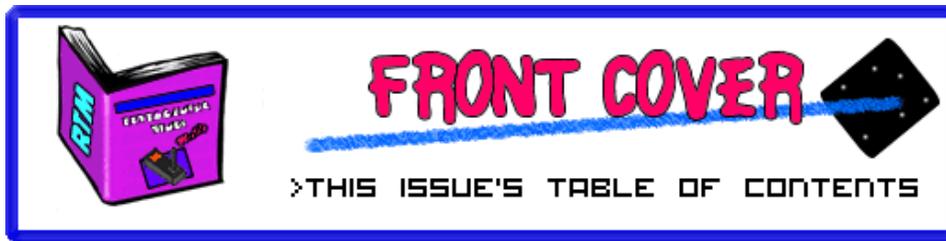




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Retrogaming Times Monthly #107 - April 2013



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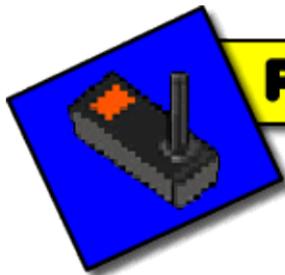
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Press Fire To Begin

by Bryan Roppolo



Welcome to what has become the Pooyan edition of RTM! It wasn't my intention for this to become the Pooyan month, but because David Lundin, Jr. wrote two great articles covering the game on the Tomy Tutor and NES, it only made sense to dedicate April to Pooyan. My experience with Pooyan is limited, however, I first found out about it while surfing the web for Tomy Tutor games. For some reason the name and the game itself intrigued me so much, that I actually at one point wanted to buy a Tutor just to play Pooyan. Sure, the game was on other systems but something about the graphics on the Tutor version seemed more fun than the other ports. However, after reading David's review, apparently it would not have been a good way to spend my money. Oh well, I always have Traffic Jam to satisfy my Tutor cravings!

As you work your way through this month's issue you will see some new columns and faces. Most of the new columnists have come via The Retro Junkies (who also write for RTM) who have a great Podcast show called The Retro Junkies Supershow, in addition to awesome video reviews. As a matter of fact, I am building their website at www.theretrojunkies.com, so be sure to stop by their site after reading this month's RTM. Even though there isn't any content on the pages yet, you can at least get a feel for who these guys are and what they are doing in the retro gaming universe. Also, their Facebook page is at <http://www.facebook.com/retrogamingjunkies>. They have over 1100 likes, which is a Facebook first from what I can tell for retro gaming!

Hope you all had a great Easter and enjoy this month's Pooyan edition of RTM!



ANNOUNCEMENTS

[Revival Studios Releases Two New Games](#)

Revival Studios is proud to present two new games! One for the Philips Videopac and Magnavox Odyssey2 consoles, called Air Assault. The other for the Commodore PET entitled Down.

Air Assault

Air Assault sees you controlling a stealth plane. Your goal is to bomb different cities while your plane flies across the sky, descending with each passing. The game is simple to control, but much strategy is needed to survive! Missing that key building will cause your plane to crash!

Game features:

- Playable on Videopac and Odyssey2 consoles
- Advanced multicolor graphics on all systems
- Enhanced Title screen on Videopac+ consoles
- Digitized speech using the Voice add-on
- Internet highscore uploading
- Online rewards system

For more information, check out the game's web page: <http://www.revival-studios.com/?page=150>

Down

The game Down is a fast-paced action/arcade game that sees the player descending into a never-ending cavern. Relying on gravity, the player has to navigate through the platforms as they move upwards. Grab the various pickups for bonus points.

The game is definitely up to par with its celebrated ZX81 counterpart and plays very well on the PET (both on 40column and 80column displays).

Game features:

- Available on Tape and as Digital Download
- Addictive arcade gameplay
- Works on all PET models (except 2001)
- Flickerfree gameplay

The game is available on cassette tape and as digital download.

For more information and screens from the game, check out <http://www.revival-studios.com/?page=151>

EVENTS

Freeplay 3

Saturday, April 6 10:00am - 5:00pm EDT | 7:00pm-12:00am movies (Chesapeake , VA)

We'll be at the Chesapeake Central Library where you can play video games on arcades, consoles, and computers in addition to pinball machines. We're hauling retro arcades out like Pac-Man, Galaga, Robotron: 2084, X-Men (4-player!), Police Trainer, Donkey Kong, Fighting Vipers, Cruis'n Exotica, and many others!

Consoles from Atari, Nintendo, Coleco, Sega, Sony, Panasonic, Microsoft, NEC & Hudson Soft, Magnavox, and dedicated Pong machines will all be there!

A computer museum reaches out with Tandy, Commodore, Apple, Atari, Texas Instruments, and more.

This year we are looking to introduce a LAN party space so bring your laptop with some fun games to play.

There will also be a demonstration of the [HYDRA: Tactical Command Simulator](#) as well as showings of Wreck-It-Ralph and WarGames. The movies are provided by the [Chesapeake Public Library](#), with the games being provided by [Southeastern Virginia Gaming](#). The movies will be presented by [Fantasma Cult Cinema Explosion](#).

[AtariMania: April Showers Bring Atari Followers](#)

Saturday, April 13, 1:00 - 9:00pm CDT (Brookfield, IL)

On the heels of the success of the Octurbofest, the VGS staff have announced their second event, AtariMania: April Showers Bring Atari Followers for April 13th, 2013 at Galloping Ghost Arcade in Brookfield, IL from 1 pm to 9 pm.

AtariMania is said to be the next evolution of the Atari Jaguar Festival (Jagfest) section at VGS, as not only will it have the Jaguar but it will also have the classics (2600 to 7800 and Lynx) plus two Atari arcades. Like Octurbofest, AtariMania will be in the Game Rooms at the arcade.

Admission to AtariMania is \$5.00 per person (this will give you access to the event only, if you want admission to both the arcade floor and AtariMania it will be \$20.00). We will be using the big screen TV's provided by the arcade, or you can bring in your own to and systems/games if so desired.

As for what you expect at the event, we will be showing classic systems and games as well some homebrews on the 2600, some rare games for the other Atari systems, and we will also have the Harmony Games High Score contest. Winner of the HSC will receive one free admission ticket to the 2013 Video Game Summit in July (the winner will be announced on the VGS website and contacted via e-mail). We will also be accepting donations at the event to help defer any extra expense at VGS as the show celebrates its tenth year.

Be sure to check out the VGS Events pages (links to both Octurbofest and AtariMania are on the VGS website) as more details develop.

[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!

[First Ever Vintage Computer Festival Southeast](#)

Saturday, April 20 - Sunday, April 21 (Roswell, GA)

A public celebration of computer history and nostalgia – will be held on Saturday & Sunday, April 20 & 21. The main mission of the Vintage Computer Festival is to promote the preservation of "obsolete" computers by offering attendees a chance to experience the technologies, people and stories that embody the remarkable tale of the computer revolution. We will educate and entertain!

A large premier exhibit will welcome each attendee as they enter the festival - The Apple Pop-Up Museum which tells the story of how a small start-up company, founded in a garage by two young friends, became the leading consumer electronics and personal computer company in the world. The exhibit displays an exclusive collection of game-changing Apple personal computers and consumer electronic products while presenting the history of the company since its founding in 1976 to the present. An Apple I, the first disk][and controller card, original apple][, original Lisa and even a Xerox Alto are among the rare artifacts to be displayed, plus much, much more.

Within the 6,000 square feet of display space that this premier exhibit occupies will be the following rooms: Pre-Apple Room, Apple I Room, apple][Room, Turmoil Years Room, No Founders Left Room, Jobs' Come Back Room, Ive's Colors Room, iPod / iPhone / iPad Room, The Timeline Lounge and Apple's Present to the Future Room.

Dozens of exhibitors will be present from all over the region, plus many from other parts of the country. A large variety of historic computers will be represented in the exhibit hall for live demonstrations by their owners. A vintage game station will be available for children and adults to play classic games on classic computer and game console systems. Two retrocomputing kit building classes will be held, plus continual, inexpensive introduction to soldering classes. In addition, many luminous speakers and special presenters are now being scheduled.

The VCFSE is hosted and produced by the Computer Museum of America and the Atlanta Historical Computing Society.

One-day adult tickets to the VCFSE are \$10, with a two-day pass for \$15. Children ages 17 and younger are admitted free when accompanied by a parent or guardian. For hours, location, and other details, please visit vintage.org/2013/southeast.

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.



Sega vs. Nintendo Throwdown

by Khelvin



Khelvin's Team

Let's say the console wars of the 90s had taken place in the Wreck it Ralph universe, and all the Characters from Sega and Nintendo fought to the death for their respected systems. The only rule I can think to invoke being there has to be an equal amount of fighters on each team, as otherwise Nintendo would just wade in en masse Xerxes style and overwhelm Sega. So let's say each side Chooses five to decide the battle to avoid bloodshed. (yes, this is the plot to Shinobi). Who would be Chosen? More importantly, which side would win, and why?



My Teams

Bowzer (Super Mario Bros.) - This guy is a tank, breaths fire, and has no real moral code to get in the way. What he lacks in intelligence he makes up in sheer muscle.

Samus (Metroid) - Come on, its SAMUS. She's a one woman army, bombs, freeze ray, missiles, spinning invincible jump...What can't this woman do?

Slippy (Star Fox) - He, like fox, has an Arwing, and is a more than competent pilot. However, unlike fox he has a fruity name, so was likely bullied all his life. This childhood rage could help him to not hesitate in a life or death situation.

Kirby (Kirby) - This floating marshmallow does it all. How could anyone deal with a guy that can just eat your best fighter and gain his powers?

Rosa (Final Fantasy 4) - Every group needs a Healer, and she's the best there is. Plus she's not your typical mage type, being able to also mix it up a bit and cast Holy on your ass for some serious damage!

Sega

Knuckles (Sonic Series) - This guy's fast like Sonic, flies like tails, and can climb and punch things like that kid at the playground you hated. All while sporting completely unnecessary dreadlocks.

Michel Jackson (Moonwalker) - This guy's one Smooth Criminal, he has magic, with the ability to force anyone into dancing themselves to death. He can transform into a badass robot, moonwalking in and out of danger, all while finding children hiding in closets...He, like Bowzer, lacks a moral compass, which might just be what this team needs.

Gong (Shinning Force) - Every team needs a healer, and it doesn't hurt if you can also fill in as a tank and punch like a mule.

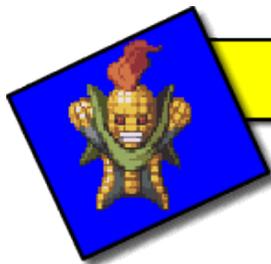
Chakan (Chakan the Forever Man) - This guy fought death himself and won. His reward? To live until all evil is eliminated. His temporary sub-mission? To eliminate the Nintendo team.

Sparkster (Rocket Knight Adventures) - Sega needed a guy in the sky, and who better than this awesome opossum? He's a rocket powered sword toting marsupial, what else is there to say?

The Battle

Nintendo puts up great early numbers with Samus killing Michel Jackson and Knuckles within the first few seconds. But Sega fires right back with a desperate attack from Sparkster, resulting in Slippy as a stain on the tarmac. Bowzer moves in to take on Chaken only to quickly realize he's way over matched, and soon has so many stab wounds he resembles a salt shaker filled with Hawaiian Punch. Samus, returning after a brief respite, fires a missile at Sparkster which is quickly dodged and instead the projectile smashes into what was Slippy. The resulting blast unfortunately knocks out Rosa, who was attempting to cast Life on him. Kirby slowly floats in set on Chaken, and easily sucks in and eats the living corpse. Meanwhile, Samus Fires not one, but instead a Volley of Missiles toward Sparkster, one clipping his jet pack...When the smoke clears, not even a pixel remains. Gong attempts to quickly revive Knuckles but is hit square in the back with an ice beam from Nintendo MVP Samus. Cheering she looks about for her only living team member, Kirby. She finds him off battlefield, chatting it up with a group of children. Before she could even question this odd behavior, Twin Swords appear from her chest; her death rattle is drowned out by the insidious laughter behind her. Standing at her back is Chaken, dressed as Michael. The two had cleverly switched clothing before the fight, knowing that other than attire, they looked exactly alike. Kirby accidentally having eaten the king of pop, had gained an ability he couldn't handle, and is arrested moments later.

Winner: Sega



Des Gamer

by John Wedgeworth



Fanboyism, And The 16-Bit Console Wars

Part 1: The "Preamble Ramble"

The 16-bit console wars were the most heated time in all of video game "debatedom". Kids these days and their PS3 vs. 360 debates don't know the first thing about the fiery passion, the vitriol, and even threats of violence that SNES vs. Genesis engendered (this is not to say that 360 vs. PS3 is not also a fascinating, and nuanced conversation.) 20 years later, the debate is still not settled. Even today, you have the fanboys eagerly ready to rally to the defense of their preferred platform. But does having a preferred platform automatically make one a fanboy? I say no. I say you only have fanboyism when you have people who just arbitrarily ascribe superiority to their platform without weighing the pros and cons, or in some cases, without even acknowledging the presence of cons in their platforms. Can we have the "bit-wars" discussion without it devolving into fanboy flame wars? I think we can, and you don't need to know so much about the hardware that you can talk about registers, and IRQs, or map out a schematic of, say, the Ricoh 5A22. That stuff is way over my head. But I think we need to have at least a functional level understanding of the hardware and software to be able to have the discussion.

If we do, we will realize first off that both the Super Nintendo, and the Sega Genesis, as well as the Turbografx16, are fantastic systems, all of which offer vastly different, but masterful takes on 16-bit affordably done (to those who are objecting on the grounds of the TG16 only having an 8-bit CPU...hold that thought). Neo Geo AES, and Neo Geo CD are 16-bit truly done, in its full splendor, without compromise, but are, were, and ever will be expensive, and niche. SNES, Genesis, and TG16 all make compromises in the realm of performance. Each have glaring weaknesses, and each disappoint in some way or another when held up against even each other, let alone the 16-bit benchmark of the Neo Geo. But consider just how much more broad and universal their success has been in one, many, or even all parts of the world than their pricey perfectionist contemporary; and all of this while offering a truly magnificent dose of 16-bit goodness, and a plethora of timeless, memorable, and magical games to play...for prices the blue-collared, and even the McJob'd could grasp in their motor-oily clutches. Also, while tense, and perhaps even dangerous at times, the bit-wars flame wars only served to make more weighty and substantial all three of these systems, their strengths, their weaknesses, and even just their very entities.



I listen to a certain retro-video gaming podcast. At one point in a particular episode, one of the hosts made an off-the-cuff comment, something to the effect of "the SNES is just better", and didn't qualify it by going into which ways SNES was and was not better. It was a pretty blanket statement. He followed it up by saying "we're probably going to get an e-mail about that", which I interpreted as "we're probably going to get an e-mail about that from "Des Gamer" (though that's not how they know me over there), since I had been the one making most of the SNES vs. Genesis noise. My thought: "Challenge Accepted." But I was busy, and it didn't get done. A week or so later, they had made some reference to fanboyism on the matter, implying, I think unintentionally, that people who push for one system over the other, or even just wanted to have the discussion are automatically fanboys (or at least that's how I took it). I won't reveal my hand just yet in which system I prefer, and why, but I have been pretty vocal about it over there. So that renewed my interest in addressing the issue. It was "challenge accepted" all over again.

You see, I didn't get the impression they were referring to me specifically, and certainly was not offended at all by the comment, but I wanted to make sure that I'm not coming off as a fanboy. Indeed, my whole M.O. here is not to "convert the world to my system" nor is it even to do battle with well informed and reasoned folk out there, whose horse is different than mine. Instead, what I'm attempting to war against is [what I perceive to be] a pervasive, arbitrary defaultish "systemism" that seems to be all over the place (not just on this particular retro-gaming program, but everywhere), most commonly, but not exclusively, a pervasive, arbitrary, defaultish "SNESism". Now, regardless of whether I am, or am not part of the pro-SNES camp (which I won't reveal yet), I feel that this debate is not nearly so simple as to allow for simple blanket statements, such as "SNES is just better", or "Genesis/TG16 is just better", for that matter. It is actually the rich complexity of the whole debate that makes it so interesting for me.

So, you see, my intent, at least, is to be "anti-fanboy."

Now, I'm certainly not suggesting that the hosts of this particular show are fanboys. Not at all, and I hope nobody will get that impression, least of all them. This show is such a wonderfully run show, that even what I feel are the rare, poorly worded gaffes like "SNES is just better." can usually be totally overlooked. The only reason I didn't just overlook it this time is because it brings up the good question of fanboyism as it relates to the 16-bit console wars. I really just wanted to do a flyover take on the fanboy issue, and now that I have, I thought I would use the occasion to finally throw down the gauntlet on the hardware superiority/inferiority of these systems, and have out with it.



That being said, first, I think we need to factor out crass subjectivism, a subjectivism which goes: "I like SNES better, therefore, SNES is better." Now, it may be true that this comparison cannot happen without at least some level of subjectivity creeping in, even if the subjectivity only comes in the form of how much weight we assign to the various objective elements. But I think we absolutely must be as objective and self-divorced as is possible. Put another way: even if an absolute objectivism is not possible, a relative objectivism certainly is, and is not only possible, but essential. I think we can (and must) at least be willing and able to stand back far enough and be objective enough that our objective analysis and subjective preference need not be the same thing (as a matter of fact, as you will see, my objective assessment and subjective preference aren't the same). Therefore, I suggest that if we're going to have this conversation, we look at the particulars in a fair and balanced way.

To that end, I propose we completely ditch the language that says "SNES/Genesis is better", or even "SNES/Genesis has better graphics", or "SNES/Genesis has better sound" as I do not think these claims can really be substantiated if meant objectively, and are more or less meaningless to the discussion if meant subjectively. It's just not that simple. Instead, I propose the following. You may wish to modify the exact wording, but I think the general positions are pretty solid:

Graphics:

SNES: "The Dazzler" - Crisper, Cleaner, Much More Colorful, Mode X Suite of Effects

Genesis: "The Fast and The Furious" - Higher Res, Bigger Sprites, More Simultaneous Sprites, Less Frequent (and intense) Slowdown, Faster Nominal Clip, More Fluid Animation

Sound:

SNES: "The Jack of All Trades" – More Diverse, More Lifelike, Often Richer, More CD-Rom like. A Sampler's Freedom of Expression.

Genesis: "The Kraftwerk Concert at the Arcade" - Crisper, Clearer, Punchier, More Dazzling, More Video-Gamey, More Arcade-like, More 1970's Avant Garde Electronica



Overall Hardware Design/Performance:

SNES: "The Gentleman's System" - More subtle, more sophisticated, more refined, more polished, more diverse. Clear picture, muffled sound. More ambitious, but more internally conflicting hardware. Spec sheet figures are higher, but were largely unrealized. Less powerful CPU.

Genesis: "The Snarly Beast" - Brutish, rough, less sophisticated, less polished, but a powerhouse. Clear sound, muffled picture. Less ambitious, but more internally complimentary hardware. Spec sheet figures are lower, but actually were realized. More powerful CPU.

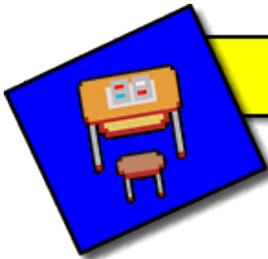
Now, for our series on Fanboyism, and the 16-bit console wars, this will be my introduction, my "preamble ramble", if you will. Next month I'll get into graphics, SNES vs. Genesis. The month after that, sound, SNES vs. Genesis, followed by overall hardware SNES vs. Genesis, and a very short thing on software to wrap up the SNES vs. Genesis considerations. Then, I'll bring the TG16 into it, and how it figures in on the dynamic set up by the resolution of SNES vs. Genesis. Next, I'll do the same thing with the Neo Geo. Although the Neo Geo is so much better that it sort of "up classes" itself out of the contest.

The thing that makes the SNES/Genesis/TG16 situation so much fun is that they are a complex weave of strengths and weaknesses. All three are the absolute best of the three at something, or multiple things, all three are the absolute worst of the three at something, or multiple things, and all three come in at the middle on the rest. The Neo Geo sort of rises above it all. It is the best of the bunch at almost everything! It's greater than or equal to the Genesis in all but one way - Genesis games could run in 320x244, or 256x244, and nominally ran in 320. Neo Geo games could run in 320x244, or 304x244 but nominally ran in only 304. It's greater than, or equal to the TG16 in all but two ways - TG16 has better RGB-to-Composite conversion, and while the majority of its games ran in only 256x224, there were a fair amount of games that ran in 336x224, or even the occasional game that ran in 512x448(i) - usually still-screen stuff, like photo based animes, and FMV on Super CD-Rom2. I don't think the highest res mode was actually used on a HuCard, but am open to correction on that point. The 336 res certainly was, at least. And it's greater than, or equal to the SNES in all but three ways - Neo Geo doesn't have any sort of mode 7 style effect, Neo Geo can't handle transparencies, and once again, the RGB-Composite issue - SNES is just slightly better. SNES could theoretically achieve resolutions of 512x448i, but suffered tremendous drawbacks when it did, and so, to the best of my knowledge, high res was never used in an actual game play context. Therefore, I don't count this theoretical advantage as an actual advantage. In every other way, the Neo Geo is greater than, or equal to the other three systems.

So, from a hardware comparison standpoint, this makes the Neo Geo the king of the hill, for sure, but it also makes discussing the Neo Geo in the context of a hardware comparison kinda boring. The only angle I can think of to make the Neo Geo interesting is to look at it in terms of how it's a best of both worlds "SNES and Genesis duel" (this is no more evident than in the sound on early AES games). So I will probably approach it from that angle. At the very end of all of this, I'll have a "clean-up" installment, where I post the spec sheets, the sales stats (if I can find more than fragmented data), and the numbers to corroborate what I'm saying. I may or may not also post objections I've received, and responses to them.

So, with all that said, let's press start on this. See you next month with **SNES vs. Genesis: Graphics!**





Retro Collecting 101

by Jeff Wittenhagen



Midwest Gaming Classic & The Changing Of The Times

So this weekend I attending Midwest Gaming Classic or MGC for the first time and overall had a great time! I have been a member of NintendoAge for almost 5 years and this is one of the many conventions that they attend as a group. Going to a convention like this with a group of people is by far the best way to go as not only do you get the convention experience, but also the camaraderie that you won't get if you attend by your lonesome. Having retro gaming parties each night into the early morning is the only way to go when attending a convention.

So the general convention was fun as there were tons of pinball and arcade machines on free play and a gaming museum where you take a look at some rare consoles that you may have never seen in person before. Lots of different groups had gaming rooms set up and there were many opportunities for new gaming experiences with great people.

From a collector standpoint it was the general consensus that the convention (re)seller rooms were a bit of a disappointment. Deals were very few and far between with everything seemingly prices 510% above internet prices. When trying to barter, the sellers would always mention that if they went down in price that they might as well just sell it on eBay, which is starting to be a bothersome pattern. Talking with some of my buddies, they said that a couple years ago the deals were amazing but beginning with last year the good prices started becoming sparse. As I picked the minds of the sellers, I frequently found out that they all constantly go to garage sales, flea markets and auctions to pick up all the games that they could find. It's no wonder why the retro gaming hobby as a whole has continually seen prices rise!



\$800 Flintstones 2 and \$1200 Bubble Bath Babes? Needless to say I didn't pull the trigger on those but many did on similar "rare" games this weekend which will only add to the prices rising.

My recommendation when visiting a convention like this and wanting to go in with a buying mood is to make sure you have a goal in mind and bring some games to trade. Don't go there looking to get common games as you are going to overpay by a ton. Rare games are going to be way overpriced 99.9% of the time and unless it's something you've been

wanting for a long time, you should pass.

I went to MGC this year looking for obscure items that I haven't come across before in the wild. I did score on quite a few items and I feel I got the most bang for my buck. It really is a changing of the times from the days you could roll into a convention and pick up \$5 complete NES games. To me that just makes the thrill of the hunt that much more exciting as this retro collecting hobby of ours is becoming competitive.

Here are some items I picked up:

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Apple II Incider

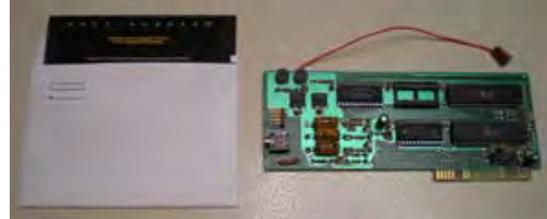
by Donald Lee



Apple II Sound And Music

Happy Easter Everyone (at least by the time you read this!). I'm in a bit of a time crunch tonight so I decided to focus on the broad subject of Apple II Sound And Music.

As I mentioned many times over the years in RTM, the 8-bit Apple II graphic and music / sound capabilities were not as robust as other systems like the Commodore 64 or Atari 800. Yet I've never really explained why. We'll leave the discussion on Apple II graphics for another day.



Apple II Mockingbird Card

In regards to the Apple II sound and music capabilities, let me borrow a quote from Wiki's entry on the Apple II (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apple_II#Sound):

The epitome of the Apple II design philosophy was the Apple II sound circuitry. Rather than having a dedicated sound-synthesis chip, the Apple II had a toggle circuit that could only emit a click through a built-in speaker or a line out jack; all other sounds (including two, three and, eventually, four-voice music and playback of audio samples and speech synthesis) were generated entirely by software that clicked the speaker at just the right times. Not for nearly a decade would an Apple II be released with a dedicated sound chip (though with six expansion slots, users could add sound functionality with various [sound cards](#)). Similar techniques were used for cassette storage: the cassette output worked the same as the speaker, and the input was a simple [zero-crossing detector](#) that served as a relatively crude (1-bit) audio digitizer. Routines in the ROM were used to encode and decode data in [frequency-shift keying](#) for the cassette.

In simplistic terms, the Apple II required software intervention to generate sound and music. Comparable machines like the Atari 800 and Commodore 64 had dedicated sound and music chips which greatly simplified the creation and playback of music and sound on their respective machines.

Because the software had to intervene to generate music and sound for the Apple II, this explained a great many things to me. When I was younger, I didn't 100% understand WHY many Apple II games did not have background music. But once you understood that the software HAD to generate the clicks to make music, things made much more sense. After all, the software had to generate the graphics, animation and other aspects of a game, that there usually wasn't much horsepower left to do music. Plus, without a dedicated chip to play music, many developers chose to include music during the beginning of the game or during intermissions between levels of games.

From a sound perspective, games were occasionally lacking as well. Rescue Raiders (Sir-Tech) is one of my favorite games of all time. BUT, the lack of sound was frustrating. The game is extremely action oriented and some sound would be a bonus.

However, many hardware manufacturers were not content to sit around. There were many pieces of hardware released to add music, sound and speech capabilities to the Apple II. Here is a list you can view courtesy of Wiki:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apple_II_sound_cards

As a long time user of the Apple II, I had never considered the purchase of a sound / music card. While I knew many friends / classmates who had Commodore 64 machines, I remained satisfied with what I had with my Apple IIe.

In fact, I was impressed with some games that had good intro music or sound / voice synthesis. Bruce Lee had good two-voice introductory and intermission music. Castle Wolfenstein and Beyond Castle Wolfenstein had great voice synthesis. A program called Electric Duet allowed the Apple II to have two voices (or channels) of music at the same time.

Listen to some samples from Apple II duet here:

<http://youtu.be/6FDtXflMBmw>



Electric Duet

However, it wasn't until Ultima V was released that I decided to invest in a sound / music card. Well, invest is a bit of a stretch. As a middle schooler around the time Ultima V came out, I convinced my parents to go to Computer Land (a now defunct chain of computer stores in the SF Bay Area) and order a Phasor sound / music card produced by Applied Engineering. Computer Land ordered it for me and I picked it up a few weeks later.

The reason I wanted the card was to hard music that Ultima V had included as part of the game. I don't regret the purchase at all. In fact, getting the Phasor card allowed me to hear some of the music (Ultima IV) and sound (Skyfox) from other games. Additionally, the Phasor had some songs included on disk that I listened to frequently.

The unfortunate thing is that not every game supported sound cards. The reality is that not every Apple II user purchased cards though there were obviously enough demand for some games to create music.

All in all, while the Apple II did lack the sound / music hardware that other machines had, some developers pushed the envelope as hard as they could with the default Apple II hardware and had some great results. In other occasions, the developers chose to design for third party Apple II sound and music cards. While the market was limited, the results were also quite amazing as well.



Gaming Studies With The Tomy Tutor

by David Lundin, Jr.



Pooyan

With the Tomy Tutor releases of Scramble, Loco-Motion, and Jungler behind us, it only makes sense that the remaining Konami arcade port would be yet another game popular in Japan, yet relatively obscure abroad. Pooyan, however, may give Scramble a run for its money in terms of recognition among non-Japanese gamers. I've always felt part of the reason the game wasn't as popular as it should have been is that the game is hard to classify; is it a shooter or is it one of the earliest examples of the escort mission in gaming? There are an awful lot of Konami arcade games from this era that have similar classification conundrums. Either way, the whole package was wrapped up in a cutesy guise that made the game look like something more akin to a kid's game or something squarely designed for a beginner. Hiding beneath that cheery and bright cloak was a very difficult game that would challenge even the most seasoned arcade patron.

The premise is simple enough: guide Mama to protect her little Pooyan from advancing wolves. Mama rides in a carriage that is raised or lowered by one of her Pooyan and she is armed with a bow and an endless supply of arrows. See, the wolves begin by descending from above, hanging onto balloons to slow their fall. If Mama shoots a balloon then the wolf will crash to the ground and be eliminated. The goal in Pooyan is to shoot down a set number of wolves in each stage. Occasionally a hunk of meat will appear at the top of the screen. Mama can grab this and use it more or less like a smartbomb. When the meat is fired, it drifts down the screen in a slow arc, causing any wolf in its path to be knocked down. If a wolf makes it to the ground, it then climbs up the tower Mama is suspended from. From that point any wolf on the tower will occasionally lean out and take a bite, making movement up and down more difficult as their touch is deadly to Mama. The wolves will also throw boulders at Mama's carriage to knock her to the ground. Every even numbered stage takes place in a different area that turns the basic gameplay on its head. Now the wolves use balloons to rise up from the bottom of the screen. Each one that makes it to the top will assist the others in pushing a large boulder. After enough wolves reach the top they will push the boulder over the cliff, squashing Mama.

I've been both an adamant defender as well as a harsh critic of the sound capabilities of the Tomy Tutor. Pooyan will be no exception. From the time the game boots up until the game is over, the same music loops endlessly. The tune isn't bad on its own, in fact it's the intro theme from the arcade version, but in no way should it be played over and over with no break. It's not just the repetition of the short tune but the blaring volume in which it is played. Imagine the little ditty that plays during the "How high can you get?" screen in the arcade Donkey Kong. Now imagine that playing endlessly throughout the entire game, at three times the volume it is usually played at. In a nutshell that's the background music in the Tutor version of Pooyan. What is truly disappointing is the rest of the audio is excellent. As the wolves climb the tower on the odd stages, and work to push the boulder on the even ones, they let out little howls. These are nearly identical in tone to the arcade version and sound appropriately cute. Mama's arrow shots sound fine and the "default Tutor crash sound" is used when Mama is knocked to the ground. I'd be lying if I said I wasn't expecting that sound to appear somewhere in the game. If the background music had a little more to it, was lower in volume similar to the music in Traffic Jam, or the game played without background music at all, the audio package would be excellent. As it stands, I'd say the total audio in Pooyan is passable at best.

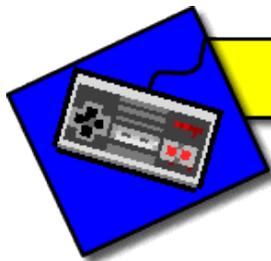


Movement couldn't be simpler with Mama's carriage moving smoothly by pressing up or down on the Joy Controllers or Joystick. Both SL and SR buttons fire an arrow or the meat. While movement is quick, accurate, and precise the same can't be said for firing. Strangely enough, regular arrow firing feels like it's crippled in some way. It's almost as if the game is too busy to check firing status when a lot is going on. It really does feel as if the program puts a higher priority on keeping object movement smooth and sacrifices keeping track of firing input in exchange. This results in often not getting response from the fire button when you need it. It has nothing to do with having too many shots on the screen or anything like that, the game simply seems too wrapped up in its own operations to pay attention to what the player is trying to do in this instance. Once a stage gets moving the action is pretty busy at all times and that's when the firing problems begin. Now the graphics are fairly nice for the platform and objects to move relatively smooth but lack detail. The wolves are really the only animated sprites but their walk animations are nice and even when descending on their balloons they have multiple animation states. These include having their feet and tails dangling as they descend, lifting their legs to glide, turning to throw rocks at Mama, and flipping over and looking knocked out when their balloons are popped. On the even numbered stages they also have nice animations as they attempt to push the large boulder over the edge. Mama on the other hand is pretty stationary and doesn't flip out of the carriage when hit like she does in the arcade. Instead the carriage simply detaches from the rope and crashes to the bottom of the screen.

As the screen is squished down from the original vertical aspect of the arcade, there's a lot less distance between the wolves starting point and their objective. The perspective change also robs the meat from being as useful as it was in the arcade since there is less vertical distance for it to cover. Additionally the wolves tend to be stacked up on top of one another much tighter than expected, making their balloons hard to hit. For the most part the wolf balloon patterns are pretty nasty with nearly every stage opening with at least one that is almost totally protected. This almost always results in at least one wolf getting past Mama right at the start and makes the game feel unfair. The rocks the wolves throw can be shot down but the firing inconsistencies make it risky. A better choice is to use the carriage's canopy as a shield, just as in the arcade version. The even numbered rock stages feel to play more fair and although the firing problems persist, the wolf patterns tend to be a little more realistic. As with most Tutor games there is a difficulty option between Amateur and Professional. The Professional setting makes the wolves throw rocks at an insane pace, making that mode virtually impossible to enjoy.

Honestly Pooyan seems a little overly ambitious for the Tomy Tutor, at least how it is presented here. With a little more fine tuning this game could have been pretty good but as it stands now I can't recommend it. The limited, difficult to dispatch wolf patterns make the game overly frustrating. Coupled with the seemingly random firing delays things only get worse. The incredibly annoying background music doesn't do much to help the overall package. More than anything though, the game has a tendency to simply feel unfair and unfair games quickly become unfun games. It's also missing a lot from the arcade version including the bonus stages, boss wolves on the rock stages, balloons that require multiple hits, interference balloons, as well as the intermission and end of level statistics screens. If this was your very first experience with Pooyan then perhaps this could be a reasonably enjoyable game but for everyone else the Tutor version simply comes up short in every respect. Jungler and Loco-Motion are awesome Tomy Tutor ports, Scramble is pretty decent and entertaining, Pooyan is just frustrating. I can really only recommend this one for collectors but as that's the majority of Tutor enthusiasts to begin with, I guess it really doesn't matter. Just the same, if you are new to the platform, this is not the cartridge to begin with.

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



NES'cade

by David Lundin, Jr.



Pooyan

Namco began their Famicom release history by utilizing their early back catalog of arcade games. An unoriginal way to get started but most of these home conversions were done well or at the very least resembled the arcade versions and were fun to play. One would assume that Konami would follow in a similar manner but unfortunately that was not the case. While Konami would go on to become a much more prolific developer on the Famicom than Namco, their success would come from original properties, developed as the hardware matured. In the greater scope of the platform this is a good thing, Konami made awesome games during the peak of the Famicom in Japan and the NES abroad, but that doesn't mean their early catalog wasn't worth revisiting. While the hardware was never given ports of early Konami arcade classics such as Scramble, Super Cobra, Loco-Motion, Roc 'N Rope or Jungler, a few other forgotten Konami originals did show up on the Famicom. Pooyan is one such game and an excellent example of why Konami should have released more of their early arcade titles on the Famicom and later the NES.

Pooyan is a fixed-screen shooter turned on its ear and then wrapped in the guise of cutesy Japanese cartoon graphics. Instead of shooting from the bottom or left of the screen, the player fires from the right side, a rarely used concept. However it's not alien invaders, asteroids, space ships, or demons that you'll be shooting, no, in Pooyan you'll be shooting at cute little wolves holding onto balloons of all things. One day in the forest, a pack of wolves stole some of Mama pig's little Pooyan and they're coming back for more. To defend her piglets Mama is armed with a bow and an endless supply of arrows. Riding in an elevator carriage, raised and lowered by larger piglets known as Buuyan, Mama is ready to put up one serious defensive. Wolves begin at the top of the screen and slowly descend while holding onto balloons. If Mama pops a balloon with an arrow then the wolf falls to the ground and is eliminated. The cunning wolves won't go down that easily as they can block arrows with shields and attack by throwing rocks, which will knock Mama to the ground if she is struck by one. Once a wolf gets to the ground it'll climb up the side of the cliff and snap at Mama as her carriage moves up and down. After clearing out all the wolves in an area, Mama then moves into the wolf's lair where the wolves ride balloons up to the top of the screen. Once enough wolves reach the top they will work together and push a boulder over onto Mama's carriage, crushing it. While the game may sound simple and look cute, Pooyan is one tough game. Three years after the arcade release in 1982 Pooyan arrived on the Famicom, developed by Konami and published by Hudson.

The famicom version opens with a unique title theme much in the style of the music from the arcade original. It's an extra touch that does well to get the player ready for the quality and attention to detail of the game that lay before them. After starting a game you are greeted with the opening intermission screen, just as in the arcade version, of a couple wolves snatching away some Pooyan and Mama chasing the rest off. The game hasn't even began proper but one can get a real feel for the level of quality on display here. The visuals, music, everything in the opening feels exactly as it did in the arcade, aside from being devoid of text. The sense of quality only becomes more apparent once the opening stage of the game comes up, as incredibly it looks nearly identical to the arcade original. Wolves stomp around atop the tree before descending with a balloon, Mama sits in her carriage with her bow at the ready, a pair of Buuyan have the carriage cable in hand and sway back and forth as the carriage moves, it looks like it's all there. Things look so good and appropriate that the few things missing here and there don't really become noticed unless you play Pooyan side by side with the arcade version. The little pig house on the bottom right of the odd numbered stages is missing in the Famicom version, as is the pig cage on the bottom left on the even numbered stages. It's purely an aesthetic part of the game and one of only a very few differences between the two versions. Intermission screens between stages are present as they were in the arcade, however as with the opening, they feature no text which means no "taken" total at the odd numbered stage intermissions. Since there's no cage for Mama to free her Pooyan from in the even numbered stages, she just walks out with them from behind the rocks on the right side after the stage is completed.

Game mechanics on the other hand are exacting. Each stage has a set number of wolves that must be eliminated to move on. Mama's carriage moves up and down the cliff side by pressing up or down on the control pad. Movement here is fast and smooth, allowing for accurate positioning to shoot arrows and to evade rocks. Both the B and A buttons fire an arrow and as with movement, firing is fast and smooth, allowing you to fire at the precise moments you need to. As in the arcade, Mama can use a hunk of meat to eliminate multiple wolves at once. The "beef bomb" as I call it, appears up at the top of the carriage path from time to time. Moving Mama to the top of the cliff will pick up the beef bomb and the next press of the fire button will shoot it. Unlike an arrow, the beef bomb travels in a downward arc and any wolf it gets near will be released from his balloon and fall to his death. The arcade documentation states that this is because once wolves see the meat they let go of their balloon to try to catch it.



On the odd numbered stages, sometimes called "Pig's House" or the "Tree Stage," if a wolf makes it safely to the bottom of the screen then they will slowly walk over to the right and climb up the ladders alongside the cliff. From there they will lean out and attempt to chomp on Mama when the carriage passes. Things can get pretty hectic once a couple wolves get by, making Mama's fate inevitable. On the even numbered stages, sometimes called "Wolf's Lair" or the "Rock Stage," wolves ride balloons upward where their primary objective is to push a giant boulder over onto Mama. The first even stage introduces a few concepts that expand the basic rules introduced in the previous stage. The biggest change is that some wolves now have balloons that require multiple hits to pop, with the balloon getting smaller with each hit, which also slows the wolf's ascent. Interference balloons are also introduced here. These are stray balloons that rise up from the bottom of the screen and serve to do nothing other than get in the way. A beef bomb that hits an interference balloon will bounce back and arc in the opposite direction toward Mama, adding an additional layer of strategy and complexity, keeping the beef bomb from becoming an all powerful weapon. Adding yet another layer of complexity are the boss wolves. The last wolf on a rock stage will be colored pink and have a flashing balloon, this is the boss wolf, sometimes referred to as the alpha wolf. The boss wolf requires multiple arrow hits to take down but he isn't immune to the taste of meat, so the beef bomb will bring him down in one shot. If the boss wolf reaches the top of the screen then five additional wolves are added to the counter, the last one being yet another boss wolf and adding yet another five wolves to the counter if he happens to slip by. The incredible thing is that this is all identical between the arcade and Famicom releases. They look the same, sound the same, feel the same, and play the same.

After the first pair of stages a bonus game is played and there are two different bonus games which alternate after each pair of levels. The first type involves a scene similar to the rock stages but instead of arrows Mama can only fire the beef bomb. There is no penalty for wolves reaching the top of the screen and the goal is to earn as many points as possible. This bonus game is exactly the same in the Famicom release as it was in the arcade original. The second bonus game involves wolves lining up on the opposite side of the screen from Mama and throwing fruit in arcing patterns which must be shot with arrows. As with the first bonus game, the objective is to score as many points as possible. The Famicom version has a different, yet very similar bonus game in which a boss wolf walks back and forth along the top of the tree stage dropping fruit. Mama must shoot the fruit for bonus points much in the way she did in the arcade fruit bonus stage.

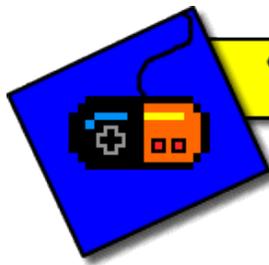
From stage three on, the wolves on the tree stages will use their defensive shields even on a clean initial shot, providing a good counterpoint to the multiple hit balloons on the rock stages. Additionally they will tend to throw rocks at Mama

far more frequently. The canopy on Mama's carriage can be used as a shield to bounce rocks away as in the arcade original. Also from stage three on, a boss wolf will walk back and forth atop the tree in every tree stage. He never comes down but he does drop fruit that acts similar to the interference balloons on the rock stages, although fruit doesn't stop the beef bomb the way interference balloons do. An important part of the strategy of Pooyan comes into play on this stage as well, that of deflected shots. If a wolf blocks an arrow with his shield the arrow doesn't simply disappear. Instead it is deflected straight down and heads for the ground. A deflected arrow isn't disabled, it can still cause damage as it drops off the screen; popping a balloon, stopping a rock or hitting a fruit on the way down. If a column of wolves is descending and you shoot low at the top one, he will deflect every shot, causing those arrows to fall down onto the balloons of the wolves below. A wolf cannot block an arrow that approaches their balloon as a deflection from directly overhead, giving Mama a great opportunity to rapid fire at a column of wolves via this special bank shot. For the stages where wolves block every initial shot anyway, you might as well put those "bad" shots to good use. The same thing goes for intentionally shooting low at wolves on the rock stages, it will cause them to deflect the shot downward, hitting anything in the arrow's path.

What always amazes me most about Pooyan on the Famicom is how Konami took a game that used a vertical aspect in the arcade, put it on regular horizontal aspect screens, yet didn't really change anything to alter the perspective - and somehow made it still work. Sure the sprites are all a little chunkier and I'm sure every little bit helps but in all honesty there's quite a bit more horizontal real estate on the Famicom version. Aside from moving the bottom of the screen up to the very edge of the ground and compacting the current stage, score and remaining wolf count, not much was really altered. In most cases this tends to completely break an arcade conversion and make the whole thing look stretched, which is why so many vertical arcade conversions move the score and statistics to the side of the screen. It's pretty incredible but if you had never played the arcade version you would never know this was originally a vertical aspect game and I still have no idea how Konami pulled it off. Even the difficulty seems pretty much on par with the original, not easier or harder but almost identical. Pooyan has always been difficult but fair and fun. On occasion there is a little flicker but nothing that detracts from gameplay and this is really only present when multiple sprites are on the same horizontal line. Pooyan often has a lot of objects moving past one another at different speeds and accomplishes this with no slowdown or other strangeness.

Here we have an arcade conversion that could easily stand on its own as a home release. The whole game plays fast and smooth with great graphics and animation that are as close to the arcade original as you could hope to get on the Famicom. The audio package is one of the most accurate I've heard on the platform, with all the music and sound effects accurate to the original and very pleasant to listen to. Honestly you will only find issues with this game if you nitpick, and I mean really nitpick, stuff like how the pulleys the carriage cable run through don't spin as the carriage moves as they did in the arcade. The superb attention to detail in presenting a game that plays and feels as it originally did is what makes Pooyan a ton of fun to play to this day. At the very core, the idea of a home conversion of an arcade game is to have a game that is as close to the arcade original as possible, to get an arcade experience at home. Pooyan is the most textbook example of that on the Famicom I've seen in a long time. It really is a shame that Pooyan wasn't more popular in the United States as this would have made an excellent early release on the NES. It does make me wonder what an NES port of Scramble, Super Cobra, Loco-Motion, Roc 'N Rope or Jungler would have been like, especially if created with the same care and polish that the Famicom version of Pooyan was created with.

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



The Retro Junkies

by Rob Luther
& Landon Long



The Retro Junkies Talk Baseball

Baseball. The American pastime has a certain charm. With each new season brings the dawning of warm weather, new beginnings, and everything that comes with sport itself—baseball cards, caps, jerseys, bubble gum, and, of course, peanuts and crackerjacks. With each new season brings fans who passionately debate ERAs, batting averages, RBIs or stolen bases. And with each new season brings little leaguers who try to emulate their favorite ball players, while others are content to pick flowers or swat mosquitos in the outfield. However, for two guys from North Carolina, baseball brings nothing but fond memories—memories of a time when father and son spent hours playing, of all things, a video game!



Rob's Baseball Memory

Ken Griffey Jr. Presents Major League Baseball



Publisher: Nintendo of America, Inc.

Developer: Software Creations, Ltd.

Released: 1994

Platform: SNES

Genre: Sports

I never thought a baseball game for the Super Nintendo would bring me and my father closer together. Truthfully, I never thought any video game would do the trick! Since he and I played Batman one night in 1990, my dad's gaming average had slumped to a measly .001, earning just one ground rule double when he played Sonic the Hedgehog for thirty seconds to make sure my Genesis was working. But that was okay though, because we shared another passion—baseball.

Long before I got into hockey, my dad and I would go to at least two or three Philadelphia Phillies games a season. It was great! We would sit in the nose-bleed section of the late great Vet. Stadium in Philly, I'd stuff my face with a pretzel or hotdog, and Dad would try his



Landon's Baseball Memory

Nolan Ryan's Baseball



Publisher: Romstar, Inc.

Developer: Affect Co., Ltd.

Released: February, 1992

Platform: SNES

Genre: Sports

With the arrival of spring there come two certain things: the first being the arrival of warm weather and longer days, and the second being the start of a new baseball season! Having played baseball since my youth—I was never very good!—I still look forward to those lazy days at the ballpark just chit-chatting with neighbors while watching America's favorite pastime. One game that captures the fun simplicity of bat hitting ball is Nolan Ryan's Baseball for the Super Nintendo.

I remember the first time I ever played this hidden gem. I was around eight years old and was absolutely dying for a game to play for my SNES. I had tried for days to get my dad to take me to the family fun center (it was kind of

best to explain to me the countless rules of the game. Sure, I had no idea what was going on most of the time, but when a 100 mph fastball was wacked 50 feet in the air, I always stood in awe with the rest of the fans! When Dad and I weren't braving the traffic to see the Phillies play, we would play catch in the backyard, host wiffle ball tournaments with our neighbor, and watch the Phillies play on TV just about every night in the early 90s. Come to think of it, video games and baseball were the MVPs of my childhood—aside from the Ninja Turtles, of course. Then, in the Christmas of 1994, both of my passions played for the same team when I was given a little game called Ken Griffey Jr. Presents Major League Baseball for the Super Nintendo! Mom had hit a grand slam that year!



Yeerrr Out!

I remember Ken Griffey Jr. Presents Major League Baseball being a pack-in with my Super Nintendo, so it was the first SNES game I played that Christmas morning. My very first impression of the game was that it was incredibly fast-paced and funny! However, I didn't get to fully appreciate the game until that Christmas evening. I played as a burly Philadelphia batter by the name of R. Balboa—who sounded so familiar!—when I struck out only to see my player face the screen and shout, "AW, COME ON!" Dad must have been cleaning the living room because he was close enough to get a chuckle out of my strikeout.

"You stink, Bobby Boy!" he jeered at me. Then, he plopped on the sofa and watched my next at bat. As soon as the pitcher wound up, I swung way too early. "Strike One!" the Ump cried in comedic fashion! I tried to focus, hoping to actually watch the pitch this time. The pitcher wound up and hurled a fastball right down the plate. I swung too late. "Steerriikke Two!" Dad laughed. Two strikes, two outs, and—for the sake of storytelling—it was the bottom of the 9th! I didn't want to let Dad down. I focused, determined to knock this one out of the park! The pitcher wound up. He threw. I swung. ...And I

like our local Blockbuster seeing as how the nearest Blockbuster was about 100 miles away) to rent a game. Finally, on Saturday evening, he relented and we were on our way to the family fun center. When we arrived, however, many of the SNES games had already been checked out. To say I was a bit miffed by this is an understatement. My dad knowing the owner of the little video rental store asked him if he had anything good that hadn't been checked out for the weekend. The owner said, "Yeah, I got this new game that came in off the truck today. Nolan Ryan's Baseball." After about a millisecond of thought on the subject I said, "Yes!"



Up at bat

My father and I rented the game and some movies for the family to watch and left. When I got home I popped the cart into my SNES and watched the intro screen. It starts with the sound of a bat cracking and a pretty good picture of Nolan Ryan winding up before a pitch. Then the music changed and it went to the gameplay of the actual game. After a second of just watching my eyes were treated to a site I had never seen in a video game before: the cut scene. I watched as players would hit almost impossible to catch balls to the fielders and right before the fielder would catch it a cut scene of the fielder doing a leaping or diving catch would be shown. To eight year old me, this was almost like watching a cartoon play baseball in real time!

My dad saw this and said, "Wow! That looks really fun! Can two players play?" We soon found out that two players could indeed go head to head. Since the game did not have the MLB license all the teams were generic with players that had names like Biff, Fred, Bob, and of course Nolan. So we picked our teams. I went with Team X while my dad picked Team M. When the announcer said, "Play Ball!" after picking our teams we started. My dad was amazed at how easy the controls were. You held the swing button to swing the bat, while tapping the same button to bunt. The view for both batting and

missed... “You’re out!” The ump shouted. I was devastated. However, my batter then proceeded to crack his bat over his thigh which got a huge roar from Dad. “Hey, let me have a whack at the next game!” he said with a smile.

After about five minutes of me explaining the controls to him, Dad was the one teaching me a thing or two about the game. He informed me about batting averages, RBIs, ERAs, and how to steal bases. He even hit a home run late in the game! To be honest, I can’t remember if we won or not, but that didn’t matter to me. It was just great to hang out with my dad that Christmas night.



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Ken Griffey Jr. Presents Major League Baseball is a very unique and underrated game. Developed by Software Creations and published by Nintendo in March of 1994, this game has a Major League Baseball license but not a Major League Baseball Players Association license—which means that while the teams and stadiums are professional, the players themselves are fictional. Fortunately, the game has a clever way around this limitation. It includes players with virtually identical statistics in comparison to the pros from the 1993 season. Moreover, the players’ names can be customized depending on your personal preference!

...But why would you ever want to change their names, anyway? Each team includes player names that are just downright comical! The Detroit Tigers, for instance, include players who also happen to be Motown singers A. Franklin, G. Knight, and R. Smokey! The Milwaukee Brewers have some pitchers that seem super suspicious, as well: P. Parker, C. Kent, and B. Wayne. Granted, I may be a little biased, but my favorite ballplayers belong to the Philadelphia Phillies. You can step up to the plate as both A. Creed or R. Balboa! “Ey, yo, Adrian! I did it!”

Aside from being unique and comedic, Ken Griffey Jr.

pitching was a behind home plate. Pitching was easy, you had the pitch button and could aim your pitches left or right with the control pad and determine the velocity with the up button (for slow pitches) and down button (for fastballs). Fielding was just a matter of moving your player to the ball and pressing the throw button and the directional pad (up for second base, left for third, right for first, down for home, and just pressing throw would get the ball back to the pitcher).

After thirty minutes, my dad and I had a real barn burner going with the score 0-0 going into the 6th inning. I got ready, threw the pitch, and WHAM! Dad had just belted a home run off of me. The cut scene that followed was humiliation to me and triumph to Dad. The batter ran the bases while pumping his fist to the cheering crowd. With a runner on base, that gave Dad a 2-0 lead on me. The game continued like that until the 8th inning. Dad had lost control of a curve ball and hit my batter with the ball. My next batter came up, and, as if by command, he hit a home run. I got the little cut scene of the fist-pumping batter rounding the bases. After the scene, my dad, being the evil genius he is, called time and switched pitchers. This blew me away that a SNES game would give you a full roster of relief guys, their stats, and how warmed up they were, and if they were ready to go or not. Sending a pitcher out that wasn’t warmed up could be just as bad as if you left the old pitcher in. This gave the game strategy and depth that I hadn’t noticed until this point



Check out those batting averages

After the pitching change in the eighth inning, we continued to play on. The game finally ended in the eleventh inning after I had used up my closing pitchers, who were all throwing very slow pitches by this point. My dad hit a homer off of me and won the game 3-2. After celebrating his victory Dad told me to practice up that evening and we would play again the next day. We played three more games that next day with him winning that series 2-1.

Presents Major League Baseball also provides loads of features and gameplay that make it a solid baseball game for the SNES. Players can choose practically any professional stadium in which to play. Moreover, the game allows for three different types of seasons consisting of 26, 78, or 162 games in order play in the 1993 World Series.

From the unique features, simplicity, and all around fun gameplay, it's hard to find a single glaring flaw in Ken Griffey Jr. Presents Major League Baseball—though I can understand why serious baseball fans might not enjoy the over-the-top, comedic gameplay. For me, fortunately, this game was and is an absolute blast that made for one unforgettable Christmas memory.



Overall, I give Ken Griffey Jr. Presents Major League Baseball for the Super Nintendo Entertainment System

9 Broken Bats Out of 10!

Nolan Ryan's Baseball for the SNES is, to me, what a baseball game should be. It's easy to pick up, fun to play and difficult to master. It wasn't the most graphically realistic baseball game back then—the players look like little league players—but it is a great baseball game nonetheless. The controls are fairly responsive, the pitching, fielding, and batting interfaces are intuitive after a couple of tries, and the cut scenes add that extra little pizzazz to make Nolan Ryan's Baseball one of my all-time favorite baseball games from the 8 and 16 bit era.



Overall, I give Nolan Ryan's Baseball for the Super Nintendo Entertainment System

9 Fastballs Out of 10!

Rob Luther and Landon Long

www.facebook.com/retrogamingjunkies

Image Credits:

Nolan Ryan Box image from http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/thumb/6/65/Nolan_Ryan%27s_Baseball.jpg/220px-Nolan_Ryan%27s_Baseball.jpg

Ken Griffey Box image from <http://www.mobygames.com/game/snes/ken-griffey-jr-presents-major-league-baseball/screenshots/>

Screenshots from <http://www.mobygames.com/game/snes/nolan-ryans-baseball-/screenshots/gameShotId.492939/>, <http://www.mobygames.com/images/shots/1/492956-nolan-ryan-s-baseball-snes-screenshot-league-leaders.png>, and <http://www.mobygames.com/game/snes/ken-griffey-jr-presents-major-league-baseball/screenshots/>

Nintendo Power cover from http://video-games.wikia.com/wiki/Nintendo_Power_59:_Ken_Griffey_Jr._Presents_Major_League_Baseball

Team Logos from <http://www.uni-watch.com/2009/09/10/what-you-d-prefer-that-they-use-a-puck/> and <http://www.dailymlbpredictions.com/2013-nl-east-predictions-atlanta-braves-finish-first/>



More 64!

by Andrew Fisher



C64 Cult Classic: Card Sharks

Reading Donald Lee's review of the Apple II game Card Sharks in [RTM #106](#) served to remind me of a great C64 game of the same title. (There is a C64 version of that Apple game, based on the TV show, as well). We are used to seeing poker apps and online casinos with virtual opponents, but here is a look back at a game that was doing this years ago...

Released in: 1988

Published by: Accolade

Programmer: Mike Lorenzen

Artists: Mimi Doggett, Richard Antaki

Musician: Ed Bogas

Players: 1 player only

What is the Premise?

Card Sharks gives you the chance to play one of three different card games - poker, blackjack and Hearts - against a choice of six different computer opponents. The twist is that three are based on famous political figures from the 1980s. They are Maggie (Thatcher), Ronnie (Reagan) and Gorb (Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev). The very downbeat Milton, the posh Lady (Vanderbilt) and Italian stereotype Luigi round out the character list.

The game is viewed as if the player were at a card table, the three opponents (or two opponents and the blackjack dealer) sitting on the other side. The player's hand and chips are displayed at the bottom of the screen.



What is the Gameplay Like?

The first thing to choose from the title screen is the game. Poker gives the additional choice of three variants - 5 card draw, 7 card stud and Hold 'Em. Hearts is played to a set number of points, the aim being to get the lowest score by avoid winning tricks with hearts or the dreaded Queen of Spades in them. Blackjack is played to standard casino rules with either 1 or 4 decks (for all you card counters out there).

Everything about the game can be controlled with the joystick, the alternative being the function keys. Holding the fire button puts the game into fast mode, speeding up the dealing and shuffling of cards. Menus are clear and precise, although there is no undo option. You can quit at certain points in each game, either starting a new hand of the new game or going back to select another type of game.

What makes it Special?

The animated characters are the heart of the game, from their downbeat speech bubbles when things go wrong to the changing facial expressions.

The game has much in common with Accolade's other releases for the C64, in that it uses the high-resolution bitmap mode to give detailed characters. Hardball, Law of the West and Psi-5 Trading Company were also drawn by Mimi Doggett, and all have the same high quality animation in high-res. In emulation the colours appear sharper and the edge of blocks more clearly defined, but on a TV the graphics work better. Although the speech bubbles can become repetitive, they do help the player gauge the state of play.



Music was created by Ed Bogas, perhaps most famous for his work on the Peanuts and Garfield TV shows, and film scores including Fritz the Cat and One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest. Although they are only short jingles, combined with the sounds of shuffling cards it all works well.

As for the games themselves, the straightforward menus and graphical display of the cards and chips make them easy to follow. Although there is no difficulty level as such, all the opponents can play a strong hand. Who knows, with a bit of practice on the C64 you could hit the casino - either real or virtual - and play like a real card shark.

What did they do next?

Accolade had been formed by Bob Whitehead and Alan Miller leaving Activision. Accolade was supposedly chosen as the name because it would appear before Activision in an alphabetic listing, much as Activision came before Atari. (The same logic was used for Acclaim and then Absolute, both formed by ex-Activision staff). Accolade reverse-engineered the Sega Genesis (Mega Drive) hardware and began making their own cartridges, only to be hit by a lawsuit from Sega. The settlement saw Accolade become an official licensee, producing games such as Bubsy the Bobcat and Test Drive for consoles. Test Drive was the company's biggest and longest running series, in part leading to a decision to concentrate on sports and racing games. The company would be snapped up by Infogrames during its late 1990s spending spree, the assets now part of the modern Atari conglomerate.



What to play next?

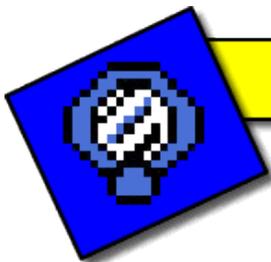
The Complete Home Entertainment Centre, CDS (C64)

A total of six different card and board games make up this set from CDS, most famous for the Colossus Chess games. The 4.0 version is included here, with its optional isometric 3D display of the board. You can also play Mah Jong, Bridge, Dominoes and the Wordsearch game. But this is recommended here on the basis of Video Card Arcade, which includes Poker Royal, Twenty One (a variant on Blackjack) and High Low (guess if the next card in the sequence is higher or lower). Good value at its release, all six games are well presented and offer plenty of options.

Alternatively, check out Psi-5 Trading Company for more of Mike Lorenzon and Mimi Doggett. This brilliant game allows you to pick a crew (with several applicants for each "station", either human, alien or robot) and then try to carry a cargo through a dangerous area of space. As the situation gets more desperate, the crew will start to become stressed and panic, all captured in great high-res animation. Should your vessel become stranded in space from damage, you have to repair things quickly or lose cargo to the looters. The



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Dual Perspective

by James Sorge



Q*Bert (Arcade)

Hello, and this is James Sorge back with Dual Perspective, the column that reviews games from both the playing and the World Record Perspectives. This month, the victim is “Q-Bert”, the arcade game that is still remembered today and had a cameo appearance in “Wreck-it Ralph.”

Graphics: 9/10

Good graphics for back in the day, and it still stands up today. It looked better than a lot of NES games for the longest of time.

Sound: 6/10

Not much to talk about. A few sound effects and that's it, doesn't add or detract.

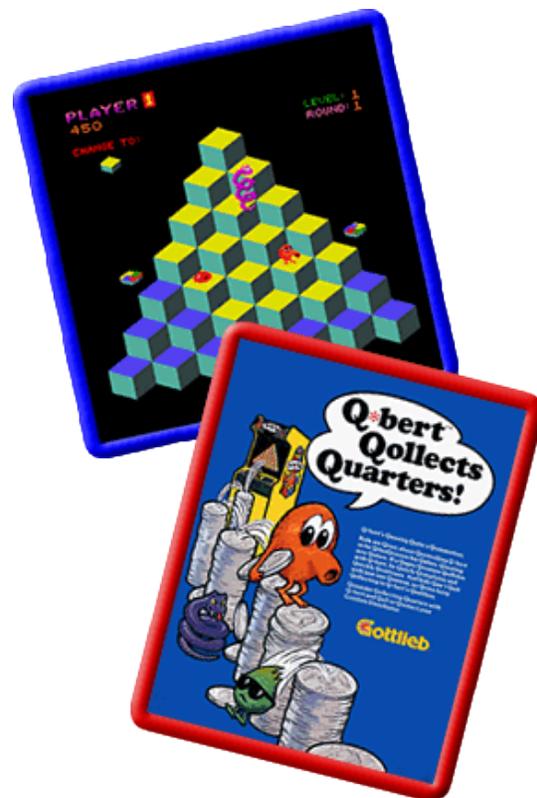
Difficulty: 6/10

I got through level 9 when I was an 8 year old kid, so the game isn't horribly difficult if you practice. Beating the World Record is another matter though.

Replay Factor: 8/10

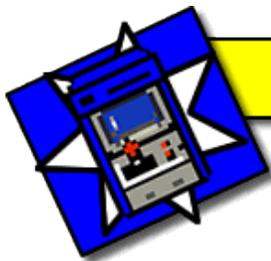
You'll play this again and again. If you're not going for the World Record though, you may not play the last level to infinity, where it repeats over and over again. Also, seeing the beeped out curse word is kind of fun.

 **The World Record Perspective:**
The sheer definition of “insanity gaming”, and the type that brings out time limit discussion and discussions about whether video gamers are sane people. **George Leutz** broke the record playing for **84 hours and 48 minutes on a single credit** gathering a score of **37,163,180 points**. I will not judge in this article on this discussion, but you can make your own decisions. Congratulations George on breaking the record!



The Penguin Says:

“Play this for fun, don't play this for the World Record, unless you're deciding to set a feat (and maybe hurt yourself at the same time). Overall I give Q*Bert a **9/10** with a world record potential of **0/5** (George Leutz has this one locked up pretty tight, but still beatable if you are up for the extreme challenge)”



MAME Reviews

by Mark Sabbatini



Lost Tomb

If an arcade game is programmed to steal players' quarters but nobody plays it, is it theft?

One of the most dreaded phrases in gaming these days is "downloadable content," as corporate trolls continue their pay-instead-of-play quest. It's a mind-frying transition from video gaming's teething stages 30 years ago, when a well-known magazine columnist scoffed at the idea of RPG-like games in arcades ("defend yourself with this mighty shield for 25 cents. Offer me not less, intrepid adventurer.") Like much about today's society, a once-satirical concept has become the norm.

But gamers are at least ostensibly getting something for their microtransactions, IAPs or whatever, even if it's just a new hair color for a character or restoration of a long-standard feature that's now an "enhancement." The times when players see their money disappear due to a host's incompetence or malfeasance (Google "The War Z" for an entertaining recent example, if you're not familiar with it) are documented widely and loudly through all of cyberspace.

The Dreamcast was reportedly the first to officially offer (a.k.a. extort) add-on purchases in 1998, although I'm pretty sure I've discovered an unofficial and completely fraudulent "extra" that debuted in arcades 16 years earlier. OK, maybe it was intended more as a joke than a shakedown. But considering we live in a society where bags of peanuts warn "package contains nuts" – and let's not even get started about the ways people are clueless about CPUs – surely a few surly suckers were victimized.

But in the MAME era it's not just possible to have a larceny-free experience with what's a pretty cool game, but to turn the tables on that evil "insert coin" message thanks to a couple of other features the programmers included.

Lost Tomb, a 1982 game by Stern Electronics, appears at first glance to be something of an early dungeon explorer with an emphasis on shooting. But gain any proficiency and the exploration/strategy element is pretty much blotted from consciousness in lieu of kill-or-be-killed in what's essentially a more challenging (if less interesting) knockoff of Robotron. I've long declared Robotron to be the best game of all time, and thus even second-tier relatives such as Black Widow and Smash TV are fine games in themselves, so ranking Lost Tomb to that category is by no means a bad thing.

The main differences: Lost Tomb lacks the diversity of enemies and waves that give Robotron so much of its appeal, but the action takes place on a series of single-screen mazes that player needs to navigate while trying to survive.

It might not even be fair to accuse Stern of plagiarism since they're the company that brought us Berserk. Lost Tomb is arguably an amped-up version of the concept (not to mention both games debuted the same year). Like Robotron, Lost Tomb uses dual joysticks for move and fire controls, but one-ups Williams' classic by adding a button that triggers an Indiana Jones-cailber whip which knocks down walls and any creatures in the immediate vicinity. Alas, you only get three whips to start (do they self-destruct or something?), but more can be obtained along the way.

This, however, is where the scam comes in, because the attract mode features a screen announcing "and now a word



from our sponsor." The machine then makes the tantalizing offer of 99 whips for a mere 25 cents, enough to ensure even the lamest player a decent-length quest for a supposed total investment of 50 cents. Of course, the offer is bogus, but I got to wonder how many arcade operators got an earful from gullible customers who stuck a couple quarters in and found themselves stuck with two credits for ordinary (and probably short-lived) games.

Lost Tomb's mission, regardless of how willingly embraced, is to descend a South American pyramid, starting at the top, until you reach the bottom and "a grand surprise." You choose the path down via a series of tunnels and rooms, with some routes more treacherous than others. The halls are filled with vampire bats that naturally must be avoided. In each room the player must pick up all the treasures (including one with a key that opens an exit, if none exists) – while avoiding/shooting monsters and getting it done before triggering an earthquake (a.k.a. a timer function, described below).

One immediately noticeable difference between Lost Tomb and its Robotron/Berserk cousins is most the on-screen elements are big. Spiders representing the most common enemy are of the type that tried to feast on Frodo, treasure chests can store enough gold to burden a company of orcs and those vampire bats could snack on the hall monsters in Venture like hors d'oeuvres.

In addition to swarms of large spiders chasing you, tiny monsters resembling miniaturized Pac-Man ghosts defend set posts like they've got an IV drip of caffeine (in other words, they're rather jumpy in their tight spaces).

As for the timer, a decreasing "time" bar at the top of the screen apparently happens to be the world's most advanced seismograph, since when it runs out an earthquake occurs that for some reason makes the walls start shooting at you. For some reason equally mystifying to seismologists, touching a treasure chest resets the timer.

One other element is every fifth room is a throne room with heightened danger, but chests worth a high amount of points (1,000 to 8,000; as a point of reference, 15,000 is required for each extra man).

At first both creatures are few enough you can almost (emphasis almost) plot and choose the most efficient route to all the treasures and the exit. But as anyone who's survived the first two laughably easy waves of Robotron knows, that sort of thing doesn't last when the profitability of companies and arcades depends on short games. The screen eventually becomes clogged with creatures and, in an one-up to Robotron, the speed increases geometrically well to the point of being unplayable. It seems impossible anyone could reach the bottom of the pyramid in a game on normal settings (and I'm sure a few extraordinary joystick jockeys have proven me wrong), but luckily there's ways the modern MAME player can persevere if so inclined.

First, unlimited continues are allowed after completed games. Second, the DIP switches, in addition to options of starting with three or five men, feature a "superman" setting that make your man invincible. Using either of those methods will allow you to get through the "impossible" rooms, if only by sheer luck and lots of deaths beforehand, to the grand "conclusion."

For those not wanting to know the ending, be warned THE NEXT PARAGRAPH CONTAINS SPOILERS.

Reach the bottom of the pyramid and you'll be rewarded with a snarky screen saying your reward is the programmers' profound thanks for playing the game. After a pause, you're also awarded a huge amount of points, whips and extra lives and a vulture carries you back up to the top of the pyramid to begin again. There the foes will again be sparse, but there's no slowdown in the mega-turbo speed.

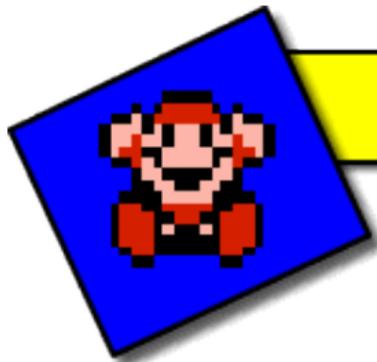


Lost Tomb did poorly in arcades, never gaining even the meager presence of the other Robotron imitators noted above. The high difficulty level probably had something to do with that, as did Stern having an off-year buzzwise in 1982 compared to their 1981 hits led by Scramble and 1983 hits led by Tutankham (arguably a far superior and more expansive take on the Lost Tomb concept).

The only home version I saw was a passable Atari eight-bit conversion, although it pales in comparison to games like Shamus for fans of the genre. The arcade version is featured in at least a couple of those "X"-in-1 full-size consumer upright machines (SuperCade and Arcade Legends 3 were the ones I found with a quick search).

Still, this genre has hooked players from Venture to Gauntlet to Zelda to Dungeon Defender. Lost Tomb may be a crude and, for many, hopeless quest, but the beginning and middle stages still bring back the nostalgia of exploring something where unknown dangers lurk behind every door (an easy thing to find in computer games of the early 80s, but not arcades until Gauntlet showed up). Yeah, it's a bit of a letdown finding out the few enemies don't change much other than their color as things progress, but the removal of the monetary aspect also makes the game an endurance test of your skills and stamina rather than a frustrating sense of being mugged for quarters almost as fast as you can feed them into the coin slot.





Game Over

by Bryan Roppolo



Let's end this month's issue on a question. Considering we took a look at Pooyan, which is a cartoony game, do you prefer the cartoony or more life-like games? I personally prefer the cartoony ones myself as they seem more removed from reality, which is one of the reasons I play video games in the first place. Video games allow me to enter a world that is completely removed from the real one, and usually for me the more abstract the game, the more I seem to like it. Anyway, I was just curious as to what retro gamers tend to like more. I guess it's possible to have a game that isn't cartoony, but also not life-like at all, however, I'd still be interested in the cartoony vs. life-like preference.

Also, you may have noticed a column called Nintendo vs. Sega Throwdown. This is a column that everyone is encouraged to contribute to, so if you are interested in assembling your team of best Nintendo characters and pitting them against what you think are the best Sega ones, feel free to send me a write-up in the style of this month's column and I'll be sure to include it in a future issue. See you all in May!