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Retrogaming Times Monthly #106 - March 2013
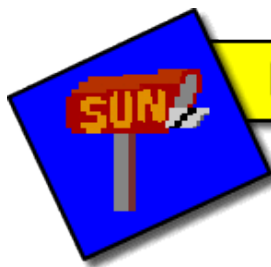
Press Fire To Begin
by Bryan Roppolo

It's March, and with Easter coming up on the 31st, David Lundin, Jr. has put together a video gaming bunnies column for you all to enjoy and help you get into the Easter spirit. It's something different that David has put together and is an interesting read.

Over in the forums the topic of explaining why your system is best came up. I remember those battles as to who had the best system. I had a TI-99/4A, so I always claimed the TI had the best graphics and especially speech synthesis (something which it was strong at). I remember going and looking at games on other systems and comparing them to the TI and arguing with other people that my system was the best. Nowadays that is not as much the case, as I realize that each system has its own strong/weak points, and even the weak points of some systems give them a certain unique charm. However, it's still fun to try and look at other systems and in the back of your mind argue why your original system is better.

So what computer or video game system did you have growing up? Did you have those classic my system is better than yours arguments with your friends? If so, I would love to hear what your arguments were for why your system was better. Feel free to leave a comment below or over on our forums at http://www.retrogamingtimes.com/forum/YaBB.pl?num=1361953613.

Retrogaming News

The Retro Junkies Launch Podcast

The Retro Junkies (Rob Luther and Landon Long) have just launched their own Podcast! Be sure to follow these classic gaming junkies on their trek through gaming history. You can subscribe to their Podcast at https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/the-retro-junkies-podcast/id607839293?mt=2 or check them out on Podomatic at http://retro-junkies.podomatic.com/. In episode one, they thank their fans and discuss the classic games that started it all for them.

EVENTS

Louisville Arcade Expo

Friday, March 8 - Sunday, March 10 (Louisville, KY)

Where and When?

- March 8 - 10, 2013,
- Fri 2p-Midnight, Sat 10a-Midnight, Sun 10a-4p
- Triple Crown Pavilion 1776 Plantside Drive Louisville, KY
- Accommodations at the Ramada Hotel 9700 Bluegrass Parkway (adjacent to the expo)
- Special show rate $69 a night! Call them at 502-491-4830
- Airport shuttle available as well, so fly in and have a good time

What?

- Over a hundred pinball and arcade machines set on free play
- Classic Consoles from the 70s, 80s and 90s
- Classic Computing including the Apple II and Commodore 64
- Kids 10 and younger are free with an adult admission

Featuring

- 2012 PAPA North American Tournament Circuit Location
- Console, Arcade, and Pinball Tournaments for all ages
- Costume Contest
- Fun for the whole family!
- Guest Speaker Roger Sharpe

See the website for additional details and current game list at http://www.arcaderx.com/.

2013 Midwest Gaming Classic

Saturday, March 23, 10:00 - 8:00PM CST | Sunday, March 24 10:00 - 5:00PM CST (Brookfield, WI)

The Midwest Gaming Classic is an all encompassing electronic gaming trade show, open to the general public featuring home video game consoles, pinball machines, arcade video games, computers, and even table top gaming. No matter what you are into now, we want you to stop in and try your hand at a little bit of everything. If you like the old school games, try some of the latest ones. If you like new games, try some of the old. If you like pinball, take the time to check out the computers. And so on. The Midwest Gaming Classic will introduce you to all aspects of electronic gaming, and you'll have a lot of fun with them all. Last year, the Midwest Gaming Classic hosted more than 275 arcade video and pinball machines, and we expect to have another great turn out this year! Visit our site above to find out more on this great event!

Cowitz Gamers for Kids 2013

Saturday, April 13 2013 (Kelso, WA)

I am happy to announce the 4rd Annual Cowlitz Gamers for Kids Charity Videogame show to help raise funds for the Children's Justice and Advocacy Center(CJAC). Over the last three years, the show has helped raise over $9,000 to the Children's Justice and Advocacy Center (CJAC) and we're convinced we can do better this year with your help!

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

The show will be on Saturday, April 13, 2013 at the THREE RIVERS MALL in Kelso, WA. THIS YEARS EVENT WILL BE IN THE SAME MALL BUILDING WITH OVER 42,00 SQ FEET! Kelso is about 1 hour north of Portland or 2 hours south of Seattle on I-5. Doors open at 10:00 AM until 5:00 PM. Admission is a suggested donation of $5 to CJAC, although we invite you to contribute more if you can!

Three Rivers Mall
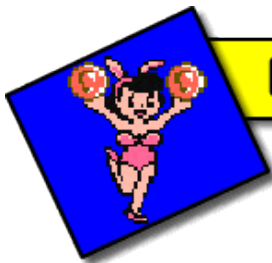351 Three Rivers Drive
Kelso, Washington 98626
360-577-5218

What can you expect?
The show will be held in THE SAME SPACE THIS YEAR; I am always looking for vendors. Like last year, it will feature classic video game vendors, a freeplay gaming arcade, a silent auction, retro videogame tournaments (with some prizes this year).

Expect a ton of good deals on classic video game merchandise including videogame systems, games, and accessories.   In addition to outside video game vendors, there will be T-shirts and other merchandise specifically made for the event that will also be sold specifically to support CJAC.

The event is child-friendly so please feel free to bring the entire family!

In late 1959, Playboy magazine Promotions Director Victor Lownes pitched an idea to Playboy founder Hugh Hefner of creating an elegant key club that would reflect the image of the magazine. Originally Hefner planned on having the club's waitresses serve drinks in scantily-clad lingerie. However Lownes' girlfriend suggested dressing the waitresses in the image of Playboy's mascot, a tuxedo wearing bunny, and created a demonstration outfit herself. While not instantly sold on the idea, Hefner came around and even eventually patented the outfit design, making it the first service uniform to be registered as such. When the Chicago Playboy Club opened in 1960 the bunnies were an instant hit. In 1962 seamstress Renée Blot was hired to further refine the bunny suit, redesigning it into a one-piece boned costume. She created the now familiar collar with bow tie as well as the shirt cuffs with cufflinks. Additionally the original oversized bunny ears were reduced to better frame the face and the fluffy tail was made larger to better complement the hostess' backside. Over time the bunny suit became very popular in Japan, so much that it lost most of its association with Playboy, instead emerging as a general symbol of glamour and sexiness. "Bunny girls," as they would become known in the Land of the Rising Sun, would mostly be associated with waitressing and casino personnel as the all purpose stand-in for a sexy uniform. Video games are no exception, especially when Japan was dominating the industry through the 1980's and 1990's. Bunny girls are in more games than one would think and for this Easter issue I thought it would be fun to showcase a few of those titles.

Casino Kid (NES)   Barker Bill's Trick Shooting (NES)

Let's start with something really obvious, no not the Dragon Quest / Dragon Warrior series, but instead an interesting little title from Sofel that I've always liked way too much. **Casino Kid** is a butchered rework of the Famicom game 100 Man Dollar Kid: Maboroshi no Teiou Hen, which translates to something like Million Dollar Kid: Lord of the Phantom. While Casino Kid was retooled into Million Dollar Kid, the games are completely different. In the Japanese version, dealers standing behind table games can usually be approached and challenged right from the start and the slot machines that line the casinos can be played as well. Additionally the Famicom version features roulette tables and occasionally you will be given the option to change a five-card draw poker game to five-card stud. Compared to the blackjack and five-card draw of the NES version there's a lot more variety in the Famicom release. The objective remains the same, to bankrupt all your opponents, but the over all game makes more sense. Patrons and staff on the casino floor are much more talkative and you have the option to converse with or attempt to challenge each person you approach. Once all available challengers have been exhausted, a plane ticket can be purchased to fly to different countries and different casinos, all of which are different and feature different people inside. As your reputation and bankroll grows, earlier casinos can be flown back to and more challengers will become available. The NES release essentially chops up the Famicom game, throws out all of the story, traveling aspects, two of the games, and then glues some of the pieces back together in a single casino. Research on the subject is difficult but it appears that the game was based on a Japanese comic series, possibly as a sequel to the manga which would explain the subtitle. While a ton

of stuff was removed from the NES version, the bunny girls were not. All the waitresses on the casino floor are clad in traditional bunny suits and for many NES gamers this was the first time seeing such in a video game.

It should be no surprise that my second favorite NES game features bunny girls paired with one of my favorite classic gaming genres, the light gun shooter. While anyone that has owned an NES has more than likely played Duck Hunt, far fewer have played its spiritual sequel, **Barker Bill's Trick Shooting**. Rather than being outdoors and shooting ducks and clay pigeons, Barker Bill's Trick Shooting features an atmosphere more reminiscent of a carnival shooting gallery. The four game modes feature a variety of targets including balloons, plates, falling objects, and gold coins as well as a variety of shooting situations to keep things fresh. The hunting dog from Duck Hunt, Barker Bill and his bunny suited assistant Trixie are all well animated and react to missed shots or perfect shooting performances. In addition to serving as hostess and assistant to Barker Bill, Trixie also throws plates in the Flying Saucers mode, dances around and holds up coin targets in her own bonus stage during Fun Follies, stands beneath objects that Bill throws into the air during another Fun Follies bonus stage, and presents the high score screen for each game mode. This is without a doubt the most polished of all the NES light gun games, if not the most polished light gun game developed for a home console outright Interestingly this game never had a Japanese release so inclusion of a bunny girl here isn't simply because a Japanese game was localized. While having a bunny girl in a non Famicom released NES game wasn't normal, it wasn't completely unique either.

Formula One: Built to Win (NES)   Popful Mail (Sega CD)

Formula One: Built to Win is another fairly obscure NES only release from 1990. While Barker Bill's Trick Shooting at least had a European release, this title was exclusive to North America. The game could be considered a forerunner to modern racing simulation games in that licenses are obtained, cars can be upgraded or replaced with money earned, and the over all goal of the game is to go from amateur racer to the top of professional motorsport. There were quite a few games like this released in Japan but this was one of the few times NES players players were able to have a similar experience. Although they don't seem to share developers or publishers, Formula One: Built to Win is incredibly similar to a Famicom only 1987 release, Taito Grand Prix: Eikou heno License. The games are so similar in fact that Formula One: Built to Win almost feels like a sequel to Taito Grand Prix, taking into account the three years of technology advancements between the two games. I've always been curious as to why these two games are so similar. The ultimate goal, if the title didn't give it away, is to rise up through the ranks of the motorsport world to become a Formula One driver and eventually Formula One World Champion. As in the real world, a Formula One driver needs to bring some substantial cash with him to get anywhere in the sport. While winning races earns money, to raise the kind of bankroll required to compete with the big boys, you're going to have to visit Casino Seta in Las Vegas. Different cities in the game feature a mix of different shops and the casino stands in for one in Las Vegas. Really it's just a mini game consisting of a slot machine but you are greeted by, what else, a bunny girl as you enter. Formula One: Built to Win must be the only driving game where you spend as much time in front of a slot machine as you do behind the wheel, since it really is the only reasonable way to build up the required money for Formula One car upgrades. Still, this is yet another criminally overlooked NES game and should be considered the pinnacle of NES racing simulations.

The Sega CD is a platform that doesn't conjure up the most endearing memories for most gamers but there were a few spectacular games that got buried beneath all the mediocrity. **Popful Mail** is one such shining example and is not only my favorite Sega CD game but my favorite game on the Sega Genesis hardware platform. Originally created for the Japan-only NEC PC-8801 computer, the game was reworked for a Mega CD release a few years later, and in 1995 localized for the Sega CD courtesy of Working Designs. Mail is a bounty hunter on the trail of Muttonhead, a notorious

criminal with a huge price on his head. Over the course of her pursuit she will pick up a pair of allies, Tatt and Gaw, and the three of them will become wrapped up in an over the top adventure. The game is a combination of an action platformer, a hack and slash, and an RPG. Movement is swift and smooth while exploring large areas and attacking enemies. The game is absolutely beautiful, everything is vibrant and colorful, the bosses are huge, there is simply so much cartoony detail packed into it. The localization follows Working Designs' usual philosophy of reworking some dialogue to be more culturally relevant to the American audience, but the game is so zany and comedic that their script fits in perfectly. The game also features animated cutscenes that are some of the best on the system as well as a ton of speech, all of it spectacularly well done as is expected of a Working Designs localization. While the characters don't build stats, they do collect gold which is then used to buy equipment upgrades or healing items. Way up at the top of the Zoth Shrine, after facing a pair of bosses back to back, there is a lone healing shop staffed by a bunny girl. It's probably not surprising but this is my favorite shop in any video game. While her wares aren't anything spectacular, the opportunity to heal and stock up on items after the previous boss encounters make this bunny girl one of the most welcome sights in the entire game.

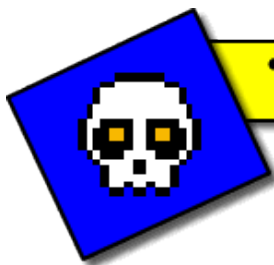Family Games (Sega Mark III)   Boxing (Game Boy)

It shouldn't be surprising to know that there are many games where the Japanese version contained bunny girls but later had them removed for the North American release. The reason why is open to debate but I'm assuming it had to do with two factors. First and foremost I'm sure it had something to do with American publishers not wanting to attract the attention of Playboy and have to pay royalties. Second, a desire not to have their games, which at the time were still primarily considered kid's entertainment by the media, be unofficially associated with an adult magazine. In my opinion this was paranoia on both accounts and obviously from the other games shown, this really didn't end up being an issue. One such game where the bunnies had their ears clipped was a entertaining little diversion developed by Compile. **Family Games** as it was known on the Japanese Sega Mark III featured pool, darts, and bingo. A bunny girl is featured on the title screen while another is featured on the options screens. The North American Sega Master System release was re-titled as Parlour Games and while the bunnies both remained, their bunny ears were removed. The European release was again re-titled, this time as Party Games, however in this version the bunny girls were able to retain their bunny ears.

Not even the handheld platforms were safe from publishers excising bunny girls from localized releases. **Boxing** is a fun little sports title that plays a bit like a handheld version of the arcade Punch-Out!! Pick a fighter, distribute attribute points between power, movement, and stamina, then head into the ring. When the fighters are apart then the entire ring is shown and at this point the game plays like a standard 8 bit boxing title. However when the fighters get close to one another, the perspective changes to that of the player in a detached first person perspective, similar to the arcade version of Punch-Out!! At the start of each round there is a closeup of a bunny girl holding up the round number card and she is also shown in the ring at the end of a fight. When Boxing was localized as Heavyweight Championship Boxing, the closeup of the bunny girl remained, however she had lost her bunny ears, cuffs, collar and bow tie. As for her appearance at the end of a fight, the North American release had her removed completely. The game mechanics were also tinkered with a little, resulting in a game that not only plays faster but opponents are more difficult to knock down which can make the fights feel drawn out. Even with the changes, the game is the perfect little distraction to kill a few minutes and is a great addition to the Game Boy library.

Suggest Games For This Column! insanedavid@classicplastic.net

Head on over to the RTM forums and let me know what you think of this column! Based upon reader feedback it may return as an annual Easter feature or possibly even more frequently. Additionally if you know of a retrogame that contains the illusive bunny girl then let me know! (A private message on the forums or direct e-mail is the best way to keep your submission under wraps until the issue goes live.) I already have a pretty big list but I'm always looking to expand it. If your suggested game is used then you will get a mention in the column that includes your submission. Surprise me with something really obscure! The only rule here is that for a game to be featured it must contain a traditional bunny girl - not just bunny ears, not some fantastical anthropomorphic female rabbit, but a human (or other worldly) woman wearing the traditional bunny suit, ears, collar and cuffs.

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

Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3

There were many classic games, starting with Pong, becoming Pac-Man. Super Mario Bros. then revolutionized the style of play, The Legend of Zelda introduced world exploring, Street Fighter II introduced a way to play with each other without waiting, and Mortal Kombat introduced the world to "M" rated games. There are many arguments about to the end of the classic gaming era: Some say the end of the NES, others say the end of the SNES, others (especially in Retrogaming Times Monthly) say 2000, when the PS2 came out. To me, there was a clear end to the classic gaming era. This was Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3, which came out in late 1995. I'll go into how the game came about, its significance, and how the gaming landscape changed in late 1996 that brought about the new era.

Mortal Kombat 3: A Revolution and a Failure

The original Mortal Kombat 3 was released in arcades in April 1995 and made it into mainstream during the summer of 1995 when school was out. Mortal Kombat 3 tried to make some changes into the fighting game culture. First of all, it got out of the Street Fighter II culture and introduced button-link combos (also called chain combos), where you pressed different buttons to get different combos. However, like all new mechanics, untested mechanics can lead to glitches, bugs, and something never seen in fighting games before: 100% combos. Sub-Zero, Kabal, and Cyber Smoke could easily pull off 70 to 100 percent combos in a hurry, bringing a very unhealthy gameplay and breaking the game into pieces. These kind of things made Mortal Kombat 3 unplayable in a competitive setting. Also, Mortal Kombat 3 omitted a few mainstays of the Mortal Kombat universe, like Scorpion ("GET OVER HERE!"), causing some of their fanbase to stay away from the game. This lead to an unfavorable environment and soon after the game got released on home consoles (which were not very good BTW), Midway developed a patch for the game, which was released around Thanksgiving 2005.

Introducing Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3

Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3 was brought into arcades around Thanksgiving of 1995. It brought a lot of badly needed updates: First of all, Scorpion returned, bringing back credibility to the Mortal Kombat storyline. Second, the button-link combos were balanced a lot better, being toned down in damage, and some gameplay mechanics were tuned. These changes kept the game healthy for a good while until the most recent years (like 2006 and later), when ultimatemk.com and the social media age broke the game and developed new 100% combos. Also, not very well known features, but important to note for later games, were 2 on 2 Kombat (no tags, Endurance style), and an 8-person tournament. There were a few notable bugs (namely the no able to combo from certain linkers on female ninjas), but overall, Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3 brought back a sense of credibility to serious players and with what turned out to be a pretty barren release schedule of 1995, brought on a decent community which survives somewhat even to today and I think credited the reboot of Mortal Kombat (9) for the PS3 and X-Box 360. Unfortunately, Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3 used a very unique board and system that was still extremely problematic to port. The SNES and Genesis ports were just as bad as MK3, the N64 Mortal Kombat Trilogy was probably the most playable, but still was missing characters and awful sound, and the PlayStation had the most characters but you had to deal with some of the worst loading times that have ever existed in gaming (try playing Shang Tsung with this), and of course, Noob Saibot broke the game in half.

Now you're wondering, why is this game the end of an era? Combined with a barren release schedule after this, I'll go into some of the reasons why.

The new 3-D Systems

With the invention of the PlayStation and the N64, gaming at home took a 3-D turn big-time around 1996. The new systems were unfriendly towards 2-D programming (one of the biggest reasons Mortal Kombat Trilogy was one of the bigger busts in history), and they introduced new styles of gameplay not seen in classic gaming. Like for example in Super Mario 64, you could move in more than two directions and walk around the entire world, despite how bad I think the game is both from a graphics and play standpoint. Sega had been developing 3-D games for a while now, including Virtua Fighter and several of its car games. Tekken was a 3-D fighter that became an early flagship exclusive for the Sony PlayStation system. The gaming world was moving towards 3-D in a hurry, and because of this, 2-D games became few and far between (that didn't mean there weren't gems though, I'll get into more of them later).

Fighting Games Adjust

With the advent of bigger RAM boards and better arcade equipment, arcade machines were able to surpass Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3. Using the Marvel Super Heroes engine, X-Men vs. Street Fighter, released in the summer of 1996, better implemented a lot of the features of Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3 and adjusted on them. First of all, button-link combos became more of a skill game than just freeze/combo and done. Second of all, more powerful RAM boards allowed for the use of 2 characters in the game at once that can be swapped in and out using a tag feature, unlike the Endurance Mode in Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3. These changes brought sweeping changes to the fighting game players, as now they were able to play their main character and learn another in the meantime, improving far more rapidly and developing a more serious fan base. The communities started slow, and exploded with the release of Marvel vs. Capcom 2 in 2000. These serious communities took over arcades compared to the generally casual fanbase of the early 1990's, as the casual bases generally trended towards home consoles. The games became more geared towards these communities as well.

X-Men vs. Street Fighter

Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3

The Expansion of M Rated Games

Some say this was bound to happen, but the Mortal Kombat series had lived on being the king of brutal, M-Rated Gaming and virtually had no competition with Nintendo and Sega clamping down on adult gaming. (I still call Mortal Kombat a horror fighting game which kind of came more true with Mortal Kombat (9) on the recent systems). Sony however did not put such restrictions on game developers, and as a result, more T and M rated games came out on the PlayStation, most notably of all, Grand Theft Auto in 1997. Grand Theft Auto's display of realistic auto theft took all of Mortal Kombat's headlines away and ushered in a market of new M-rated gameplay and newer genres that weren't so kid-friendly. This would virtually be unheard of in the 8 and 16 bit eras. They brought in a new group of gamers that weren't accustomed to the old games and had different tastes and styles than the gamers that had preceded them.

AI Development

One of the biggest problems with fighting games of the old era was the fact that the AI was either too simple or could not be beaten. This ultimately hit a breaking point with Super Street Fighter II Turbo, which literally read every command you pressed and automatically countered it. I call Super Street Fighter II Turbo one of the worst games to ever hit the marketplace because it killed almost every sense of casual fanbase that fighting games ever had (some tournament heads might disagree with this sentiment, but with a near unplayable single-player and some of the things I have heard I think this way). At least despite being nasty, the Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3 AI had exploitable things you could do

things about. But this was becoming clearly unacceptable for fighting games. This wasn't something that was fixed right away (this is a post 2000 fix), but recent fighters like Super Street Fighter IV had adjustable AI that felt more humanlike and didn't follow certain patterns or read commands nearly as brutally. Also, AI in other games became more realistic, as with Call of Duty Black Ops II, it feels like you're with a real team helping each other rather than relying on yourself to do anything. This was probably one of the slowest changes and came much later, but is important to note as if a fighting game was released in today's world with 1992 AI, it'd be blasted off the shelves (a.k.a. Mission 251 of Mortal Kombat (9)).

Closing Thoughts

Being a classic gaming person and big into fighting games, I guess all good things had to come to an end. Times change, and even as we as classic gamers struggle to accept the new players, times do change, and I think the classic era truly ended with Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3 because of the reasons above. This may be a good thing or bad thing depending on who you talk to. I turned 17/18 around this turning point (and my last act in the Classic Gaming Era was beating Blaster Master, doing it the day I got the N64), and it seems a pretty dramatic turning point between Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3, and say, X-Men vs. Street Fighter, Super Mario 64, Final Fantasy VII, or Grand Theft Auto. It just seemed games changed a lot for the reasons above (and the newer games were far far easier than their counterparts). I personally wish some things would come back from the classic era, but times do move on, sad to say. Some could say another turning point came in 2009 with achievement systems and the advent on online (I will not be covering that, it's for someone else to do). In closing, there will be more eras and different things to come, that was just the end of one age.

C64 Cult Classic: Mancopter

Released in: 1984
Published by: Datasoft
Programmer: Scott Spanburg
Musician: John A. Fitzpatrick
Players: 1 or 2 (simultaneous)
Plays like: Joust (Arcade), Balloon Trip section of Balloon Fight (NES)

What is the Premise?

The player takes control of a human-powered gyrocopter in a race against similar machines. Unusually the screen scrolls from the left, the opposite of many games. The route is unforgiving as it takes place over the sea, with mangrove swamps and oil rigs scrolling by. The main hazard is the other riders, but there are also dark clouds unleashing thunderbolts.

If the player is knocked down, they must use a fish from their reserve to call a whale. This will allow them to launch again from the whale's back. Run out of fish and it is game over, with a nasty shark swallowing the unfortunate player whole. More fish can be grabbed from the full beaks of the flying pelicans, but an empty beak means the bird will grab a fish from the player. Friendly mermaids also offer extra fish. In the mangrove swamps, the trees restrict the movement and there are more hazards – leaping squid will steal fish and the falling dodo birds will knock the player into the water. Rafts provide a short breather, but when the race resumes a shark will loom out of the water to eat the raft.

Each section of the race has a time limit, and failing to complete it in time means the end of the game. Time is extended on completing a section, where points are awarded for the number of riders passed and time remaining. There are three races to complete, each one awarding you a trophy.

What is the Gameplay Like?

Control of the copter is simple. Repeatedly pressing fire spins the rotors to gain altitude. Pressing left accelerates up to top speed, while pushing right decelerates and allows the player to manoeuvre in a limited area. This is especially important for grabbing the extra fish when available.

The main element of the gameplay is the other riders. Here is the influence from Joust - the higher of the two riders survives. You can also take out an opponent by hitting their tail rotor, but this is a riskier manoeuvre. The computer AI effectively creates a pack of riders at any one time, changing speeds and making moves. There is strategy in plotting a route through the traffic, making a quick dash to get past, and the aggressive grey copters (who home in on the player at a higher speed) make life tougher. The

swamps create a bottleneck, forcing riders through small gaps. And the storm clouds require careful timing to get past.

Is it a race game or a dodge 'em up? In two player mode different tactics come into play. The option is there to co-operate, letting a player low on fish grab them when the opportunity arises and avoiding collisions. Or you can be competitive, looking for the chance to knock down the second player and take the lead.

Why is it Special?

For the time this has some innovative ideas, launching around the same time as the Famicom game Balloon Fight with its similar Balloon Trip mode. However that games does not have the two-player element in the scrolling sections. Although at first glance it appears graphically simple, there are some nice animations and clever use of sprites (the shark sequence, the mermaids and the thunderbolts spring to mind). The backgrounds include the animated waves and two layers of cloud, the riders appearing behind the high clouds in an effective use of sprite priority. One interesting aspect of the graphics is the choice of multicolour. In common with a lot of early C64 games (Choplifter, Hard Hat Mack) it uses white and red as the sprite multicolours, the sprite colour changing to give the different riders their own colour. The short tune has an urgent pace to it, in keeping with the atmosphere. Switching off the music reveals some simple sound effects, including the swish of the rotors and the falling splash of a downed copter. A couple of jaunty jingles, for the friendly whale and the menacing shark, round out the sound department. The mixture of Joust, simple controls and a scrolling background gives the real feeling of a race, and it is a game I keep coming back to now I have discovered it. There is longevity, with three increasingly difficult races - at a choice of three difficulty settings - to complete before the animated end sequence.

What did they do next?

Scott Spanburg continued to program C64 games. His next major project was The Goonies, based on the hit film (earning him a crew credit on IMDb). This presented a series of scenes from the movie and gave the player control of two independent characters, switching between them to solve puzzles and move to safety. Scott also programmed the C64 version of Airborne Ranger for Microprose, with his face immortalised in the game. He is still in the games industry, his most recent projects including F3AR. Musician John A. Fitzpatrick provided the scores for several C64 games, including the On Field series of sports games for Activision, Datasoft's Zorro and the Superstar sports series for Mindscape. There seems to be little trace of his work in games beyond 1987. Zorro was another of the clever licenses from the company – after it turned a platformer called Visigoth into a Conan game (at the time of the Schwarzenegger films) and created the memorable Bruce Lee. Datasoft itself went bankrupt in 1987, despite the efforts of two former executives who purchased the back catalogue and renamed the company Intellicreations. This soon closed as well.

What to play next?

Ugh! by Play Byte, 1992 (C64, Amiga, PC)

You control a caveman-powered taxi, flying passengers to their required destination. Time limits, gravity, dinosaurs and the changing water level all hamper your efforts, and make sure you land gently or your passenger will complain. Not as fun as Space Taxi but worth a look for a different take on the same idea. (There is an earlier C64 game called Ugh! From Softek released back in 1983,and the two are often confused.)

Apple II Incider
by Donald Lee

Card Sharks

Good evening everyone! It's almost the end of February. Hard to believe two months of 2013 have already flown by. I had some fun snowboarding up in Lake Tahoe two weeks ago though a few stressful things have cropped up since then. I'm dealing with it and writing for RTM is a nice way to break away from things a bit!

As I was thinking about what to write, I immediately thought of a game I wanted to explore. It was an interesting game with a slightly adult theme. Alas, I couldn't seem to get that particular game running on the Virtual Apple site. Perhaps in the future!

After poking around for a few minutes, I found a simple yet fun game to review. That game is Card Sharks by Sharedata. If anyone's read my column for any length of time, you'll remember that I reviewed Wheel Of Fortune (March 2009) and Jeopardy (April 2009) in the past. Wheel Of Fortune was quite fun while I found Jeopardy moderately entertaining.

As for Card Sharks, the TV game show was simplistic but fun to watch. It's a little beyond this column to explain how Card Sharks was played. If you've never seen Card Sharks, please read about the on Wiki here:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Card_Sharks#Gameplay

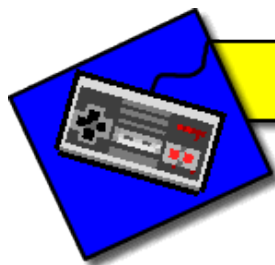Alternatively, there are reruns of the show on the GSN Network.

Playing one game of Card Sharks (since I know the show and the rules) from beginning to end was quite fast. It may have been the fastest time I've ever completed a game. Of course, Card Sharks is not an adventure game or anything like that. Card Sharks was one game that worked well with a keyboard. It was easy to use my arrow keys and the return key to make the selections. The real game came on a double sided disk. One side had the game while the other side had the questions. You had to flip the disk in real life before you could get a game started. Fortunately, since I was using the Virtual Apple site, I didn't have to actually flip the disk. Still had to click some buttons to simulate swapping disks though!

"The game stays relatively faithful to the rules of the game show but there are some exceptions noted in the Wiki entry. You can play two human players or one human / one computer. The one player option is fun though the computer AI sometimes does some weird things. In playing a second game, I had a chance to win a car by selecting one of seven cards. Just for kicks, I decided to select the same card where the first game had the car (I did not select right the first time). Interestingly enough, the car was located there again. Not sure if it's a bug but just interesting to note.

From the graphical standpoint, the graphics are colorful though there is no real animation. The screens displayed are mostly static screens. From the sound standpoint, there is only sound when you select items. Otherwise, there is no sound of the the crowd cheering or anything like that. Card Sharks is a purely graphical affair.

Sharedata did a good job with their game translations and Card Sharks is no exception. If you're a old fan of Card Sharks or looking for some quick one or two player entertainment, Card Sharks is a good bet for you.

NES'cade
by David Lundin, Jr.

Quarth

Last issue NES'cade covered a puzzle shooter, Palamedes, my favorite game in a tiny little subgenre combining puzzle games with shoot 'em ups. Although the ranks of the puzzle shooter are fairly thin they are comprised of entertaining and unique titles, something that can't be said about the larger gaming genres in whole. Konami would develop what many consider the premier puzzle shooter, combining simple gameplay with fast action, a true throwback to the early days of arcade gaming. Released to arcades in 1989, Quarth plays a little like a combination of Tetris and Space Invaders but breaks away from all other established titles to create something completely new. While relatively popular in Japan, Quarth would be mostly unknown in the states outside a domestic release of the Game Boy version and very limited arcade rework and retitle as Block Hole. The year is 199X and the delicate balance of gravity has disintegrated. The ensuing cataclysm has produced a deadly phenomenon known as a Block-Hole. This destructive force has devoured everything in its path and is heading for Earth. Instead of an alien armada or an invasion force, the enemy in Quarth is a mass of geometric blocks, indestructible through common means. In order to defend the planet a special ship is launched, guided by angels, with the power to destroy the incoming objects. By using the ship's cannon, the invading blocks can be grown to form squares or rectangles, making them self-destruct. Less than one year after the arcade release Quarth was ported to the Game Boy, Japanese MSX2 computer, and of course the Famicom. Unfortunately the Famicom release wouldn't have an NES counterpart and with the Game Boy version overlooked in the wake of the Tetris phenomenon, Quarth would end up becoming tragically forgotten outside of Japan.

Quarth is a game of many versions, even in the arcade. The visual presentation of the original Japanese version is massively stylized after the films of early French film pioneer Georges Méliès with a ship that is essentially a bullet-shaped pod with a pair of cherubs guiding it from each side. The background is made up of planets, suns, and moons with faces like something right out of a Méliès film. Even the graphics surrounding the play area resemble something like an ornate late 19th Century wind up toy, with the player's ship connected to a slide rod while the ship advances along a cogged bracket. All of this gives the game a very unique visual style that stood out from the shooters of the day. The USA arcade release, Block Hole, changes quite a few things but the core gameplay remains intact. The French science fiction rocketship is replaced with a conventional starfighter and the ornate visual clockwork flare is removed all together. Additionally the standard single player mode takes place on the left side of the split screen two player mode, allowing a second player to join in at any time. In the Japanese version once a single player game is underway it cannot be interrupted until game over. I'm guessing this is due to North American arcade operators desiring the second player slot on the machine to always be at the ready to make money. As the Famicom version of Quarth never had a release outside of Japan, we're going to be comparing it to the Japanese arcade release. The Famicom version borrows a little from both the arcade Quarth as well as Block Hole but has more similarities to the Japanese version.

The objective of Quarth is to shoot blocks with your ship's canon so that their shapes grow into squares or rectangles, which cause them to be destroyed. A completed square or rectangle will spiral off into smaller blocks, awarding points as it is eliminated. Your ship is always advancing forward, pausing only briefly when a block is being counted off the play area. Making larger squares or rectangles from multiple blocks will eliminate any in the group, including blank spaces, and award bonus points in addition to stalling your ship's forward movement for longer. There are ten stages, each comprised of ten sub stages represented as a fraction such as 4/0, 4/1, 4/2, and so on until finishing at 4/9 and continuing with 5/0 as an example. Throughout each stage a sliver block will appear from time to time. Completing it will award the player with elimination of all blocks on the screen, providing a breather to regain one's bearings. At the end of each stage a gold block will appear. Completing it will clear any remaining blocks on the screen and complete the stage. Alternatively the gold block can be saved for last but either way the stage ends with the completion of all blocks. After a brief congratulations message the next stage begins right where the previous one left off. Each stage is accompanied

by denser and more difficult to clear block patterns as well as increased speed. The arcade version also features three different two player modes but we'll get to those in a moment.

In all modes on the Famicom the player can choose between the ornate ship from Quarth or the starfighter from Block Hole, although they perform exactly the same. The single player mode on the Famicom is more or less the same as it was in the arcade. A starting stage can be selected, a nice feature that allows practice of the difficult later stages and doesn't require the entire game to be completed in one sitting. The ornate details and background graphics have been removed on the Famicom, which is disappointing but on the other hand the last thing one needs in this game is background distraction. I'm assuming that this concession was due to the color limitations of the Famicom as background graphics would have stood out too much in relation to the foreground blocks and cluttered up the play area. Aside from the more simplified graphics, the game plays exactly the same. The directional pad moves the ship to the left and right as well as increasing forward speed by pressing Up. Both the B and A buttons fire a shot and as in the arcade there is a limit to four shots on screen at a time. The forward scrolling is silky smooth and flicker free. In fact the only flicker in the game is that of the baseline above the ship but this is due to it being represented as a transparency. The objective is the same: eliminate all the blocks by forming them into squares or rectangles before they reach your ship's baseline.

Aside from the minimal graphical reworks, the differences in the Famicom version are either technical changes or enhancements. Replacing the gold and silver blocks of the arcade are four power up blocks. The target reticule will change to one of four letters when a power up block appears on the screen, each representing a different power up ability. Once the power up block is eliminated the related power up will be awarded, they are:

E - Erase. The most useful power up in the entire game. It works exactly as the silver block in the arcade version did. By completing this block the entire screen is cleared of all blocks presently in range, so the key here is to get it as close to the baseline as possible before completing it. Doing so will eliminate as much of the threat as possible and clear up many hectic situations.

S - Stop. Completing this power up block will stop the forward movement of the ship for a short time. As with Erase, this power up can be a life saver, especially on the later stages when the block formations become very dense and the forward speed much faster. Forward movement can still be achieved via the Up button while Stop is in effect. In essence Stop gives the player total control over movement while it lasts.

C - Change or "2xCount" from some sources. An enhancement power up award that causes the ship to transform for a short amount of time. While transformed all point values are doubled. This is the perfect opportunity to build up points for completing large groups as an extra ship is awarded at every 10,000 points. Basic strategy is to get a large group or series of groups ready to go, complete the power up block, then complete the prepared groups for big points.

B - Bonus. While useful to build score, this is the least useful of the power ups. Completing the power up block will award 3,000 points instantly. More points gets you closer to an extra ship and are always welcome but, especially on the higher stages, you'd really rather have an E or S over this one.

Since there is no longer a gold block at the end of each stage the objective is now to reach the end by clearing out all blocks. After each stage is completed a results screen displays a statistical breakdown of blocks eliminated within the stage. After the results screen the next stage begins. While the arcade version features a play area that was the same size throughout the entire game, the Famicom version mixes things up a bit. Some stages use the standard size play area that anyone who has played the arcade version will be familiar with. However some stages us a play area that comprises almost the entire width of the screen, based upon one of the two player modes. A wider play area means a wider spread for blocks and also a lot more area to cover with the ship. This adds quite a bit of difficulty to the game and a little more variety than the arcade original. Another technical change has to do with how completed blocks are removed from the screen. Originally they were counted off in a spiral from the lower left, heading up and around clockwise until the block was removed. The Famicom version starts in the lower left as well but the spiral heads to the right before going around anti clockwise. This may not seem like a big change but since a huge part of Quarth is planning out shots in advance, knowing what areas will open up first does make a difference. Really that is the key to Quarth, planning out your course of action in advance as you make on-the-fly judgments and changes to your plan of attack. Experienced players will learn to never sit still and that the brief moment when forward advance is stalled, while a completed group is counted off, is your chance to get to work on completing the next series of blocks. When moving

from one side of the play area to the other an opportunity to in part set up blocks for elimination, even if they are not immediately a threat, should never be passed by. After all, they'll have to be dealt with eventually and doing what you can with the time you have is how to be successful in Quarth. Another minor technical change is how the stages and sub stages are counted in fraction, being reversed in the Famicom version. For example arcade stage 4/7 would be displayed on the famicom as 7/4, extremely minor but it is a difference. Sub stages also seem to have more distance between them on the Famicom.

Arcade Original   Famicom Version

Both versions of the game feature three different two player modes with some slight changes between arcade and home. Type A in the arcade is a two player split screen version of regular Quarth. Although the screen how has two equal play areas, they are the same size as they were in the single player version. This is the mode that the single player game in Block Hole uses, except the second player side remains stationary with an "Insert Coin" message displayed and a second player can join at any time. The Famicom stand-in for this mode is "2P Change Play" which is just the regular single player mode with alternating play. Arcade Type B uses the split screen as well however play is much more competitive. Eliminated block groups are sent over to your opponent's side, serving as an interference screen at the top of the play area. In effect this makes it more difficult for your opponent to see what is approaching them. Eventually the blocks that comprise the interference screen are passed back and forth as groups are eliminated and it's not long before the competition gets fast paced and heated. This is an ingenious two player mode that I would love to see used for other puzzle games. Anyone can work around additional blocks that may be added to a stack in a game like Tetris, but this mode is equivalent to someone covering up the top of the screen with their hand, a true challenge. The equivalent to this mode on the Famicom is "2P Vs Play" which is similar but completely different at the same time. Since the Famicom would have a hard time displaying a foreground layer that would be passed back and forth over half the screen in increments, a new competitive mode was created. This mode uses a split screen similar to the arcade version's Type B with some differences. Although there is the usual automatic forward movement, there is no manual forward acceleration via the Up button. Instead, shooting into a blank area will accelerate that player's side forward. From here it's regular Quarth however completing a group composed of three or more blocks will cause your opponent's baseline to move forward one increment. The amount of movement is based on how many blocks are in a completed group of at least three, with one increment given for every block from three forward. For example a group of three gives one increment, a group of four gives two increments, a group of five gives three increments and so forth. So rather than the interference screening of the arcade version, completing groups forces your opponent closer to the top of the screen and closer to the onslaught of blocks. If your opponent was to then complete a group they would move back as you moved forward. The eventuality of dissimilar movements means that even with fairly balanced play, both players will be pulled closer and closer to the top of the screen over time.
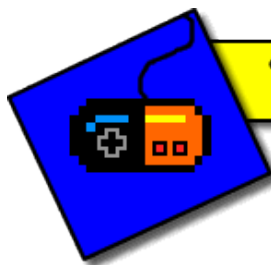
The final two player mode in the arcade version is Type C, which plays radically different than the other two player modes. Rather than being regular Quarth for two players or a competition against two players, Type C is cooperative play on a single, much larger, play area. The kicker here is that the two ships cannot move past one another and no one ship can cover the width of the entire play area. Due to this both players must work together to eliminate blocks and call shots as they advance forward. Two player cooperative modes have been attempted in quite a few puzzle games but it has never worked as well as it does here. Play isn't only frantic and demanding but amazingly complex as you begin to read your partners movements and together plan to work the blocks down. "2P Tag Match" on the Famicom version is the equivalent to arcade Type C and uses the wider play area from some of the single player stages. Gameplay is identical to the arcade cooperative mode in that both players are at the bottom of the same play area,

cannot overlap one another, and one cannot cover the entire play area on their own. This mode is a real challenge as if a block reaches the baseline that's it, game over, one chance. The challenge also makes it great fun, especially with evenly matched players.

As things are different yet similar between the arcade and Famicom versions, one surprising consistency is the music. Both games feature the same music, as in the identical arrangement, songs, everything. With so many home conversions changing, replacing, reworking or enhancing original arcade music it's amazing to find a game where so much emphasis was placed on recreating the original musical score. Of course they sound a little different due to different audio hardware but if you listen to the musical loop from the arcade version and the Famicom version back to back, it is incredible how similar they are. The music on its own is incredible, right up there with some of the best stuff ever to come out of Konami either in the arcade or on the Famicom hardware. Honestly the music sounds like it was left over from the Gradius series or Life Force, it's that good. Once a stage advances past its eighth sub stage the music picks up in tempo to alert the player that the stage is nearing its end. In the arcade version the blocks change to dark outlines at this point, a graphical quark not present on the Famicom release. Although the game gets difficult, the difficulty curve is far more welcoming than the arcade original which gets out of hand very early on. Of course this makes sense for the arcade version as the objective is to get you to cough up another quarter and continue.

I talk a lot about hidden gems and forgotten games on the NES but Quarth is the real deal in this respect. It has continued to receive releases in Japan and Europe on mobile phones, compilation releases, and even in other games as a minigame but there really hasn't been an enhanced version for quite some time. It's a shame that Quarth never received a sequel on the Super Famicom / Super Nintendo because Konami could have taken the visual style of the arcade version and really ran with it on the hardware. Every release of Quarth retains the basic gameplay and style of the original while adding new modes and enhancements. For instance, the Game Boy version features a total of six different ships and a stored power up system where special power ups are earned based upon how large a block group is. Earned power ups can then be used at the player's discretion. I suppose the nice thing about Quarth is that with the current widespread ease and availability of import retrogaming anyone can enjoy this often overlooked classic. At first it may take a few plays for your mind and reflexes to get into the groove but in no time you'll be counting your shots, filling out blocks in passing, and building up huge groups without breaking a sweat. Efficiency is rewarded, incorrect shots can be remedied with fast action, and careful planning must be balanced with spontaneous reaction. Quarth succeeds as a puzzle shooter because of how flexible it can be within a specific set of rules.

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

The Retro Junkies

by Rob Luther & Landon Long

Super Star Wars

2013. It is a period of civil war. Classic and modern Star Wars titles like Atari's home and arcade ports of Star Wars or BioWare's Knights of the Old Republic have already earned their victory with gamers. Two retro spies have managed to buy LucasArts' ultimate weapon, SUPER STAR WARS, a game that could potentially be one of the most overshadowed Star Wars games on the entire planet! Pursued by the success of well renowned Star Wars titles, Rob and Landon race home in their Landspeeders, custodians of a game that could save their people and restore hope to a forgotten gem.

...That is, if the Force is, indeed, strong with this one...

Super Star Wars:

Publisher: JVC Musical Industries, Inc.
Developer: Sculpted Software Inc. and LucasArts Entertainment Company
Released: June 1, 1992
Platform: SNES
Genre: Action

Super Star Wars Box & Nintendo Power #42

Landon's Take

A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away…

That iconic first line from the Star Wars trilogy is what sets the mood for an epic story that has captivated millions of fans worldwide (myself included). Star Wars is, by far, my favorite movie series ever. To me, it symbolizes everything we go to a movie to see: action, adventure, the traditional battle between good vs. evil, love, and most of all, that if the little guy tries hard enough, he can achieve his goal.

Rob's Take

In 1992, my lack of faith in Star Wars was disturbing.

As a matter of fact, I didn't actually see my first Star Wars film until 1996 when our neighbor played *The Empire Strikes Back* on laser disc. Sure, I had heard of Luke Skywalker, R2-D2, and the sinister antagonist Darth Vader, but I just didn't get the hype that surrounded the films. It wasn't until I watched *A New Hope* (pre-special edition, of course!) on TBS's *Dinner and a Movie* series about 12 years ago that I finally saw the magic that was and is Star Wars. At last, I had become one with the Force!

Despite knowing virtually nothing about the Star Wars films back then, I absolutely loved a little game called Super Star Wars! I remember playing this classic title at a friend's house in the early 90s, and I was blown away by the graphics, cut-scenes, gameplay, and, of course, the

What a title screen!

Let's go back to 1997; I was in middle school, and I was a huge Star Wars fan! One day at lunch while discussing Star Wars with some buddies, one of them asked me if I had ever played Super Star Wars on the SNES. To my surprise, I hadn't. I then made it a personal quest to find this game no matter what it took. I looked high and low after that day for the fabled Super Star Wars, and finally on one of my many—and I do mean MANY—attempts to find this game, I did. I think I might have paid ten dollars for it (Well worth two weeks of saving allowances!) took that bad boy home, and popped it into my SNES.

From the opening line up to the start and options screen, I was hooked. It felt like I was really watching the movies and was finally going to play them out as I had always wanted.

I pressed start and was blown away by the graphics. Luke Skywalker actually looked like Luke, not the nondescript character from the NES version of Star Wars. So, taking my blaster, Luke and I went across the desert of Tatooine. There were enemies all over—everything from birds dive-bombing me to scorpions that fired poison from their tails. It was during this overwhelming assault that I realized this game might be difficult. I marched on blasting anything that got in my way with reckless abandon. I got a blaster upgrade about halfway through the level and that made short work of all the enemies that were starting to overtake my screen. … Womp-Rats are nothing compared to an upgraded blaster!

I finally made it to the boss of the first level. It was a huge Sarlacc Pit Monster (the ugly thing that Boba Fett fell into in *Return of the Jedi*). I fired everything I had and, in the end, came up very short of destroying the boss. Then I had to start over without the blaster upgrade!

music! I also remember how incredibly challenging this game was (a certain Sandcrawler stage comes to mind!), but the intermediate cut-scenes made the hours of grinding worth it! As an eight year old kid, just a mere gaming Padawan in those days, I thought Super Star Wars was one of the most exciting games I had ever played. Of course, that was a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away…

Nice 3D level designs!

Hop into your Millennium Falcon and set your turbo boosters to Light Speed (or was it Ludicrous Speed?) to the year 2013. Now, dozens of Star Wars video game sequels, prequels, and spin-offs have been released since Super Star Wars including: Rogue Squadron, Shadows of the Empire, The Force Unleashed, and Knights of the Old Republic. The Star Wars prequel trilogy has come and gone. Disney has acquired the rights to Lucasfilm and promises to give fans a new trilogy in the near future. Indeed, it's an exciting and, perhaps, an anxious time to be a Star Wars fan! However, when it comes to the Star Wars video games, it seems that Super Star Wars is caught between two gaming eras: the arcade and Atari era of the 1980s where ports of Star Wars were well-known and renowned as classics, and the modern era with popular role playing games like Knights of the Old Republic and the MMO aptly titled The Old Republic. So, in 2013, is the Force still strong with Super Star Wars, or was I blinded all these years by the Dark Side of nostalgia?

As I started Super Star Wars for the first time in years, memories of a more civilized age washed over me, but I

Why does the Sarlacc explode when it's defeated?

…Talk about letting the wind out of your sails.

I groaned and tried five more times to kill that horrid beast. I was almost successful on a few runs, but still came up short. So, having the temper that I had at the time, I put the game up and forgot all about it. Those fantastic graphics, the best game rendition of beloved Star Wars themes, and the awesome story shoved into a sock drawer.

Let's skip ahead to the year 2013. Rob and I were talking about a game to review and Super Star Wars came up. I agreed that maybe this classic should get a second chance. So I found my old copy (Still in the sock drawer!) and popped it back into the SNES.

I was still impressed by the graphics, as they had aged fairly well for a game that came out in 1992. Luke still looked like Luke. As I watched the demo run, I noticed that the other characters in the game looked as they should; Han looked like Han, and, of course, Darth Vader was an intimidating sight to see in his 16 bit glory.

I remember having issues with the controls in this Super Star Wars when I was younger and they still plague me to this day. I'm not a big fan of the controls of this game —especially when compared to the sequels. I can recall one part on the Sandcrawler stage (Yes, I did finally beat that awful Sarlacc!) where you have to do a super jump on to a platform, and I could never get the super jump to work well. After 20 minutes of trial and error, I made it up. The controls of firing the blaster and other weapons were fine, as well as the Mode 7 stages where you are in vehicles, but I just never liked the jumping controls in this game.

The difficulty of this Super Star Wars is what stands out to me. Granted, I like a challenge, but not like this game. I played for a total of about three hours and could only make it about halfway through the Sandcrawler inside

was determined not to let nostalgia influence my review. From the very beginning, I was impressed with the art of the title screen and the iconic Star Wars music blaring through the TV. Players have the option to start the game right away or select the options mode to adjust the difficulty to easy, brave, or Jedi.

First of all, the music, graphics, and level design of Super Star Wars are absolutely stellar for an early Super Nintendo game. Super Star Wars begins with the traditional title and prologue scroll that are analogous to the films, while the game's music in stereo captures the excitement that evokes the inner Star Wars fan! Graphically, the protagonists of this game—Luke Skywalker, Han Solo, and Chewbacca—are easily identifiable. Enemies like the Jawas, Womp-Rats, Storm Troopers, Rodians, Defense Droids, and even the Trashcan-With-Legs Droids (as I like to call them!) look fantastic! The bosses are also well designed. Players can expect to see bosses like the Sarlacc Pit Monster and the Ralhar Boss Monster, along with the Maintenance Droid, Imperial Defense Droid, and Tractor Beam. Each level is beautifully crafted—whether players are in the barren desert of Tatooine, inside the close-quartered Sandcrawler, amidst the wretched hive of scum and villainy in the Mos Eisley Cantina, or aboard the cockpit of Luke's X-Wing trying to destroy the colossal Death Star!

In general, Super Star Wars follows the plot of the original Star Wars film; however, there are some creative liberties taken for the sake of better gameplay—don't worry; Darth Vader doesn't scream his drawn-out "Nooo!" in this game! After the first stage, for instance, Luke discovers a disheveled C-3PO who claims that R2-D2 has been kidnapped by Jawas. Luke then has to hop aboard his Landspeeder, slay about 15 Jawas, enter the dreaded Sandcrawler, and rescue R2. If this Jawa-slaying stage was featured in the original Star Wars film, I'm not sure how I would feel about Luke being a part of the Rebel Alliance.

stage. I think this game is one of those platformers you must become intimate with. That is, knowing all the little jumps, ducks, and slides perfectly. I think, perhaps, if I had more time to play I might do a little better, but those who are newer to adventure platforming games might want to get cozy with the game over screen. (Which I love, due to hearing Vader's breath and the theme of the Force).

The music in Super Star Wars is pretty good for 1992 SNES music. It's not going to blow your ears off like the movie's original soundtrack, but it does a great job of being recognizable with the 16-bit hardware. The tunes in this game don't seem to get stale to me and fit the stages and actions on the screen very well.

After reviving this game from the sock drawer, I have to say; I think this game is a decent platformer. It's not going to be a Mario Bros. styled game, but that's okay. For what it is, I would say Super Star Wars is a decent game with decent music that improves greatly in the following sequels.

Overall, I give Super Star Wars for the SNES
6 X-Wing Fighters of 10

We wish this droid was in the film!

Lastly, the gameplay of Super Star Wars is incredibly entertaining. Super Star Wars is essentially a run-and-gun platformer, but there are also first-person, pseudo-3D stages that change up the pace of the game. Moreover, Luke can obtain weapon upgrades like the Plasma Blaster, Heat Seeking Missiles, or the glorious Light Saber! Players will also hear intermittent voice samples from the likes of Obi Wan Kenobi: "Use the Force, Luke!" Another nice feature included in Super Star Wars is the ability to play as Luke, Han, or Chewie about halfway through the game. Overall, the controls handle very well, but there are a couple occasions where levels require precise jumps that are very hard to perform due to stiff controls. I found myself loathing the Sandcrawler stage because I would miss a platform and land all the way back at the bottom of the Sandcrawler each time. Fortunately, the controls aren't terrible, as there are only a few occasions where it affects the gameplay.

From the detailed graphics, characters, and level design to the suspenseful music, voice samples, and variety of gameplay, Super Star Wars captures the excitement and adventure of the original film very well. However, train, you must, young Padawan. You're going to need every bit of the Force to beat this one!
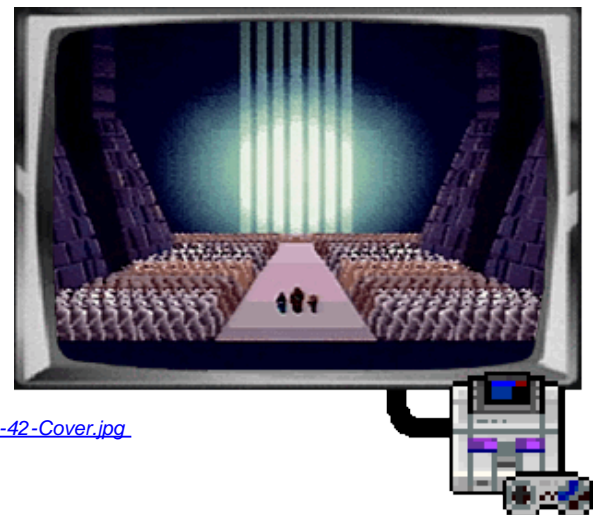
Overall, I give Super Star Wars for the SNES
9 Sarlacc Pit Monsters out of 10

Super Star Wars for the Super Nintendo Entertainment System.

Is it one shot in a million? Unfortunately not. While it's a classic platformer worthy of being praised, it's not the best Star Wars video game of the LucasArts franchise.

As Yoda would aptly say, "There is another."

7½ Death Stars out of 10!

Rob Luther and Landon Long
www.facebook.com/retrogamingjunkies

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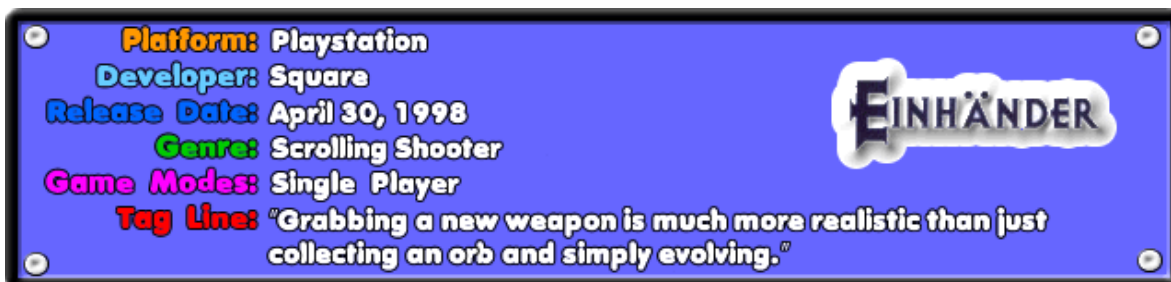*Screenshots from http://www.mobygames.com/game/snes/super-star-wars/screenshots/*

Einhänder

Platform: Playstation
Developer: Square
Release Date: April 30, 1998
Genre: Scrolling Shooter
Game Modes: Single Player
Tag Line: "Grabbing a new weapon is much more realistic than just collecting an orb and simply evolving."

EINHÄNDER

Synopsis

Einhander is the result of what happens when Square experiments with other genres out of the roleplaying field. While Square's nonrole playing genre games such as the Bushido Blade series and Chocobo Racing were met with little critical acclaim, the opposite could be said about Einhander. With Einhander, Square takes an established genre and pushes the envelope for difficulty and graphical greatness into the 3rd dimension.

Einhander is set in the future where there is a war between Earth and the Moon colony of Selene. The First Moon War resulted in most of the Earth's surface getting destroyed and thus allowing for a totalitarian regime to engulf the planet. During the game, you will play through the events of the Second Moon War where the Moon again invades the Earth in order to obtain its natural resources. Your role is to control a oneman Selene fighter called an Einhander on a kamikaze mission in order to conduct as much damage on Earth as possible before the enemies destroy you.

Almost looks like a Transformer of some kind

As you are playing through an objective, you are given new objectives via the Selene military satellite Hyperion. While you continue to progress in the level, EOS your onboard computer records and relays your flight and battle record data back to Hyperion. After an objective is complete, Hyperion compares your EOS record data to the battle record and informs you of your progress.

Gameplay

If you look past the 3D graphics the basic gameplay behind Einhander are essentially the same as all the classic scrolling shooter series such as Life Force and Gradius. You fly your ship on a set path, against massive amounts of enemies, attempting to destroy them all, and get the highest score possible. Your weapons that attach to the ship can take a couple of hits, however one direct hit to your actual ship and your Einhander is toast, which sends you back to the last acquired checkpoint. This keeps a constant amount of pressure on you, which all great shooters provide.

Einhander puts a bit of a twist on the typical shooter formula. You are basically a kamikaze pilot who is on a mission of destruction. It feels a bit more lonely out there than your typical shmup and the story just adds to the emotional involvement. It's interesting that as you progress, Hyperion gives you more intensive missions which makes the ramping up the difficulty expected. Knowing beforehand that the shit is about to hit the fan makes it acceptable when the game

to gets ridiculously hard. A minor setback with Einhander is that it was released before the addition of the analog controller to the Playstation's lineup, so you are limited to the PS1's shoddy excuse for a dpad. Luckily the digital control is very responsive and you can remap all of the buttons to fit your personal needs.

One of the best features of Einhander is its arm manipulation ability that can grab enemy weapons called Gunpods and attach them to your ship. Because you can see the possible weapons on screen, it makes grabbing a new weapon much more realistic than just collecting an orb and simply evolving. This adds a bit of strategy when playing the game. You cannot just obliterate the enemy if you want to cannibalize its weaponry, but you must disable them by attacking certain sweet spots. It's unique and fun to decide whether to blow the enemies to pieces or lay back on your mayhem and upgrade your weapons. A few of the Gunpods require specific conditions to be met in order to be unlocked which adds in even more depth to this feature.

Huge enemies with a huge presence

Another feature that adds a large amount replayability is the secret bonuses scattered at three points throughout each level. Each secret requires you to perform a certain task, such as beating a midboss a specific way or shooting a portion of the background, in order to unlock the bonus. Who doesn't like bonuses? They are just one more reason to keep coming back and getting a better score.

Graphics and Sound

Einhander is a classic 2D scrolling shooter at its finest and takes the 3D graphical capabilities of Playstation to add to the overall graphical artistry and technical quality. Everything in Einhander has an artistic animelike style to it, which didn't become popular until the next console generation. Saying that Einhander was ahead of its time is an understatement. Square used this unique graphical style to come up with many unconventional level and boss designs. The backgrounds in Einhander are a masterpiece to behold and you will never grow tired of blazing through a level. The graphical techniques may be unconventional, but that's what puts Einhander heads above all of the other Playstation games that badly show their age.

...That go down in huge flames.

Throughout the company's history, Square has always been known to put out amazing soundtracks. While it may not be up the the standard of the Final Fantasy series or the Mana series, the electronic music in Einhander fits the game perfectly. Nothing in the score is memorable per say, but each track goes with its corresponding level or boss well. Having synthesized music in the game gives Einhander a technological feel which is perfect for its futuristic setting. Voice samples and sound effects are another area where Einhander exceeds expectations. The massively loud sound effects give larger enemies a huge presence. Also, some of the bosses will taunt you in German which gives it an ominous, yet cool feel.
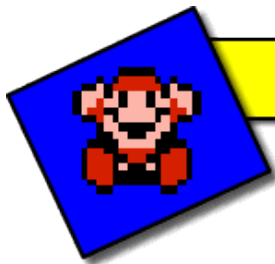
Why You Should Play It

When Square decided to release Einhander, they didn't set out to recreate the genre. Yet, they hit the floor running and applied their decades of experience programming roleplaying games to perfection in the frantic world of shmups. This has made Einhander one of the most challenging yet rewarding experiences to be had on the Playstation. Visually you may not find a nicer shooter in the fifth console generation. Einhander will run you about $50 online, but is well worth it in order to be able to experience this masterpiece first hand.

Rating = 5 Crazed Kamikaze Pilots out of 5

Game Over
by Bryan Roppolo

I hope you all have a great Spring! I remember when Spring came around it was always a good time to hit up the flea markets or thrift stores, as everyone would be doing their Spring cleaning and be getting rid of a lot of good items. I'm not sure if that is still the case, but it's one of those classic game collecting tips. You might even want to keep an eye out on eBay the next few months in case some Spring cleaning stuff shows up on there.

Next month we should have the first installments of The Gaming Diaries and Fanboyism and the 16-bit Console Wars. Both of these columns will be pretty epic and will continue through many issues. The Gaming Diaries will be penned by Rob Luther where he takes the reader step by step as he plays a new game for the first time, up first is Soul Blazer. It should be fun to sit back and read our way through Rob's first time playing this classic. You'll be able to leave comments on the article giving Rob tips as he traverses through it, maybe informing him of side quests that he's missed. In Fanboyism and the 16-bit Console Wars John Wedgeworth (Des Gamer) will be looking at the classic SNES vs. Genesis debate on which system is better and analyzing the various arguments given throughout the years. It should be interesting revisiting this classic battle and seeing what's bunk and what's fact. I look forward to it and I hope you all will as well!

Have a great Easter, and I'll see you all next month when these two epic columns begin!