, configured for a 128k eeprom circled in cyan – just right of the CPU
b. Jumpers for 128k eeprom selection – just above ROM socket
4. DRAM chips circled in yellow – middle of the board
5. MC6847P VDG chip circled in green – upper left next to the RF modulator shield

While the differences may appear to be pretty stark, mainly due to component location, there really isn't much difference between the non A & B series and the A & B series 26-3134 & 3136.

To upgrade the memory in the 26-3134 & 3136, you swap out the eight 4116 DRAM chips with 4164 DRAMs, solder a jumper on the J1 'RAM SIZE' pads near IC7.

To upgrade the memory in the 26-3134A & 3136B, you swap out the two 4416 DRAM chips near the white connectors with 4464 DRAMs, solder a jumper on the J1 'RAM SIZE' pads near the MC6821P (which I think is IC7).

Incidentally, those two white connectors were supposed to be used for a future DRAM upgrade via daughter card. Prior to my digging my CoCo2's out of my garage for this article, I'd been told of the 26-3127 CoCo2's in the wild having these same motherboards with the white connectors. During all of my research, I've found one example of a commercial product that took advantage of them - and I own it. However, I understand the Aussie Radio Shacks usually upgraded their 16k CoCo2's by use of a daughter card, this was more common there than in the states.

The Korean 26-3127

The Korean 26-3127 is identical to the American version. No difference. There's also supposed to be a 26-3127A version; I've never actually seen one, but, that's what my research has shown me thus far. However, there is a 'B' version of the Korean 26-3127 that deserves special mention. The 26-3127B CoCo2 is notable since some of these models used a different VDG; the MC6847T1. This allowed the CoCo2 to provide TRUE lowercase characters on screen.

While there are several ways to identify whether a 26-3127B CoCo2 will put true lowercase characters onscreen, just typing the '0' (zero) character should tell you. If the 0 has a slash thru it, it's the updated VDG chip and should be capable of lowercase characters. Or you could issue the following: POKE 359,57 then POKE &HFF22,&H10. That should get you true lowercase.

Wrapping it up

That's it for this issue of 'CoCoLicious!'. Writing the article was fun and informative. I know I didn't cover every version of the CoCo2 in depth, and I apologize. However, I only own four of them, and there are several more that I can only read about.

In closing, I hope everyone had a great Thanksgiving, and. I wish you all a joyous and blessed holiday season. I'd like to give you some Christmas wishes from the next Color Computer I'll be discussing - the Tandy Color Computer 3. Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!!!



(Pics taken with a 256 color composite output from a CoCo3 to a 19" Magnavox TV, taken with s Samsung Galaxy S III)

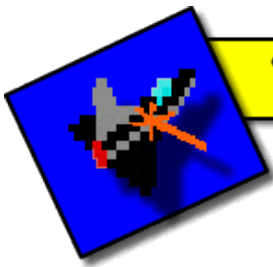
Sources for this article:

Sam's Computerfacts CC15: Radio Shack TRS-880 Color Computer Models: 26-3134, 26-3136 - Howard W. Sams & Co.

Tandy's Little Wonder - the Color Computer: 1980-1991 - Frank G. Swygert, Published by FARNA Systems

The Color Computer Mailing List Archives: <http://five.pairlist.net/pipermail/coco/>

Techno's CoCo Site: <http://users.digitalindigo.net/~techno/coco.html>



The Thrill Of Defeat

by Mark Sabbatini



The Dragon That Faintly Roared

I could say this is a tie-in to the Movie of the Moment, much like sellers of everything from adult sippy cups to slot machines are doing. I'd be lying.

If not for the phrase "absurd flaw," the connection might never have occurred to me. But one of the lesser moments in Tolkein's breakthrough novel is a fitting metaphor for the kludge of plastic and silicon that's my latest exploration into the world of obscure and failed computers: The Dragon 32/64.

Remember Smaug boasting about his invincibility, only to expose a chink in his scaly armor at a conveniently vulnerable spot (a plot stumble as lame as Bond supervillains laying out their grand schemes right before failing to kill 007 with something a hundred times more complex than a bullet through the brain)? That's the Dragon: Looks good, has some legit creds, but, eeesh, what an anti-climatically easy creature to slay.

The Dragon is probably best described as the quirky British cousin of Tandy's Color Computer, itself an oddball in the eight-bit CPU family. The Brit, as the stereotype might suggest, possesses an extra degree of suave refinement, but blows any chance of being perceived as such by acting with a bumbling daftness.



The spods reviewing the Dragon had reasonably kind words when it was introduced in 1982 (when things like a spacebar and on-off switch were luxuries in the U.K.). Compared to the market-dominating Sinclair Spectrum, the Dragon looked like a solid computer with a real keyboard and non-glitchy display. It didn't feel like it might crash or break if you so much as nudged it a bit hard. It also had a bunch of ports for extras like a real monitor instead of a TV, joysticks and third-party printers. The 32/64 moniker refers to two models of the Dragon, the first with 32K of RAM and a subsequent model with 64K.

But the more time one spends with the Dragon (a luxury reviewers on deadline didn't have), the more some major flaws are evident. Perhaps the biggest one for gamers is the graphics are abysmal compared to anything beyond the black-and-white text display of a Sinclair ZX81. The highest color resolution was 128 horizontal by 192 vertical pixels, with a choice of two four-colors pallets – both of them absurdly garish. Those familiar with the Color Computer know it also has a 256X192 pixel resolution that can "fake" the four of the most useful colors (black, white, red, blue), but on the Dragon that display is only black-and-white due to the inability of European TV sets to display the fake (a.k.a. artifact) colors. The Dragon also shared the Color Computer's relatively slow speed, lack of ability to produce multi-tone or background sound, and a 6809 CPU at odds with what most commercial programmers were using.

That meant another type of longevity trouble since software never came close to the quantity and quality of the Spectrum, or later and much more powerful British computers such as the BBC Micro and Amstrad CPC. The Dragon also tried blazing a path in the U.S., but flamed out even more spectacularly against better machines, including its Color Computer blood relative (due to its far larger software library and distribution channel). The U.S. model of the Dragon can handle artifacting, by the way, but it had such a tiny market presence you'd almost certainly have to get your software from the U.K. – and this was before there was the internet (or even a selection of imported computer magazines in bookstores) to make you aware of what was out there and where to order from.

The Color Computer managed to survive for a decade as a second-tier U.S. machine, but the Dragon was slain after a mere two years. Still, it's an interesting creature to study, especially for CoCo fans, since the Dragon plays a number of classic games originating in the U.K. like Manic Miner and Chuckie Egg that never got translated to its U.S. cousin despite nearly identical hardware. Emulators are easy to find and it's also easy to buy an unopened U.S. version of the Dragon for \$45 at www.cadigital.com/computer.htm (rumor on the chats boards is the company can be bargained down to \$35, but I won't vouch for that).

I'm planning to spend the next few months writing about the worthwhile discoveries in the Dragon's obscureness, but this month I'm just offering a few quick impressions of titles I was most inclined to look at first. For impatient types, a few good websites are The Dragon Archive at <http://archive.worldofdragon.org> (the best one-stop portal for pretty much everything), Dragon 32 Universe at www.dragon32universe.info (a new, in-progress game database with nice screenshot previews and some reviews), and the Dragon User magazine archive at <http://archive.org/details/dragon-user-magazine> (only five issues, but in multiple formats).

Two types of games interested me most: The landmark U.K. titles, since I suspect many would have ranked highly among CoCo fans, and comparing how some of the most notable CoCo titles fared in translation to the Dragon (spoiler: very unattractively, although they still play pretty much the same). I'm taking a bit of a guess with the grades, which are a bit higher than they'd be in the larger CoCo market, since I haven't yet played enough Dragon titles to know if there was a society of bedroom British geeks who created a secret wealth of games.

Starting with the (comparatively) positive, the U.K.-only titles include:

Manic Miner (B-)

This is the Spectrum-born platformer that begat 10,000 clones, virtually all known to U.S. gamers who followed the parallel lineage of Donkey Kong instead. I've always appreciated, if not entirely enjoyed, the game due to a numerous-for-the-time 20 levels that are creatively designed. The objective is simple enough: grab all the flashing objects on the screen and then reach the exit portal that lights up before your oxygen runs out. A wide variety of bad guys, unstable terrain and mechanical hazards such as threshers make the miner's life almost as hazardous as working for Murray Energy (Google if you're clueless as your edutainment for the day). The Dragon version is competent, but probably ranks near the bottom of the 15 or so machines the game has been ported to due to: 1) the black-and-white graphics, which rob it of charm and ability to identify objects as easily, and 2) a lack of pixel-perfect control (vital for this game, since memorizing patterns and timing is everything) due to the Dragon's non-centering analogue joysticks. Manic Miner's sequel, Jet Set Willy, raises the bar a bit (future review to come), and both were probably enough to satisfy Dragon owners wanting to play them back then – if they didn't have a friend with a Speccy willing to share the experience.



Chuckie Egg (B)

This platformer is rated the 13th best Speccy game by Your Sinclair magazine, but even back then the love wasn't universal, as some found its control scheme infuriating. The game features a cutesy theme as the protagonist, Hen-House Harry, must collect 12 eggs on each level before time runs out while avoiding being pecked to death by hens on patrol. Scattered piles of seeds will freeze the timer if Harry eats them, or the hens briefly if they get to the seeds first. There are only eight levels, but they cycle through five increasingly difficult challenges. The second cycle features a lone giant duck with far greater pursuit capabilities instead of the hens, the third features the hens and the duck, and so on. Like Manic Miner, the Dragon version of Chuckie Egg plays much the same as on competing machines, but is hampered by hardware defects. This time the graphics are in one of the 128X192 modes, and the red-blue-green-yellow pallet is merely ugly and functional. The controls are also a nuisance again, but I don't dock that as much here since I hated the Speccy's controls as well. The main problem is to climb or descend ladders you

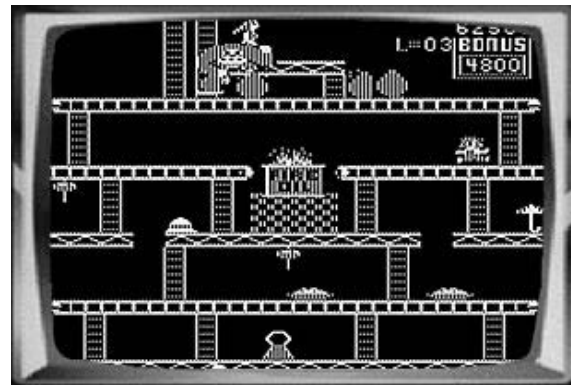


have to be exactly (to the pixel) centered at a ladder. The secret, as any gamer completing more than one level discovered, is to push the joystick up/down while you're moving left/right toward a ladder. It's also possible to jump onto a ladder while doing this, which made the game far easier once mastered. In the CoCo world this would probably be a C+ title; the Dragon benefits from grade inflation, at least until I'm better informed.

Finally, on a more harsh note, a look at how some U.S. CoCo hits fare with a British accent:

Donkey King (B+)

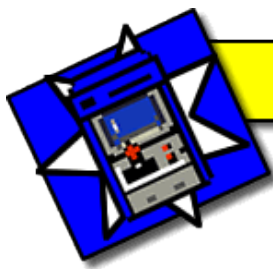
Sigh... This one hurts because this unauthorized Donkey Kong clone is one of maybe two games CoCo owners can gloat about with superiority to their peers with more successful computers (the other is Dungeons of Daggorath, which was never translated to the Dragon – a true travesty since it's meant to be played in hi-res black-and-white). Donkey King on the CoCo features all four levels of the arcade game (plus the intro and between-screen animations), doesn't "chop off" a girder from each screen like many ports do, and looks and plays closer to the coin-op than nearly every other competitor. All this holds true on the Dragon except for one thing – the black and white display. While Dragon gamers might not be too bothered by this in the privacy of their bedrooms, there's a deflating depression for anyone familiar with the CoCo port – and of course it kills any chance of impressing your peers with other machines.



Buzzard Bait (B-)

This is a first-rate Joust clone on the CoCo that suffers even more than Donkey King on the Dragon because, instead of opting for black and white (which would have made distinguishing between riders impossible), the game is an abstract mess in the lower-res four-color mode. Yeah, it still incorporates every feature of the arcade down to the order in which platforms disappear (albeit with somewhat slower gameplay, especially with numerous enemies on screen). But this is where the ugly untruth of "I don't care about your looks, I appreciate you for your personality" is revealed. It's a first-rate personality attached to a 350-pound pimple-faced date. I just couldn't set those garish colors aside. Again, maybe Dragon users who never saw the CoCo version and were starved for any kind of Joust title might have been more appreciative, but even then there were too many games that were far more impressive, even within that creature's limits.





MAME Reviews

by Mark Sabbatini



Pirate Ship Higemaru

Why, yes, I've always thought Pengo and The Legend of Zelda are remarkably similar.

Both are based on cute and cuddly carnage, feature four-way player movement and...oh, hell, I can't even fake this one. I'm entering this review at a complete loss to explain an apparently common belief there's One Degree of Separation between the games.

Welcome aboard the good Pirate Ship Higemaru.

If you don't remember feeding change into this arcade machine back in 1984 it's because you were short on 100-yen coins. Higemaru was a Japan-only release until it found its way into U.S. homes in "collection" titles for various consoles from the Sega Saturn to PlayStation 2.

Replace Pengo's penguin with a sailor named Momotaro, ice blocks with barrels and Sno-Bees with pirates and the foundation of the two games is the same. The biggest immediately noticeable difference is Momotaro picks up the barrels and can carry them until throwing them at the pirates. Higemaru also expands gameplay with two types of objects that can be thrown (one destructs on impact, one doesn't), multiple types of enemies and what's essentially a boss stage every four waves. The graphics are more detailed and animated, with pirates flying off the screen ("overboard") when hit rather than just being crushed, for instance.

It's very much what one might expect to see in an official Pengo sequel (had the characters remained the same) and, as a big fan of that game, one of the minority of times with 1980s arcade games where it seems like an improvement. That's an intellectual judgment since my heart still prefers the penguin, perhaps due to a latent polar region fetish that fully blossomed during adulthood. But even in my overheated enthusiasm back then I never thought Pengo would merit a sequel or cash-grab ripoff by a competing company.

So Higemaru is a fun discovery (I was randomly scrolling through my hundreds of ROM files in MAME and booted it up because of a rhyme association with the no-win simulation in Star Trek II). But things got a little weird reading about the game at a few websites, where the close connection to Zelda was asserted.

The Pengo-Zelda link is, strictly speaking, provided by a sequel to Higemaru called Higemaru Makaijima released in Japan for the NES and MSX home machines. Quoting Wikipedia, the sequel's gameplay is mostly similar, but "the game features much more diverse gameplay such as the ability to traverse a map screen via ship, levels taking place on islands, and giant bosses, as well as a more developed plot." And quoting StrategyWiki, "The island exploration sections are extremely reminiscent of dungeon exploration aspects of The Legend of Zelda, to which the game is often compared."

OK, that's all strange enough to merit giving the original Higemaru a shakedown voyage, after which I'll get to whether "they" are out of their gourds by making the Zelda connection with its successor. (Spoiler alert...read the final few paragraphs of this mess if nothing else, since Makaijima is a far superior game well worth spending time with.)



Pirate Ship Higemaru's controls are simple, with a four-way joystick and a single fire button for picking up/throwing things. The DIP switches, at least in the ROM file I have, are at least partially useless. There's one that's supposed to allow one to five starting lives, but it didn't actually change the game's default setting of three. Extra lives can be awarded at between 10,000/every 50,000 and 40,000/every 100,000 (or not at all, except for one possibility in the game that's not based on points). Go with the most generous setting and you'll be able to earn extra lives with a single action, as will be seen below.

A very cool introductory extra is what's essentially a short tutorial when you begin a game. Three barrels appear in a line at the middle of the screen with three immobilized pirates in a line directly beneath them, and the player gets a short time to hit the sitting ducks. For first-timers it's a reassuring way to know what you're supposed to do, while anybody who's played more than once and takes a moment to think will realize there's some extra opportunity here. The main one, of course, is moving down so you can take out all three pirates with one barrel, which is worth far more points. Another possibility is if you're holding a barrel when the timer expires you start the first wave with it. Not a huge thing, but interesting nonetheless.

It's tougher to play as beginner since you'll need to master more skills to take advantage of the extra features. The ordinary pirates seem about equal to the Sno-Bees when it comes to pursuit skills, but the action is quicker and some buccaneers pack extra strength. Those walking around in barrels need to be hit once to knock him out of it, then again to send him overboard. Then there's the leader, Bous (get it?), who will climb back on board if you him. Finally, take too long and the skull-and-crossbones icons at the corners of the screen start moving around the edges (they do this in the tutorial screen as well). Not nearly as big a threat as say, the pterodactyl in Joust, but one more nuisance to factor.

One other difficulty is you're destroying those barrels when you throw them, so the playfield gets more open and your weapons decrease over time. You won't ever completely run out of weapons, however, since a few projectiles (appearing as oil drums, gold pots, coins and other objects) are indestructible. Also, the playfields are generally more open and/or tricky than Pengo, especially after the first few waves, making it far harder to hit pirates who are either moving erratically in open spaces or in short corridors.

Now for the stuff that makes life easier: First off, since the pirates are hiding in barrels waiting to replace their vanquished mates, it means they may be in the barrels you pick up and throw. You'll see a set of eyes peek out when this happens and tossing the barrels counts as one of the "kills" you need to complete the wave. Next, a particularly nice advantage is every time you destroy 16 barrels an item appears that's basically a Pac-Man energizer, making you invincible and able to kill enemies by touching them for a short time.

There's also bonus items worth varying amount of points (usually 400-3,000) when you pick up barrels that are flashing. I consider them "nice, but not worth risking your life for" items (unless you're close to earning a bonus life, of course), but there are "secret" bonuses in a few stages worth between 10,000 and 50,000 points (and one with a sailor suit that awards an extra life) definitely worth taking a risk for. The catch, however, is it must be the first barrel lifted during the wave.

A big risk/reward feature is the Bous stages every four waves. As the name suggests, these Captain Hooks are the only baddies and they all must be knocked off the screen before any climb back aboard to complete the wave. It's definitely one of those times when destroying enough barrels to get an invincibility power-up is a good idea. The good news is the point values of the bonus items are higher and in general it's easier to rack up a bunch of points.

There's a total of 16 waves, with the latter eight repeating infinitely once all are completed. The bad guys, of course,



keep speeding up and getting nastier over time. If there's a "kill screen" I haven't seen any reference to it.

The NES Port?

Ordinarily this would be a "discover, play and enjoy for a bit, forget" game, without much interest in checking out the home-only sequel. But since the Zelda comparison was made, I gave Higemaru Makaijima what I figured would be a brief spin on an NES emulator (a "translated" version from the Japanese version that may be an unreleased prototype).

To summarize my findings: 1) The sequel definitely is worthy of more than a quick spin and 2) It's no Zelda, but the One Degree connection to Pengo is unmistakably there.

True to the spirit of home console games, Higemaru Makaijima eschews the quick-play arcade format in favor of a longer single quest. In fact, after diving in without any guidance I wound up having to retreat and find some help on the 'net, since the game starts with the player navigating a ship around the open sea and I found myself doing so at length without encountering anything useful. (A good instruction/walkthrough guide is at strategywiki.org/wiki/Higemaru_Makaijima).

The goal is to defeat bosses and collect their treasures and other certain items on seven islands in order to gain access to the area that holds the final boss fight and the grand treasure. You collect keys to gain access to islands by finding and boarding pirate ships, defeating captains who are essentially mini-bosses. Once you find the island with a gate matching the key you navigate around a definitely Zelda-like landscape battling various foes in search of the boss.



NES VERSION

Higemaru Makaijima was released in 1987, a year after the original Zelda, and everything from the cute graphics to the playful chiptunes are an unmistakable "me too" effort. The key difference is the "throw the barrel/object" action is the focus of gameplay, although it turns out some other weapons/abilities are available. Another big difference is your battles take place on multi-screen playfields (each ship is five, the islands obviously are much bigger) that scroll a screen at a time like Zelda. Unlike Zelda, however, screens are usually full of baddies from the start and since they regenerate it's frustrating as hell to accidentally leave a screen and return immediately into peril, which I did frequently at first.

You need to defeat a set number of pirates on ships to access the captain's area, then hit the captain several times while he tosses knives (or swords or whatever they are) at you. The islands (at least the first, all I've completed so far) repeat all this on a larger scale, but the variety of foes means getting attacked in ways that will catch you off guard (not to mention the difficulty of navigating your way to where you need to go).

You get some, if not a lot at first, of extra ability and help in your quest. Your character can now jump, which is useful for eluding foes as well as necessary for navigation. You'll encounter merchant ships whose occupants will offer guidance (while the text is translated into English, it's amusing to see it presented in the right-to-left style of Japanese). Finally, your mortality doesn't consist of lives, but rather an overall health that is reflected by your score. You lose 100 points every time you're hit and if you reach zero you die. There's a password system, although I avoid them in favor of far more useful save/freeze options when using an emulator.

These few paragraphs barely touch the essentials and depth of Higemaru Makaijima and, as you might tell, I'm definitely Hooked enough I plan to keep at this game for a while. The one possible long-term hitch I can see is a monotonous fatigue from the largely repetitive battles, but the StrategyWiki intro gives me reason to believe more variety lays ahead. The game probably doesn't stand out from dozens of other Zelda knockoffs, but since I haven't played those this one will do just fine.





Apple II Incider

by Donald Lee



Scouting The MicroLeagues

Welcome to the December edition of Apple II Incider. By the time you read this, Thanksgiving and Black Friday will have passed and we'll be on our way to Christmas. I am actually writing this column early for once. As I noted last month, I had settled on talking about MicroLeague Baseball so that made things easier. I have a couple of interesting news items to pass along so read on for some interesting bits.

REVIEW - MicroLeague Baseball

As I have noted many times throughout the years, Computer Baseball was my favorite baseball simulation. I love the ability to change lineups, warm up pitchers and do a few other things that managers could do. As I noted last month, most of the baseball games I played after Computer Baseball were more arcade / action simulations rather than strategy simulations.

However, there was one game that I had wanted during my youth but never did pick up. That game was MicroLeague Baseball (released in 1984). Despite the fact that I have covered my share of baseball games in this column, I never covered MicroLeague Baseball.

I decided to give the game a spin last month, and after my first play, I was impressed. I had finally found something worthy to compete against Computer Baseball. I just gave the game a second spin and while it is still worthy, there were some holes I noticed. Some of them are no big deal while some others can be frustrating.



From a game play perspective, you can have two human players play each other, two computer players play each other, or as most people would do, have one player play the computer.

When you start, you pick two teams (one home / one visitor), determine if you want a designated hitter, select your starting pitcher, then choose lineups and off you go.

If you are up at bat first, you are presented with some options, such as if there is no one on base, you can hit or bunt, or if there are runners on the bases, you can tell them to steal. Additional hitters can hit and run or do a sacrifice bunt.

If you are playing defense, your pitcher can throw fastballs, curve balls, sliders, change ups and specialty pitches. The defense can be adjusted slightly by moving infielders around (surprisingly, no outsider defensive options).

As a manager, you can also pinch hit, warm up pitchers, visit the mound and replace pitchers.

Graphically, the game wasn't much to write home about. The overall field is represented faithfully with a green field, the pitcher's mound, base lines and bases. There are also fans present as well, though they are literally more like dots than people. The players are either white or purple to differentiate the two teams playing.

Game action like hits, steals, home runs and other things are simulated on screen, though I didn't find the animation that impressive. In fact, unless you turn it off, the game defaults to having animation of players running to and from their dugouts in-between innings. While I appreciate the detail, it really is a waste of time.

There is minimal sound in the game, though there is music at various points depending on the situation.

My overall impression is that I liked it, but there were a lot of commands to remember. If I were to compare it to Computer Baseball, MicroLeague Baseball had a lot more commands to memorize for both offensive, defensive and managerial functions.

While the offensive options made sense, I wasn't entirely sure why the pitchers were allowed to choose a style of pitch as the game (like Computer Baseball) only throws one pitch to the batter (except for pitch outs) and then the ball is put in play (or the batter walks or strikes out). Comparatively, Computer Baseball simply asked you to Pitch, Pitch Around or Intentional Walk to a hitter.



I found the system for replacing hitters, warming up pitchers and replacing pitchers to be a little clunky. Yes, I know we are dealing with a 1980s game, but Computer Baseball was able to implement a simple system that worked well. The MicroLeague Baseball system has a lot of buttons to push and doesn't feel intuitive.

There were also some game play issues that I found that could be considered a negative. First, when you warm up a pitcher in the bullpen, there is no indication he is ready. Computer Baseball would display a "+" sign next to a pitcher to let you know.

The second and more major issue was that the game did not keep track of players that were taken out. Thus I could swap players in and out even though they had already played. The game kept indicating that some changes had been made and I needed to look at my lineup. However, I kept playing with no repercussions.

Overall, after playing the game a couple of times I did enjoy it. In many ways, MicroLeague Baseball is a successor to Computer Baseball. MicroLeague Baseball attempts to keep the simulation aspects of Computer Baseball while adding just a little more graphics and sound to the experience.

I'm not sure the game is entirely successful with the issues noted above, plus the graphics can be redundant after awhile. However, if you did enjoy Computer Baseball and wished for a game that was similar with more graphics, MicroLeague Baseball is definitely a worthy choice.

NEWS & NOTES

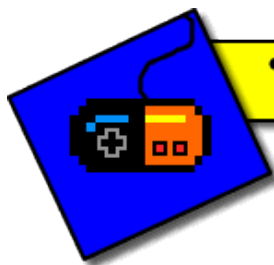
Thanks to a2central.com:

Karateka Remake Trailer: <http://a2central.com/4602/karateka-remake-official-trailer/>

Karateka, the 1980s classic is being remade for current systems by original author Jordan Mechner. Check out the link above for the announcement and two trailer videos!

Eamon #255 Announced: <http://a2central.com/4614/eamon-255-announced/>

Eamon is a long running text / adventure series and #255 was recently announced. Despite the long history of the game, I have never played it though I will make an effort for a future issue!



The Retro Junkie

by Rob Luther



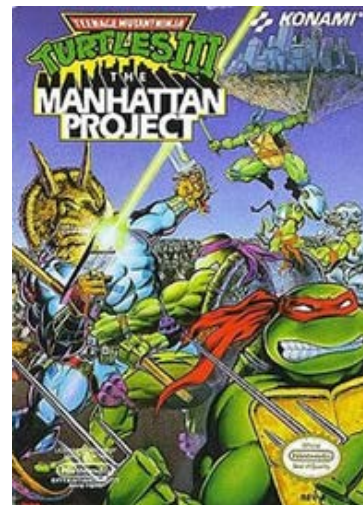
Strikes Back

TMNT III: The Manhattan Project

July 1992. Amidst the smell of pizza, birthday cake, and freshly cut grass, four legendary heroes stood upon the ledge of the pool with Super Soakers in hand. There was Chris, the leader of the gang who was Gloucester City's little league baseball MVP. There was Eddie, the kid who was so funny and laid back that I often wondered if he ever had an awkward moment in his entire life. There was Kenny, the kid who would rather play with a Rubik's cube for 12 hours than talk to a girl for 12 seconds. And then there was me, the kid who would love to be the leader, the funny guy, or the genius—a kid who always tried to blend blue, orange, and purple only to find a pallet of puke green that left much to be desired!

After a front flip, back flip, screwdriver jump, and a cannonball, we heroes plunged into the pool with a certain grace that only second graders possessed. Then, much to our chagrin, we heard Eddie's mother shout from the back yard, "Eddie, it's time to open your presents!" We waited for Chris to give us his approval, leapt out of the pool, and ran for the porch.

Eddie eagerly opened his presents: Batman socks, an American Gladiators lunchbox and thermos, Ghostbusters play sets, and the Hungry Hungry Hippos board game—which I wanted to con Eddie into setting up as soon as we were away from the parental units. Then, as Eddie began tearing the wrapping off a small rectangular box, Chris, Kenny, and I froze in our tracks. There, before our very eyes, was the game we'd all been drooling over for literally months on end—Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles III: The Manhattan Project for the Nintendo Entertainment System. I looked at my buddy Kenny with starry eyes and managed to scratch out a very faint "Cowabunga..."



Now, 20 years later, I can't help but smile when I think about those days in Eddie's attic kicking back in our beanbag chairs, chugging Slimer Hi-Cs, and saving Manhattan Island from the evil Shredder's clutches. However, I need to clarify one point before I continue. While this game is synonymous with my childhood, I didn't choose to review it for the simple sake of nostalgia. Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles III: The Manhattan Project for the Nintendo Entertainment System is, without a doubt, the most underrated game in the Ninja Turtles series. To put it another way, it's totally bodacious, dudes!

The Radical Run-Down:

Publisher: Konami of America, Inc.

Developer: Konami Corporation

Released: February, 1992

Platform: NES

Genre: Action/Side-Scrolling

The Story in a Half-Shell:

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles III: The Manhattan Project begins with the turtles catching up on their green tans on a beach in Key West, Florida—with Leo rocking the shades like only Leo can—when suddenly, the four



heroes get breaking news: Shredder has taken Manhattan Island hostage by suspending it hundreds of feet above the Hudson, Harlem, and East River! Oh, and Channel 6 news reporter April O'Neil has been kidnapped by the Shred-Head as well. ...Someone needs to keep an eye on that woman! Now, it is the turtles' daunting task to defeat Shredder and his infamous Foot Clan, rescue April O'Neil, and save the citizens of Manhattan Island before sundown. . . Hey, it's all in a day's work, right?

The Gnarly Gameplay:

The gameplay is where Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles III truly shines. Some critics argue that TMNT III is too much like its classic predecessor TMNT II: The Arcade Game, which was released two years earlier, but it's the subtle improvements in the third installment that make it a gem for the NES. For instance, now the turtles can flip enemies over their heads, which typically makes short work of the Foot Ninjas! Another improvement is the signature move that each turtle possesses. By pressing both the A and B buttons simultaneously, the turtle of your choosing will perform a special attack that will inflict significant damage on enemies. The catch, however, is that these special attacks deduct health points, so be sure to use the attacks wisely. TMNT III's graphics have also received a facelift! Vibrant shades of oceanic blue collide perfectly with the a golden grains of sand, multi-colored Foot Ninjas seem to pop out of the TV screen, and, of course, the dark red shades of Manhattan provide an eerie backdrop as the turtles make their way to Shredder's Technodrome. Yet another notable improvement lies within the level designs. From the beach of Key West to the floating Island of Manhattan, each of the eight levels seem fresh and innovative—aside from the generic "Beach" signs from stage one, but I digress! Avid turtle fans won't be disappointed with the inclusion of memorable villains too! Fans can expect to see the following cartoon and toy line villains in 8-bit goodness: Dirtbag, Groundchuck, Slash, Leatherhead, Bebop, Rocksteady, Tokka, Rahzar, Krang, Shredder, and, yes, Super Shredder—Oh, how I loved *Secret of the Ooze*!

Sweet Soundtrack:

It's incredibly challenging not to mention the absolute BEST part of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles III—the music! During the late 80s and early 90s, Konami/Ultra was prolific at composing some of the most memorable game soundtracks of all time, and TMNT III is no exception! With famous Konami composers like Yuichi Sakakura (Top Gun: The Second Mission), Tomoya Tomita (Gradius, Contra Force and Castlevania: Dracula X), and Kozo Nakamura (Zen: Intergalactic Ninja and Castlevania: Legacy of Darkness), it's no wonder that this game's music stands head and shoulders above its predecessors on the NES! This game's soundtrack is the epitome of party-surfer music blended with splashes of tension at just the right times! Okay, folks. Confession time. To this very day, every time I see a beach, I can't help but whistle TMNT III's Stage One music. ...Is that sad?



The Retro Junkie's Famous Last Words:

In 1992, the Nintendo Entertainment System's life cycle was dwindling down—and, alas, the Turtle craze was fading too. With the Sega Genesis and Super Nintendo hitting their apex of popularity, gamers often forgot that the NES was still cranking out great games. It seems that TMNT III was lost in the shuffle between the popular 1989 TMNT Arcade Game and TMNT IV which was released in late 1992. Nonetheless, from the innovative gameplay, graphics, and level design, to the unbelievably memorable music, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles III: The Manhattan Project for the NES was and still is the complete beat-'em-up package wrapped in a green bow! Something needs to be said for a game that keeps me coming back for more 20 years and counting.

**Overall, I give Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles III: The Manhattan Project for the NES
9 Cowabungas out of 10!**

Happy Holidays!



Freeware Alert

by Zachariah Nyne



Iji & Not Tetris 2

Iji

A unique platformer with an excellent story

Homepage:

<http://www.remar.se/daniel/iji.php>

Developed by: Daniel Remar

Graphics: It appears to have been done with Paint, but looks quite good. Daniel Remar's style is very distinctive.

Sound: The music varies from chip music to a very sad piano piece. The end theme also matches Iji very well.

Entertainment: Very high, no matter what way you play it.

Replayability: Very, very high. Multiple story endings, difficulties, and a vast amount of unlockable content make this game worth playing many times.



The indie gaming community is flooded with platforming games, and many of them are extremely similar. But when one stands above the crowd, it is always something that is unique or very well done. Iji happens to be both. An action platformer, Iji has very heavy RPG elements, a large array of interesting weapons, and a finely tuned story that is one of the most honest that I've ever found within any game.

Unlike almost every action game you'll ever play, the combat in Iji is almost entirely optional, while simultaneously being the single most important element within the game. It seems a bit paradoxical, but let me explain. Iji lets you play the game however you wish, with the price of changing the protagonist's personality, and ultimately the ending of the game. If you focus on combat Iji will become a ruthless killer; she becomes the opposite if you focus on doing no harm. This is emphasized in a very effective way; if you make Iji kill a foe, the first few times she will apologize and weep. Essentially, what you do in a fight determines the story in a simple, yet very effective method.

The combat in Iji is very important in another way as well. It is very entertaining, and has its own distinctive style that makes it stand out from so many other action platformers. Unlike so many of them, it isn't extremely fast paced. You have to be very deliberate in your actions, because your character is not amazingly fast. She's laden down by the weight of her weapon, and you have to consider before every action. Do you duck beneath a table and run past the foe before they see you? Or should you jump in front of them and reflect their missile, gaining EXP yet retaining your pacifist rating? Or do you focus on your cracking skill, so you can weaken or defeat your foes and develop new weapons? Or do you utilize all of your skills to get by peacefully?

Iji is a game that competes with many commercial offerings, but some people may be annoyed by its slower combat. Yet it is an experience that is definitely

worth playing, if it is for the great story of unique gameplay. Iji is a masterpiece among platforming games.

Not Tetris 2

Not just your usual Tetris clone

Homepage:

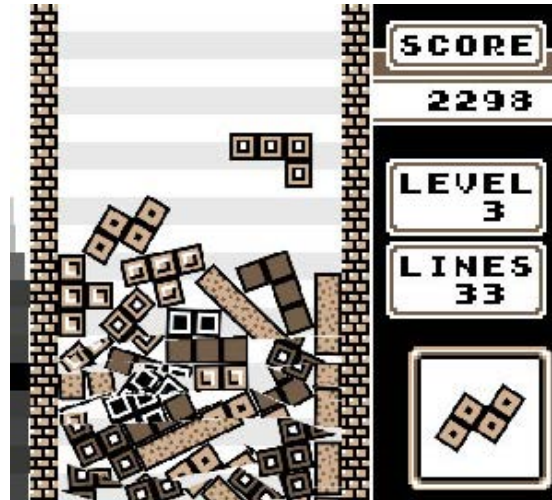
<http://stabyourself.net/nottetris2/>

Graphics: Simple and similar to the original Gameboy.

Sound: The same old songs, and a couple of bleeps.

Entertainment: Addicting, but not recommended for long play sessions.

Replayability: Good.



Ah, Tetris. One of the most beloved puzzle games ever created, it has spawned dozens of clones. Making a copy of it almost seems to be a right of passage for young programmers to cut their teeth with. Not Tetris manages to stand out from the crowd, using the mighty magic of... physics.

It really is as simple as that. The blocks drop, the player rotates them freely — occasionally fighting against their momentum — and when a row fills enough the blocks are neatly erased, leaving block slices behind. A fairly addictive setup, although it does feel quite different than the Tetris that most people love.

And that's about it. Not Tetris is a fun game, but I can't say it is for everybody. Puzzle addicts will like the fresh take on the classic game, but Not Tetris cannot compete with its namesake. But if you like Tetris, and have time on your hands, I'd say this game is for you.



I'll leave the readers of RTM something to ponder on over the Christmas holiday. The question is, why are there so many classic gamers located in the Midwest? This is just something I have picked up on through my years of playing and collecting video games. In fact, Ohio seems to put out quite a large number of prolific classic gamers, such as Tom Zjaba (who started Retrogaming Times) and Alan Hewston (who took over the magazine after Tom). Interestingly enough, I am from Southwestern Pennsylvania, not far from the Ohio border, and knew a number of classic gaming enthusiasts that did live in Ohio (such as Keith Bergman who was writing for RTM for a while and was going to swing by my house to pick up some TI-99/4A items I had stashed away in my basement). It's something to think about, maybe there's just something in the air/water there that makes people become addicted to these old games. Heck, even Twin Galaxies was started in Iowa.

Out of curiosity, I conducted a little poll over on the RTM Forums and did find that even with the small sample that the Midwest won out. Once word of the forums spread and we get more registered members, I'll have to pose the question again to see what the results are with a larger sample. So take a look around and see if you notice more Midwesterners among our ranks than people from other locales, especially take note of Ohio. In case you're curious, the Northwest got the least votes.

I would like to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! Be sure to stop by our forums (<http://www.retrogamingtimes.com/forum/YaBB.pl>) before you leave and join in the conversation. Now you no longer have to wait once a month for RTM, you can get your retrogaming fill every day.