



Printing Help



Retrogaming Times Monthly #110 - July 2013 Torpedo Terror Edition



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Press Fire To Begin

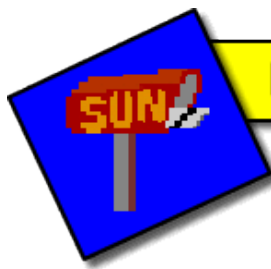
by Bryan Roppolo



Happy Fourth of July for those in the U.S.! It's time to start sizzling as summer kicks into high gear, not just with hot weather, but also hot games. We all know that not all games were that "hot", as was the case with many licensed titles. A common complaint is that once a game company got the license to make a game based on a popular movie, person, etc. that they felt they could put out a second rate title since it would sell no matter what. Interestingly, many of the programmers I've talked with through the years claim that they programmed the game to the best of their ability, and the reason for a crummy licensed title being crummy is just because, well, it was not most people's cup of tea. The concept just backfired and it was not just an attempt to cash in on a trend. However, I can attest to the fact that many times the company would place a short deadline on licensed game development since the commodity they were licensing could become old news if a game was not put out fast enough. So there is the fast development thing going on which would lead to most likely a less thought out game being put out.

Now, even though there was a trend for many licensed titles being less than stellar, there were a number of really good ones. This topic was brought up by Dorf on the RTM forums (<http://www.retrogamingtimes.com/forum/YaBB.pl?num=1372376538>), and I thought it would be a great way to open up this hot summer issue, in looking at ones that were indeed "hot". Dorf came up with a goodie, in Bruce Lee by Datasoft. I have seen this game listed as being among one of the best titles on the C64! Not just best licensed games, but best games overall. That's really a feat for a licensed title, as they always seemed to be in the dog house. For me, I'd have to add most of the Star Wars lineup from Parker Brothers there, such as Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back for the Intellivision.

So what licensed games can you think of that were "hot" so to speak? We'd love to hear about it since we always get reminded of how awful E.T. on the 2600 was, so let's see how many good licensed titles there are out there!



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Upcoming New Releases from Revival Studios

July:

COLECOVISION: Shifted! (cartridge)

August:

VIDEOPAC / ODYSSEY2: Down! (cartridge)

SINCLAIR ZX-81: Boxing Champ (tape)

COMMODORE PET: Boxing Champ (tape)

They put out some very good stuff, so be sure to check out these new releases once available!

Dark Souls For The ZX Spectrum Released

This game is inspired by Dark Souls (from the PS3, 360, and PC), so it is likely that if you do not read the instructions, you will not understand how to progress in the game. Dark Souls is famous for its extreme difficulty, although I tried to make this game a little easier. The basic premise of the game is to find your way to the final monster and kill it. It's as simple as that. The direct link to the download is <http://205.196.123.185/74q1xag437wg/y1zu81bn4bl4ifj/Souls.rar>.

The Beard in the Mirror Coming Soon (PC)

Classic adventure game fans, rejoice! Lizo (a Sierra fangirl) and Paul (a LucasArts fanboy) are proud to present the teaser trailer for their brand-new point-and-click adventure game, The Beard in the Mirror:

Teaser: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WPC4LP6NU7g>.

The Beard in the Mirror is about a kid who doesn't know who he is, where he's going, or how he fits into his world. But not because he's an amnesiac; he's just a typical 22-year-old. As far as he knows, he's never once traveled outside his own universe—but the beautiful girl who wakes him up in the middle of one stormy night seems to think otherwise...

Inside his bedroom is the comfort and stability he's known all his life, but outside, there's an all-new fantasy world filled with magic, danger, romance—and the promise of adventure.

Mirror is a collaborative work by the wife-and-husband team of Lizo and Paul (the latter being the writer/designer of last year's [Life in the Dorms](#)). It started off as an interactive text adventure the two created and played over instant messenger, but over the years it's blossomed into a full-on point-and-click adventure game—complete with challenging puzzles with wacky solutions, dialogue trees, dangerous mishaps (and even death!), and a story about how to find oneself once the world's finally figured out you're an adult.

It's coming out digitally for the PC...uh, whenever it's finished!

To keep up with The Beard if the Mirror's development journey, you can [like us on Facebook](#) or [follow Paul on Twitter](#). (You can't follow Lizo on Twitter, so don't even ask.)

EVENTS

[5th Annual Game Play Festival](#)

Friday, July 5 - Sunday, July 28 (Brooklyn, NY)

The Brick is pleased to announce the fifth annual Game Play festival, taking place July 2013 in Brooklyn, New York. This year's festival will once again feature cutting-edge works that lie at the intersection of video gaming and performance.

"The most ambitious effort I know of to fuse the techniques and live presentation of theater with the themes, structures and technology of interactive electronic entertainment." - The New York Times

"Explores the intersections of technology, theatre, performance art and video-game culture in delightfully inventive ways."
- American Theatre Magazine

This genre breaking festival will play at The Brick (579 Metropolitan Ave at Lorimer Street, Williamsburg, Brooklyn) July 5-28. Tickets (\$15) may be purchased online at www.bricktheater.com or by calling 866-811-4111. Performance schedule TBA.

[Atari Party 2013](#)

Saturday, July 6, 12:00pm - 5:00pm PDT (Davis, CA)

Atari Party is an annual (more or less) exhibition of classic Atari video games from the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. The event is free, and open to the public. No registration or RSVP is required. Volunteers donate their time and loan their games and systems to the event.

Atari Party is for anyone interested in reliving their childhood, or showing their own children the games that mom & dad grew up with. Come join us at the Davis Public Library as we play games and give away prizes!

[2013 Video Game Summit](#)

Saturday, July 13, 9:00am - 7:00pm CDT (Lombard, IL)

Remember how much fun you used to have playing Atari, Nintendo and all kinds of games on your computer? Well, you will have the rare opportunity to play these great games again at the Video Game Summit, Chicago's premier video game trade show. In fact, dealers in retro games will be on hand offering games, controllers, systems and memorabilia and will be prepared to buy or trade for the games you have held onto since you were a kid. Who knows, you might just have an Atari cartridge worth \$1000 or more collecting dust in your attic.

The event is open to the public and people of all ages with an interest in video games or computers are encouraged to attend. According to the event's organizer, Dan Iacovelli, "we plan to have many retro and modern game consoles for play".

The date of the show will be July 13th, 2013 from 9am to 7pm at The Heron Point Convention Center, 665 West North Avenue, Lombard, IL (adjacent from the Fairfield Inn and Suites hotel).

Admission is \$5.00 per person (children 12 and under with an Adult are Free) and booths are \$30.00 (a booth consists of three 2 x 5 tables 2 side tables and one front table). Booth price includes admission for two and a choice of ad size full page (8.5 by 10) or half page (8.5 by 5). We will once again have free Wi-Fi access.

Classic Game Fest 2013

Saturday, July 13 - Sunday, July 14 (Austin, TX)

Classic Game Fest 2013 will take place on July 13-14 at the Palmer Events Center near downtown Austin (www.palmereventscenter.com). Wristbands good for admission the entire weekend including ALL events, tournaments, concerts, etc. will be sold for only \$10 each and all children under 12 get in FREE all weekend (when accompanied by an adult). Plus, a portion of every wristband sold will benefit the Dell Children's Medical Center Foundation. Discount wristbands on sale NOW at all Game Over Videogames retail stores and online at www.gameovervideogames.com.

The complete listing of all events and times for CGF2013 has just been officially released.

California Extreme 2013

Saturday, July 13 11:00am - 2:00pm | Sunday, July 14 11:00am - 9:00pm (Santa Clara, CA)

Arcades were once a fixture on the American urban landscape, and games were plentiful in rural cities too. The closest heir of today is the so-called "Family Entertainment Center", which is populated with a myriad of devices designed only to take your coins quickly and leave you with a pile of tickets, which you exchange for cheap, trashy toys. This is entertainment? California Extreme was born with a desire to share fun coin op games that are in the hands of private collectors, and to hopefully spread the word that pinball machines were once plentiful, and that videogames were not synonymous with "martial arts" and violence. Buy/sell/trade! The show is a great place to bring games you want to sell, and also a good place to add to your collection, or even start it! Not all games will be for sale; many collectors bring games to show (or show off!) that they would never sell. So... Can I play the stuff? Yeah... Everything is on free play. You can play from the moment you arrive until we shut off the power at closing -- Play as many games as you want, in whatever order you want to. There are *HUNDREDS* of games, all set to play for free. This is your chance to try those older games, or the newer games that you'd never put money into in an arcade. There are also many games that never got produced, and are very hard to find.

KansasFest 2013

Tuesday, July 23 - Sunday, July 28 (Kansas City, MO)

Apple II users, programmers, hobbyists, and retrocomputing enthusiasts are invited to Rockhurst University in Kansas City, Missouri, from Tuesday, July 23, through Sunday, July 28, for six days and five nights of sessions, demos, announcements, contests, and camaraderie.

The week kicks off with keynote speaker Randy Wigginton, Apple employee #6, who worked on the Disk II disk drive, Apple DOS, and Applesoft BASIC. Wigginton will be available immediately afterward for a Q&A and autograph session.

The week then offers a variety of presentations and workshops, including but not limited to:

- Teaching kids to program with Matthew Hellinger
- Disk II theory of design with Tony Diaz

- Hardware hacking with Stephen Buggie
- How to build an arcade machine using MESS and MAME emulation with Carrington Vanston
- Disk copy de-protection with Martin Haye
- HackFest, an annual programming challenge open to coders of all skill levels
- A vendor fair and exhibit hall for attendees and the general public to show off, play with, and buy and sell new or unusual hardware and software.

GameWarp ~ Classic Arcade, Pinball & Console Show

Friday, July 26 - Sunday, July 28 (Orlando, FL)

Game Warp is a 3 day convention dedicated to all forms of gaming. We'll have over 150 games on the show floor all set to free play. This includes all your favorite classic full sized arcade and pinball machines from the 70s, 80s and 90s.

Plenty of rare arcade games including several prototype machines will be available for play!

Classic consoles will be setup for play including some fairly rare systems.

Weekend long tournaments for Pinball, Arcade and Consoles.

We've got Twin Galaxies on board this year and we'll have multiple world record attempts live at the show. Come watch some of the best arcade players in the world try to top the boards!

Tons of special guests scheduled including gaming legends like Todd Rogers and Billy Mitchell.

All this plus panels, Q&A sessions, live podcasts, gaming documentary showings/premieres and much, much more!

Game Warp runs the weekend of July 26th - 28th, 2013. The show is located at the International Palms Hotel in the Heart of Orlando. Only minutes from all of the theme parks.. right on international drive. Some attractions are literally in walking distance from the hotel so bring the family and make it a vacation. Special convention room rates available.

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.



Des Gamer

by John Wedgeworth



Fanboyism, And The 16-Bit Console Wars

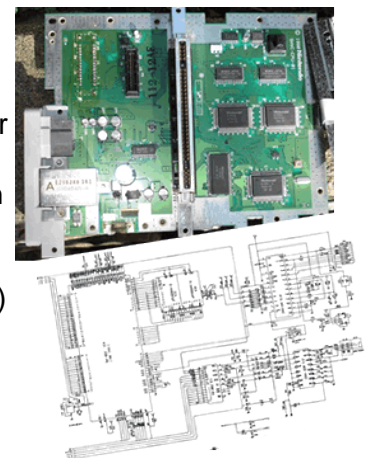
Part 4: SNES vs. Genesis - Overall Hardware, Performance, and Design

Hi Kids! For our fourth edition of “Fanboyism, and the 16-bit Console Wars”, and the last one which really focuses on the SNES and Genesis hardware specifically, we will be looking at the overall hardware design, and the overall hardware performance of these two fantastic, and iconic pieces of retroware. If you’re just tuning in, or would like a refresher, the previous installments can be found here: [Part 1: The “Preamble Ramble”](#), [Part 2: SNES vs. Genesis: Graphics](#), and [Part 3: SNES vs. Genesis: Sound](#). Now, let’s press start to continue:

Put at its most simple: the Genesis has a faster, more powerful CPU, and RAM sufficient for everything it needed to do, but it has less advanced dedicated graphics and sound hardware. The SNES, of course, is the converse. It has a slower, less powerful CPU, and is at least somewhat memory underfunded despite having more total memory, but it has more advanced graphics and sound hardware. I state the obvious in saying that if the contest were to be decided on nothing but graphics and sound hardware, regardless of whether or not they were able to perform at full capacity, and regardless of other considerations, then of course, the crown would go to SNES. And if the contest were to be decided on nothing but raw CPU might, then we’d give the crown to the Genesis. But as we’ve discussed before, and what makes this comparison so much fun, I might add, is that it’s all so much more complex than that. More advanced graphics and sound hardware doesn’t necessarily equate to better graphics and sound. There are so many other factors that play in to determine how good a game will look, or sound. Also, a system is more than just its CPU, as the Genesis has slowdown too, and sometimes at the most perplexing times (of course, sometimes slowdown isn’t a hardware issue at all, but just bad programming.) In the context of this series, it may seem almost silly to point out the “if one only judged by CPU” / “if one only judged by graphics and sound hardware” thing, but a lot of people err in this very same way. Fanboys latch onto it, and flame wars start because of it. I want to avoid that.



If one were to look at the spec sheets, they’d get the impression that the SNES could outperform the Genesis by a ratio of almost two-to-one. But this is actually one of my biggest beefs with the SNES hardware design in that its graphics hardware (PPU), and sound hardware (PCM) were theoretically capable of so much, but that potential was never realized, either due to memory limitations, CPU limitations, or odd architectural gaffes, such as the PPU color issue in 512x488 resolution. The Genesis hardware may have been much less ambitious, and not devoid of its own internal problems (RGB-to-composite conversion in a VDP carried over from the MasterSystem, for instance), but overall, its hardware was far more internally complimentary, and the supporting hardware (CPU/RAM) were able to fully push the VDP/FM/PSG to their limits. The Genesis spec sheet may promise much, much less than the SNES spec sheet, but it delivers on everything it promises, and then some. Consider the split-screen two player mode in Sonic 2. While it was jumpy, and did suffer from some slowdown, it was running in 320x448i. Theoretically, the Genesis was not supposed to be able to do this, but it did it. The SNES had so much more theoretical potential, and Nintendo made sure that the spec sheet bragged it up, but the architecture was plagued by more internal [yet public] strife than the Kardashian family. As a result, the SNES spec sheet turns out, in the end, to



be very, very misleading. An example: the 448i thing: the spec sheet said SNES could do this...but it never did. Contrast that to the Genesis which supposedly could not do this...but did anyway

And yet, how many people back in the day, myself included, believed what the spec sheet told us more than what our eyes and ears did? I recall specifically Mortal Kombat II. There was a still shot of Sub Zero with his arm extended. I remember seeing that same move on both systems, and noticing the detail in Sub Zero's arm, I thought: "Holy cow, the Genesis one looks higher res!....But that can't be. SNES is 512x448, while the Genesis is only 320x224. Spec sheet can't be wrong, I must be trippin." But years, and years later, my eyes would be vindicated. The Genesis one was indeed higher res! The SNES spec sheet: The mouse that roared. **Advantage - Genesis.**

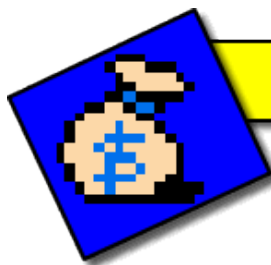
I think the best way to frame the overall hardware performance objectively (again, you can tweak the wording if you'd like) is the SNES is the "gentlemen's system" of the 16-bit era. More subtle, more sophisticated, more refined and polished, more diverse. The Genesis was the "snarly beast"; brutish, rough, less sophisticated, less polished, but a powerhouse (and many of its games featured dazzling FM/PSG music that was anything but unsophisticated, and unpolished), Once again, neither or these categories are inherently superior objectively, but they do lend themselves very well to subjective preference considerations. Objectively, standing as far back as I can, and being as subjectively divorced as I can, I cannot declare an objective superior. A great processor, with enough memory to do whatever it needed, paired to perfectly decent graphics and sound hardware vs. far more advanced graphics and sound hardware, paired to a weak CPU, and memory insufficient to the task. Each yielded graphics that look nothing alike but come out a wash, and sound that sounds nothing alike but also come out a wash. So whether we're talking just graphics, or just sound, or the whole package, they tie, they draw, they stalemate, they average out, they wash, they're equals...you pick your preferred term. **Objectively, I cannot declare a definitive winner in any of these categories!**

However, subjectively, I have to yet again favor the Genesis. Why? Well, frankly, in this category, my preference of the Sega over the Nintendo has less to do with the Sega's merits, and more to do with the SNES's demerits. To be perfectly honest, I am just so frustrated with the SNES. We have [essentially] a liar of a spec sheet...a liar most of us believed over our own sensory perception. We have a system that people at large just take as gospel is the superior system when I think that's completely unsubstantiated. We also have a graphics processor and sound processor that if "properly funded" by the rest of the hardware would've absolutely slaughtered the competition, but wasn't, so didn't, and in many ways underperformed against it. Then again, in the final analysis, we should be grateful the SNES was "underfunded", because had it been properly funded, it would've cost funds that only Neo Geo owners could fund, and would've funded itself right out of the market. So frustrations aside, Nintendo definitely made the right choice in the price vs. performance thing, and I'm very glad they did



So, for the conclusion of the matter: The **Genesis and SNES are equals** in that they are both smart compromise technologies which, through totally different approaches, yielding totally different results, both strike a masterful balance of performance and affordability even if they strike very different masterful balances. As I said before, for 16-bit truly done without compromise, we have the Neo Geo. For 16-bit affordably done, we had two very excellent options to choose from, three, really, when you figure in the Turbogرافx16 (let alone things like DOS and Amiga). I just happen to prefer the Genesis, both in approach, and in results. In approach because it just felt more cohesive, and made full use of all its parts, without any significant parts holding anything significantly back. I prefer it in results just because its strengths have greater personal appeal to me, and its weaknesses bother me less.

So that's SNES vs. Genesis hardware. Next month will be a shorty. We'll be looking at software. See you then!



The Price We Pay

by Nick DeMarco



How Ignorance & Greed Are Ruining Retro Gaming Sales

In November 2011, I had this crazy idea to start reviewing classic video games, mainly out of my love of writing and my passion for sharing my knowledge and love of them, ignited by that common form of nostalgia we all have for them, and Nick D's Video Game Vault was founded. I began writing articles, from reviews on the classics, to lists of games that could use a remake, as well as games I felt every person should experience on a certain console. As I wrote these articles, I began developing this idea, what felt like an absurd notion to me at the time, to open my own small business selling classic video games.

I had no idea how to make this dream a reality. I was encouraged by my fiancée to do this at a local flea market where she sells her crochet goods and other crafts. I was given further encouragement from the owners of the space by being offered free rent for the first month. Still, I was unsure where to get the money for overhead. I had heard of Kickstarter, but surely people wouldn't want to give me money, even for cool rewards, to fund my business, right?

Right? Luckily, I was very wrong, and over \$1,200 was donated, and while most of it went back into rewards that I'll be sending out this month, a lot of it also went into buying merchandise for the shop, and it's grown into a pretty impressive looking setup, despite only being a table and two shelving units, but by gosh, those shelves and table are filled to the brim with some great stuff!



My reasons for starting this business are the subject of this article. I live in Northeastern PA, in a small town known as Jessup, not far from an equally small town known as Eynon, where this flea market resides in what was once a large and well known department store known as Sugarman's. It is not that my area has no options for those who love retro gaming, but the options are severely limited. While there are stores in Scranton and Wilkes Barre, two of the more metropolitan areas in this section of NEPA, some of the variety of items at these stores are limited, and are often the same for long stretches of time. The prices, for the most part are reasonable, but not always, and they are **ESPECIALLY NOT** reasonable inside Sugarman's Market Place where my shop resides, and it is quite sickening to see this kind of greed and ignorance running rampant.

It's not a long walk to my shop, you just make the first left when you walk in and I'm there on the right, but I am **NOT** the very first gaming shop you see when you go in. One of the first shops you see when you walk in is being run by a gentleman who actually works for a big business in the area and sells video games (along with CDs, DVDs, and records) just for extra cash.

To say that this guy thinks he's the only sheriff in town and the authority on video games at this flea market is an understatement. He's arrogant, smarmy, and on my very first day of operation tried to buy me out! I refused, three times, until he got the hint that I wasn't for sale, and in the rare times he does come into my shop, he tries to play me or whoever is working my shop like we're idiots and we don't know about gaming. It's silly, but this happens.

I take great pride in cleaning and testing everything I sell, and I refuse to sell anything that doesn't work, I value my

name and the fact I am not just selling games, I am selling memories, taking people back to times in their lives that they felt carefree and happy. I don't want to tarnish that by selling them garbage that doesn't work. The Sheriff, as we'll call him, doesn't see things that way.

How do I know this? Enough customers have come into my shop complaining about him, everything from his attitude and refusal to make good on a sale gone bad, to the price gouging and inflated prices of things they have been looking all over for. If that isn't bad enough, he does not clean or test anything he sells. If he buys something out of a dusty garage somewhere, he puts it right on his shelf, no questions asked. He sold me an NES before I opened my shop that he swore up and down had a new pin and was cleaned inside. My fiancée and I opened it to find cobwebs and dust all over, a broken pin, and just an overall poor experience with dealing with him. I had several people I worked with at my other job tell me he sold them PS1s that wouldn't spin the disc, had bad disc readers, you name it. The worst part is this kind of attitude, that the consumer will simply buy something in poor shape because they can't find it anywhere is running rampant in the retro gaming market, especially at flea markets, and it's only one of the major culprits. The other is what I like to call the "It's Rare" epidemic. Have you experienced this? Allow me to explain.

A part of building any kind of business, like a writing career, is connections, networking, and it's played a vital role in growing my business, but, like any business, any industry, any hobby, there are people who know what they're doing, and there are people who don't take the time to gain the necessary knowledge to make themselves a true expert, or at least student of classic gaming. I have a connection, he works a lot at another flea market in the area that takes place every Sunday at a drive-in movie theater, and he has some great stuff, but he has this unwritten rule it seems that if there's something he hasn't seen before, that automatically means it's rare. He's not alone in this thought process, and while his lack of knowledge is innocent enough, and he is welcoming to my knowledge, there are those who thrive off making a buck, seemingly using their lack of knowledge to impress people who know even less. Ignorance plus ignorance equals more ignorance, and in turn, prices of games that aren't worth much are going up because it's one thing for one person to think a common Atari 2600 game is rare, but it's a totally different beast if that "knowledge" goes viral.

As consumers we are handicapped by what is there to be offered to us. Sadly, in my area, there appears to be this stronghold by people who don't know the first thing about retro games, or enough to make themselves a well-rounded seller. I am doing my part to break this seemingly never ending nightmare. Until then, arm yourselves with knowledge, dear gamers, and stay away from The Sheriff. We've got a date at the O.K. Corral.



Killing Killer Instinct

by Nick DeMarco

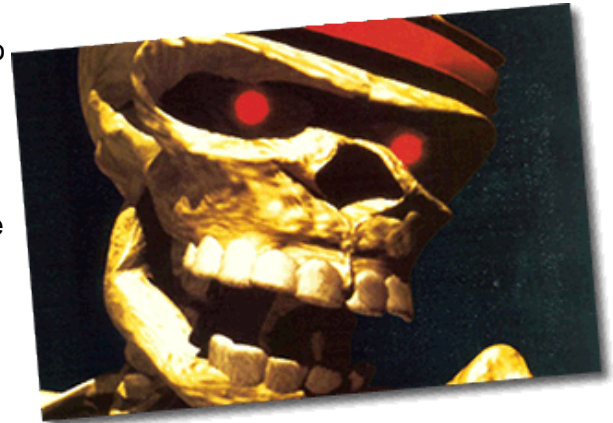


How Microsoft Is Destroying A Cult Classic

Hi there, RTM fans! Nick D here, working on what I feel will be a series of opinion pieces I do here for RTM, perhaps subtitled "One Gamer's Opinion" or maybe not. I apologize right now if this comes across as ranting, or if it makes little to no sense. Right now I am operating on very little sleep, as my brother just suffered a massive heart attack and is in intensive care. Things are looking up, but I'd rather explain that than say "The opinions here are not necessarily those or RTM, blah, blah, blah." So, what's on tap in this article? Why, only one of my favorite fighting games of all time, Killer Instinct. I've been having conversations about this subject matter for a few days now with friends, and I feel, with the mood I'm in due to my brother's health issues, that it would be a swell time to really spew some venom on what I feel will be one of the biggest disasters to come in this next generation of consoles.

Now normally I choose to keep my opinions to myself as it relates to video games, unless someone really asks for it, especially as it relates to modern gaming, because quite frankly, my knowledge of it, while good, is a small fraction of my retro gaming knowledge. However, when these two worlds collide, as they do here, I feel the need to address some things, and perhaps, if nothing else, verbally bitch slap some people out there in the gaming industry, whether or not they choose to read this fine publication known as RTM.

Now certainly entire articles are being devoted to the major flaws involved with the production of the Xbox One, or as I fondly call it, Xbox BetaMax, because really, are we looking at a new system, or a \$500 spiffy VCR? Point being, it's easy to poke fun at Microsoft's miscues and total blunders with the console itself. That's not the purpose of this article. The purpose here is to point out what I feel, personally, Microsoft is trying to do to desperately get people to ignore their flaws, and what these "masterminds" of gaming are trying to do to get me specifically, Nick DeMarco, a longtime Sony and Nintendo consumer to buy their new console, and how it relates to the legacy of Killer Instinct, and yeah, how Microsoft is basically messing up, to be quite frank.



Certainly this is just one gamer's opinion, and while I have scoured the Internet looking for information on this new Killer Instinct installment, I've also spoken to a lot of friends who have a better hand on the pulse of Microsoft products, especially gaming related things, so I caution you, if you know something I don't, I apologize, but rumors alone are worthy of concern, whether proven to be true or otherwise. Keep in mind, Microsoft wants you, no they NEED you to buy their new console, and here is the reason they are giving to me personally, as a consumer, as written by yours truly.

Dear Mr. DeMarco:

We here at Microsoft, we are fully aware of your distrust of us and everything we create, but please, hear us out on our proposal for you. While we offer little in apology for the fact Xbox Live will still cost money, and our complete lack of respect for indie game companies, not to mention the uncertain future of used games on our new system, have we got a deal for you! Remember that game you played in 1995 on your Super Nintendo! Gosh, Super Nintendo, that was a great system, wasn't it? Well anyways, we know that you and a whole host of your friends have been waiting for what probably seems like an eternity for a new Killer Instinct game. Well, wait no more, our balding consumer, because Killer Instinct 3 is coming exclusively to Xbox One. Doesn't that excite you? Doesn't that make you want to save up and buy our new VC-er I mean, console? Of course it does! Buy an Xbox One, you won't regret it. KILLER INSTINCT, RAWR!

Sincerely,

Your Friends At Microsoft

Alright, now all kidding aside, let's get serious. What made Killer Instinct such a great franchise to begin with? Well, many things really, from the great opening, to the awesome level tunes, and those crazy combos. The characters, for the most part, were fairly original, and it was made by a company that really could do no wrong at the time, Rare. Rare titles are synonymous with the SNES and N64, for their graphics, their great music, and memorable games that just stick with you over a lifetime. Trust me, this wasn't something that was lost on Microsoft, as they would end up buying the company in 2002. I could go on and on about the games they would make, the treatment by Microsoft of this beloved company, but that's not the focus of this article either. Why do I feel Microsoft is killing something sacred to retro gamers? Why do I feel they are flushing millions of dollars down the toilet? Read on.



Free-To-Play NOT Free-To-Enjoy

Now at first glance the idea of a game this monumental being free to play with your new console seems like a great idea, right? Let's delve a bit deeper. Yes, Killer Instinct fans, you FINALLY get the game you've been waiting eons for, free to play on your Xbox One. However, you get ONE character that you can actually use, Jago, with the rest of the roster being downloadable content you must buy separately. Now look, I'm not an idiot, every company has to make money, and even games out within the last few years have used this technique of having extra characters as purchases you must make to complete the full roster. However, NOT one of these games had you start with just ONE character. Most, in fact, give you the necessary ones most gamers look for, with the extras just being that icing on the cake. This is the first fail for Microsoft in the return of this game. You're telling me fans of this franchise wouldn't pay full price for all characters in an actual disc based game? I don't want to jump on the seemingly bursting-at-the-seam bandwagon of critics who say Microsoft doesn't understand their consumers, but this is a prime example of that.

Disrespectful Baiting

When Killer Instinct arrived in 1995, it really did change the way people looked at gaming, fighting games in general, and created a whole new kind of cult classic. You've had fans making their own videos of what they thought the return would look like. While Killer Instinct Gold for the N64 wasn't the worst game ever made, it didn't satisfy gamers the way the original did. So think about that for a minute, you've essentially had fans of this franchise waiting 18 YEARS for its return to greatness. With Rare having some influence in the game's creation (as well as another developer that should have been kept away from it) all the tools were there to really give this franchise the proper respect it deserves. So what does Microsoft do? They take a proud franchise and turn it into bait to get people to buy an Xbox One (I mean, even the announcer from Killer Instinct, that doesn't totally sound like the old one orders you to get an Xbox One) thus making the whole franchise a sell out to Microsoft's greedy corporate demands. Whether you're a gamer, a sports fan, anything that allows you to fall in love with something or someone for what it is, and it becomes a puppet for someone or something that doesn't understand why you loved it in the first place, it's not just a slap in the face of that product or that individual, it's a slap in the face of all those people who have followed it since the beginning and get it better than that corporation.



In Conclusion..

I will not be purchasing an Xbox One, for many reasons, not just this mishandling of a true classic. I will probably be doing what most hardcore fans of this fighting classic plan on doing the day this atrocity comes to light. I will pick Killer Instinct from my shelf, pop it into the SNES, and take pride and wonderment in the fact that Nintendo could do it right 18 years in the past, where Microsoft failed in every way in 2013 with enough tools to make it right. To make it even better.



Gaming Studies With The Tomy Tutor

by David Lundin, Jr.



Torpedo Terror

We're on the downward slope with only four games remaining in the Tomy Tutor cartridge catalog. Of those games one is interesting, one is entertaining, one is infuriating and one is frustrating. Torpedo Terror would be the frustrating game of the mix and for all those following along at home with their Tomy Tutor checklists, all five of you, I'll let you figure out where the other three remaining titles fit into that abbreviated list. Torpedo Terror is a single fixed screen shooter in which the player controls a submarine equipped with a rapid fire cannon. The submarine can move and fire in eight directions and can travel anywhere beneath the surface of the water, which makes up the majority of the play area. At the bottom of the screen is the enemy base and although it cannot be attacked directly, it houses the objective of the game. Waves of enemy submarines are dispatched from the base, three at a time, and start out following one another in a rigid spiral path as they fire. Although they too move in eight directions, they can only fire to the left and right, however colliding with one will destroy the player submarine. After following one another for a few moments they will break formation and move around following a seemingly random path. The enemy base will constantly fire shots in the direction of the player as well. As if that weren't enough to contend with, ships will patrol the surface of the water, lobbing bombs that slowly drift down to the ocean floor. Achieving a high score is the main objective in Torpedo Terror and although it may sound a little like a simple space shooter pulled underwater, in reality the only thing that should be underwater is the cartridge itself.

Torpedo Terror is a flat out ugly game with a garish color scheme for a title that's supposed to take place underwater. I can understand black being used to convey the depths of the ocean but the pastels for everything else don't do very much to make the game visually appealing. Even something as simple as an ocean floor would do a lot to break up the simplicity of what is seen on the screen. The enemy base in the center is, well, let's be honest here, made up out of five objects that look more like spacecraft than any kind of aquatic structure. It makes me wonder if these were assets reused from an aborted space based shooter or if this game began as something else that was scrapped and quickly reworked into the game that was released. Putting a huge object in the center of the screen in a shooter usually means you should shoot it but not here as the base is the one thing in Torpedo Terror that cannot be damaged. After the door at the bottom of the base slides open and three enemy submarines move out, the door will close, displaying the number of the current attack wave. After the three enemy subs are destroyed the next wave will be sent out. After seven waves of enemy subs have been destroyed the base will release a fast moving glowing triangle, essentially the game's stage boss. Shooting the boss will award a three thousand point bonus and complete the scene, what the game refers to as a set of eight attack waves. Subsequent scenes have the attacking submarines move a little faster but the real challenge ramp up has to do with the base cannons firing more frequently and surface ships dropping bombs at a quicker rate.



While eight direction movement and firing should give the player an advantage over the enemies, the control is so sensitive and stiff that it often ends up being more of a handicap than a help. Either SL or SR can be held down for a constant barrage of fire but little good it does when you will often collide with enemy subs or stray shots. Everything just moves too fast for you to have any kind of real control over what you're doing. Another huge gripe and something that only further facilitates the all too fast movement is that all objects, including the player sub, enemy subs, shots from both types of submarine and shots from the enemy base, travel faster diagonally than they do in the four cardinal directions. This means objects often tend to speed up, slow down, and speed up again when making turns or changing direction. Instant deaths from collisions with enemy submarines are common due to the abrupt changes in direction, which cause abrupt changes in speed. When coupled with what feels like out of control acceleration and movement of the player submarine, it can be very difficult to shoot an enemy that would be easy to destroy in pretty much any other shooter. It goes without saying that the movement issues nearly break the game completely but there is an even bigger problem that sometimes won't even allow you to play that far into the game. Quite often the enemy base will get a shot off right as the game begins, and as you start directly above the enemy base, you will lose a life instantly. I've actually had a couple games where all my lives were drained by cheap shots from the base the instant the stage began each time. I understand why the base shoots at the player, it prevents you from hiding in a safe area and decimating the enemy submarines as they enter the stage, but there should be some kind of delay in place before the base can start firing to prevent instant deaths. Any game that can kill you straight away before you're even able to get in any kind of move is a fundamentally flawed game.

Now Torpedo Terror isn't overly terrible as it does have a few nice touches. First and most importantly is that all shots and bombs can be shot and destroyed. No points are awarded but it allows you to have a little more of a fighting chance, especially against the shots from the base which tend to home in on the player submarine. The boss and player submarine explosions are big and colorful, in fact they're the most colorful part of the game, and look like an explosion out of Robotron 2084 or at least an abbreviated Tutor version of something like that. The sound effects are pretty good and each game event has a different sound associated with it, my favorite being the whistling bomb sound the surface bombs make when thrown from the ships. Some Tutor default sounds do make the expected appearance including the standard destruction sound for explosions and interestingly enough the cursor movement sound is used for shots from the enemy base. Speaking of the enemy base shots, they take the form of an "x" and would later be reused as the worm shots in the Tutor version of Jungler. Both surface ships and enemy submarines explode into a display of their point values, "200" or "500" respectively, which is a nice arcade style nod. Submarine shots and ship dropped bombs are also two different colors which helps to designate the direction of travel since both are really just otherwise nondescript dots.

Perhaps if the game was simply slowed down a little the control issues and cheap shots would be remedied to a satisfactory level but as things sit now the game becomes almost instantly frustrating. There really is no amount of practice or level of skill to be built up to get any better at the game because things just move too darn fast to compensate for. This is one of those Tutor games that will cause your hands to feel really cramped while playing, mostly due to the hard to predict movement and how generally stiff control input devices for the hardware are. The deck is pretty heavily stacked against Torpedo Terror with stiff yet somehow overly responsive controls, broken diagonal momentum, ugly graphics, and a rather boring premise. I mean, just look at the screen shots of the game, it just looks uninteresting. The title doesn't make a whole lot of sense either, nor does the Japanese title, Bermuda Triangle. Shouldn't the game be about planes disappearing into clouds or ships being lost at sea or something? I'd love to see what the crack Tomy Tutor documentation writers came up with to explain the story of this game, one of the reasons why I am out to gather high resolution scans of all Tomy Tutor documentation for redistribution. At best, Torpedo Terror is a bit of a curiosity but it is far from what the hardware can really offer in terms of gaming enjoyment.

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



The Dragon That Faintly Roared

by Mark Sabbatini



The Many Faces of the Dragon 32/64

Even Glass Joe, the Washington Generals and Wile E. Coyote have known the thrill of victory. So it's possible to maintain the pretense I'm not a certified loser.

OK, not me (an already lost cause) so much as the computer I'm representing for the time being. That would be Tano's Dragon 32/64 which, as noted in my first two columns on the machine, is a warped and mostly ignored U.K. version of Tandy's Color Computer. I've already noted the Dragon has no unique landmark software titles (close, but...) and other games are second- or third-rate conversions of stuff for competing machines. So it would seem an ultimate exercise in futility to actually give the Dragon's lineup the full-scale Retrogaming Times Monthly competitive treatment by subjecting them to an (unofficial) Many Faces Of faceoff.

But since the Olive Garden still frequently wins "best Italian restaurant" in newspaper surveys, anything's possible. More relevantly, the Atari 2600 prevailed in several official MFO showdowns against vastly more powerful competitors. Classics defying "improvement" such as Pitfall were among them, naturally, but so were oddities like Battlezone where features necessitated by the 2600's limitations (i.e. color graphics, simplified gameplay) turned into positives that outscored other machines' poorly done features (i.e. flawed imitation vector graphics).

There's another good – probably superior – reason for the comparisons: It's a chance to rank games not previously considered in the official MFO competitions, largely because many of the ones in this column (and probably one or two to come) originated in the U.K. and often didn't make it to the U.S. market. Similarly, some modest U.S. coin-op titles (Moon Cresta being the example in this month's article) were ported almost entirely to computers in the British market.

Two ratings are assigned each of the games here. The letter grades are how each game ranks in comparison to all Dragon games; the second is how it ranks in a hypothetical MFO contest. While I list the would-be medal winners in each review, a full scoring for each machine is beyond what I'm willing to write (and my editor is probably willing to read). If anybody is actually reading this and expresses interest in an official scoring, I might be willing to revisit the subject.

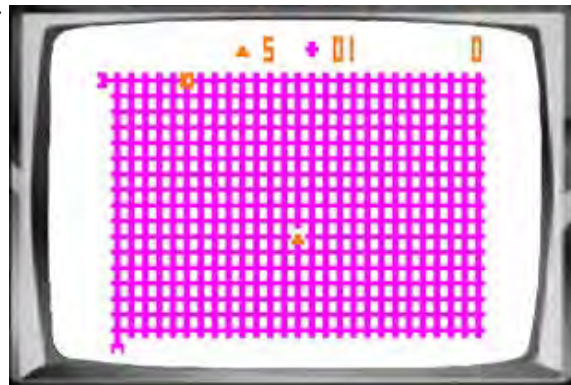
Time to see if the Dragon can singe, if not incinerate, its competition:

Gridrunner

Dragon grade: C-; MFO rank: Have Not

This mutated species of Centipede by demented-gaming master Jeff Minter begat a series of sequels that are still spawning on modern platforms like Windows and Android. It was his first commercially successful game, preceding his fetish with goats, llamas and mutant camels, so his departures from the Atari classic are more substantive than weird.

The action, unsurprisingly, takes place on a grid rather than a mushroom field. Instead of spiders and such, two laser guns scroll along the left side and bottom of the screen, firing rays every few seconds. When their beams intersect, or the snake-like droid playing the centipede is shot, a pod is left behind that turns into a bomb after a few moments.



The Dragon version is pretty much sucking larvae compared to the competition, trailing even the primitive Vic-20 version that started it all (note: Minter would disagree with everything I'm about to write since he still calls the Vic version his favorite). The bare-bones gameplay (6) is slightly better than on the Vic-20, which has a too-cramped grid and movement that "jumps" in conformity with the infamous 22-character-wide screen. Controls (8) are also better for the same reasons, plus Centipede-like games are one of the few the Dragon's analogue joysticks are well-suited for.

After that it's all downhill. The graphics (3) use the ugliest color pallet possible and are so vague they not only impair gameplay, but strip the game of all personality. Sound (4) lives down to the Dragon's usual barely functional standards. But most of all, the Dragon version is the only one seriously lacking addictiveness (4). Even the Vic version, which plays like a glorified LED handheld game, is something I keep replaying despite my many frustrations with it.

The winners in this category, the Commodore 64 and Atari 8-bit computers – with the Sinclair Spectrum nudging out the Vic for a bronze – are so far ahead it's almost as if they're running an entirely different game (and in Minter's opinion they are, calling them overly skinny and somewhat flawed ports).

Hungry Horace

Dragon grade: D+; MFO rank: Bronze medal – by default

Giving this clusterfudge of a game a medal is disgraceful, bordering on scandalous, especially when a number of high-quality titles are being narrowly denied medals in a more crowded field. But it gets to stand on a podium and claim its prize like a boxer who's won a fixed fight because this Pac-Man derivative was released on only three machines. As such, I was inclined not to include it, but it's a good example of just how bad Dragon conversions of popular titles often were.



Hungry Horace is one of the most-loved early releases for the Spectrum, debuting the same year as the computer in 1982, and it led to three sequels on various platforms plus appearances in two more games (including the 2003 Playstation 2 game Dog's Life, featuring the retro-themed Horace's Ski Shop). Occasional projects from modern-day programmers are still appearing, including a level editor for the Spectrum original in 2009.

Horace is, to quote a Sinclair magazine review, "a large purple blob which has sprouted arms and legs." His stated objective is to roam a park eating everything in his path while avoiding the guards (one at first, more appear over time) who try to capture him. Substituting for Pac-Man's power pills is a single bell that essentially serves the same purpose. The "park" is four connecting single-screen mazes that are simple in comparison to Pac-Man, with tunnels that are one-way (in other words, you'll need to exit the maze from a different tunnel than the one you entered through). For those familiar with Exidy's coin-op Pepper II, Hungry Horace is more a cousin than immediate family – and IMHO is about a seven if Pepper II is a ten.

The Sinclair version stayed on best-seller lists for a long time, and reviewers and gamers generally place it near or at the top of all Pac-style games released for the machine. The Commodore 64 version, to the chagrin of Speccy disciples willing to admit it, is even better with superior graphics, a simple background chiptune and built-in level editor that Sinclair users were denied for nearly 30 years. Both are strong medalists, offering a quick-paced game with an eccentrically charming protagonist and personable guards that turn into hilarious panic faces when their bell is rung. I don't necessarily agree with those giving it best-ever status, but it's catchy and certainly better than nearly all of the crude Spectrum software appearing the year of its debut.

The Dragon version, on the other hand, is beyond awful even though the programmer(s) released it 18 months after the original. The graphics (4) use the awful medium-res pink/orange/cyan/white pallet, so the characters aren't just indistinct blobs, they're *ugly* indistinct blobs. Sound (3), which is unimpressive on the Sinclair and most impressive on the Commodore 64, is an awful blipping assault on the ears on the Dragon.

Gameplay (3) is awfully slow compared to the other two versions, completing the feeling you're playing a completely different game that's massively inferior. Key elements are also missing due to the graphics limitations and/or crummy

programming, including arrows at the tunnel entrances indicating which way they can be accessed. On the Speccy and C64 you quickly get a sense of how the mazes connect and can focus on eating and dodging; on the Dragon mere navigation becomes an unwanted primary challenge.

Controls (7) are fine, although the analogue joysticks are always going to be inferior with games like this. Addictiveness (3)?! Don't get me started on the awful thing again. The kindest thing I can say about the Dragon version of Hungry Horace is it'd be a somewhat impressive achievement if it were a type-in magazine program.

Manic Miner

Dragon grade: B+; MFO rank: Bronze medal

This classic platformer that gave birth to a thousand imitators is one of the biggest shockers in my Dragon experience, largely because most of the other contenders in the vastly crowded suffer from flaws that are inexplicable beyond being lazy/incompetent programming efforts. Not only does the Dragon version match the gold-winning Spectrum original in every way except for a lack of color graphics, but it also includes two extra levels and a starting-level cheat mode.

The game requires the player to guide a miner through 20 screen (22 on the Dragon), gathering several items on each and then reaching an exit that appears. Giving the game its charm is a creative and wide-ranging variety of enemies and obstacles. Giving some players heartburn is the difficult, pattern-based gameplay that usually involves dying many times on a level before figuring out the sequence of moves necessary for successful completion. It will probably not impress modern gamers who somehow have never encountered it, but it might be a challenge coming up with five computers and/or consoles that don't have an official or near-perfect unofficial version.



The Dragon version's gameplay (8) is essentially identical to every other eight-bit port except for one or two clearly substandard efforts. Graphics (7) take an obvious ding for being in black-and-white, but not much of one since they're well-defined, and don't have the amateurish flicker and quirks of some competitors (notably the Spectrum, which suffers all kinds of color bleeding due to the machine's inability to handle multiple colors within eight-by-eight pixel grids). Sound (5) is competent, but lags behind the charming bleeps of machines like the Speccy and is badly outclassed by medal winners like the Commodore 64 (and I guarantee putting the C64 and MSX ahead of the Speccy, which ties the Dragon for the Bronze, will have a large percentage of the British population burning me in effigy).

Controls (7) are more or less the equal of other versions, with the score limited because I've never liked the slightly lagging feel the game itself implements. Addictiveness (9) actually scores a point above the competition because of the official starting-level cheat, allowing players to bypass screens that are frustrating to the point of abandonment. True, POKEs to modify other versions in all kinds of useful and destructive ways were seemingly published in quantity every month in magazines, but those don't get credit for being an official part of the game.

For those wondering why versions for the many and more powerful platforms aren't among the medal recipients, I'll note as examples that the Amstrad CPC looks notably worse despite far superior capabilities along with the the equally powerful BBC Micro, which also plays slower. Even more advanced platforms like the Amiga and Windows, obviously not considered here, make what has to be a deliberate effort not to upgrade the graphics, sound and such from early '80s standards. On the other hand, for those looking to be impressed – fans of the game or not – check out the versions for the ZX81 (which has hi-res B&W graphics despite hardware that supposedly limits the resolution to 64X48) and the Vic-20 (a 2005 homebrew that remarkably requires only the unexpanded 3.5K of memory).

Moon Cresta

Dragon grade: B+; MFO rank: Have Not

This isn't an exact clone of the coin-op version, but I had to boot up my MAME emulator to determine the reasons why. In other words, it's one of the most impressive official arcade conversions on either the Dragon or the CoCo – and the Brits get to rub the noses of their U.S. counterparts in the mud for once since there's no official or unofficial CoCo version.

But the bad news for the Dragon – and great news for the rest of us – is this is a rare case where most of the home versions are stellar. In fact, they're largely indistinguishable from each except for some graphics and sound nuances. That's where the Dragon falls short, since it's the only version lacking color as the programmers (correctly) opted to use the hi-res black-and-white mode.



Make no mistake: the graphics (8) are clean and mostly smooth animated, and using either of the medium-res four-color pallets would have destroyed nearly all of the game's positive qualities. But the other versions score nines and tens for near-perfect replicas of the coin-op's ships and aliens, with the lower scores going to ports like the Spectrum which is limited to displaying each object in a single color. The Dragon is also a step behind on sound (5), although none of the versions offer more than basic buzzes and chiptunes instead of the coin-op's catchy harmonious pings.

Otherwise, the Dragon pretty much punches its weight across the board with the medal winners (Commodore 64, Amstrad CPC and Spectrum, in that order). Controls (9) are precise and flexible, offering joystick and user-defined keyboard options. Addictiveness (8) matches the coin-op and most home versions; it's the game itself that limits the ceiling in this category. It's a shame to deny the Dragon a medal when the absence of color doesn't feel like a big loss, but a narrow margin means just as much as a large one when it comes to defeat.

It's also worth noting all of these versions are far superior to the "not like the others" port for the BBC Micro, which is not just astonishingly bad consider that machine's mostly superior horsepower, but a lousy game lacking the coin-op's charm in every possible way. Another "not like the others" version at the other end is a true arcade-perfect Atari 7800 homebrew released in 2011, which is disqualified from this particular competition since modern-day coders have all kinds of advantages (accumulated knowledge, access to the original coin-op code, etc.) not available back in the day.



Apple II Incider

by Donald Lee



Cubit

Good evening everyone! I'm writing this at the last moment as I've been a bit tired and perhaps slightly sick the past two days. I partially blame it on a softball league I am playing in on Sundays. Even though it is summer time, the SF Bay Area is entirely different beast when it comes to weather. It was sunny and warm on Saturday and I enjoyed it greatly. The next day was entirely different. It was cool, damp and drizzling. I was plenty wet before, during and after the game so that's a partial explanation as to why I wasn't feeling 100% well.

As for this month's game, I randomly picked the letter "Q" on the Virtual Apple II game site and looked at the games that started with "Q". I was fortunate to see a couple of games that were interesting right away. I decided to look at the game named Q-Bit.

Based on the name of the game, I assumed this was a remake or clone of the arcade game Q*Bert. To my delight, indeed Q-Bit was based off of Q*Bert. I will note that while the Virtual Apple II site listed the game as "Q-Bit", the actual game was called "Cubit".

In thinking back to my youth and playing games at the arcade, Q*Bert is not one I think of too often. I can't really explain why as I enjoyed my experience with Q-Bert. The game play was simple though rather intense. The graphics and sound were also simple but very effective. You had to maneuver Q*Bert around to change the colors of every cube in the pyramid but content with multiple enemies:

Coily (Snake) - That chased Q*Bert around. Q*Bert had to jump on the flying disks to kill Coily.

Ugg and Wrong-Way - Two enemies that could kill Q*Bert but did not chase him.

Slick and Sam - Two green characters that revert the color changes Q*Bert performed

Bouncing Balls - If Q*Bert hits them, he dies so you have to avoid them.

I was curious how Cubit on the Apple II would compare to the original arcade version. Overall, the game was good. This was the RARE game that allowed me to define which keys on the keyboard I wanted to use. This allowed me to find a combination that was comfortable. The annoying thing? I was asked to define the keyboard every time though I admit I never selected "No" and didn't see if the game retained what I had set earlier.

While I wished I had a joystick to play the game, using the keyboard wasn't too bad. My character moved around very well and the game play is very faithful to the arcade game. I managed to get to Round 3 and saw the balls, Coily, and Slick / Sam. I didn't see Ugg & Wrong Way though perhaps I didn't get to the upper levels of the game.

The weakness of the game? The graphics and sound are far inferior to the arcade version. The pyramid and the flying disk are represented well. Q*Bert (or Cubit) looks like himself but is not orange. The enemies are represented but look



like shadows in the game. The lack of sprite graphics may have hurt the Apple II here. The pyramid graphic sometimes partially obscures the characters as they move around the screen. Additionally, the more character that are on the screen during game play, the flickering was quite noticeable. The sound was used but definitely not to the level of the arcade game. In some ways, the sound slightly detracts so I turned it off for a while.

All in all, if you are looking for a Q*Bert game for the Apple II, Cubit is about as good as you can. Yes, the graphics and sound aren't up to the arcade game, but the developers did the best they could. It may not be perfect but definitely worth a look for the fans of Q*Bert.



More 64!

by Andrew Fisher



Pi R Squared

This time we look at an unusual puzzle game that will get the cogs of your mind whirring. It was released on the appropriately named Mind Games label.

Released in: 1987

Published by: Mind Games (Argus Press Software)

Developer: Binary Design

Programmer: Dave Healey

Artist: Lee Cawley (game), Chris C.(title screen)

Musician: Jason C. Brooke

Players: 1 player only



What Is The Premise?

Professor Storm is losing his mind, so he goes deep into his own brain to retrieve his memories. Each level is shown as a series of interlocking wheels which rotate in different directions. The professor travels along the rim of the wheel, pressing fire to swap to a neighbouring wheel. The aim is to collect parts of a formula - by completing a complete circuit of the wheel containing the letter or symbol - in the correct order and return to the starting point to complete the level, moving onto the next tougher formula.

What Is The Gameplay Like?

The professor can move with the motion of the wheel, or slower in the opposite direction. Travelling around the wheels are enemies, some sticking to one wheel and others moving between them. As the levels become harder, the enemies start to chase the professor from wheel to wheel. Contact reduces the professor's IQ, shown as a large energy bar. Once that bar is empty, a life is lost from the starting quota. Some wheels contain stray thoughts, such as ice cream, which deplete IQ. Books increase IQ, calculators speed up movement and a hammer is used to swat the stray thought. The trash can is very helpful, as the professor can use it to re-arrange the formula letters collected so far - essential since it must be assembled in the right order.



What Makes It Special?

This was a very unique and unusual puzzle game at the time, and would make an interesting experiment on modern touch screen devices. The rotating wheels are a clever graphical effect, accompanied by a jolly and bouncy piece of music. The difficulty does soon increase with the number of enemies and the need to plan a route, but it definitely inspires you to have one more go.

What Did They Do Next?

Binary Design worked on original budget games as well as arcade conversions. Argus Press published books on computing and several specialist computer magazines, including Commodore Disk User and 64 Tape Computing (which came each issue with a disk or tape respectively). The software company had a few hits, including Alien licensed from the film. This featured an interesting character system and more than one way to win.

Argus took over Quicksilver, transferring several of its staff from Southampton to London. That label was responsible for converting Pac-Land and Pacmania from the arcades, and the terrible Flintstones Yabba-Dabba Doo game. The assets of both companies were transferred to the new software house Grandslam, but it went into bankruptcy in the early 1990s.

What To Play Next?

Released just a few months later, Deflektor by Gremlin Graphics is another mind-bending puzzle game. The player must guide a beam of light around the screen, using movable mirrors to destroy all the grey spheres to unlock the receiver and complete the level. The beam is a clever piece of programming and the level layouts soon become very devious.

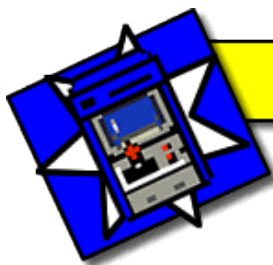
Another option is The Detective Game, also from Argus Press. Walk around the isometric mansion finding clues and talking to the guests. There is murder afoot, more people die during the game and an incompetent detective can soon find themselves the target... The recent DS homebrew remake retained the original's charm.



Web Link

<http://www.gb64.com/game.php?id=25&d=18&h=0>

The Gamebase64 link for Pi R Squared (which is very hard to discover in a web search!)



MAME Reviews

by Mark Sabbatini



Pinball Action

"This is definitely a contender for video gaming's most dumbass idea done poorly."

I had that opening line composed after losing my first two balls almost immediately in Pinball Action, a 1985 arcade game that looked and played like it belonged in 1978. A couple sets of drop targets, a lone round bumper at the upper right of the table, a lone spinner nearby, a few catch-and-release ball drops that weren't there for multi-ball play since there is none. Also, for some reason, the key response for the right flipper was lagging a fraction of a second.

My imagination was on the executives and programmers at Tehkan (which became Tecmo a year later), who apparently thought it could compete in arcades with games a couple of generations ahead such as Gauntlet, Ghosts 'n Goblins and Super Mario Bros. To say nothing of real pinball games still being released then, including a personal addiction known as Eight Ball Deluxe. Sort of like the folks who thought the Yugo could compete with the Honda Civic (for literary types, "The Yugo: The Rise and Fall of the Worst Car in History" is a great retelling of that tragicomedy).



It seemed too trifling a game for a MAME review, but I was still mildly curious about the question of "why?" I also thought maybe I could turn this month's column into a comparison of video pinball machines since I wasn't familiar with them, although in the computer/console world I'd become disenchanted with how early attempts at realism (see: Little Wing and its replica of the aforementioned Eight Ball Deluxe) gave way to increasingly outlandish concepts with few to no features physically possible on a real table. Games like Mario Pinball Land can be fun, but they're not even an incestuous cousin to a real table.

So I started a second game of Pinball Action and ... things changed. Literally, as I shot a ball into one of the more difficult drop targets and the entire table changed. This, of course, is exactly the thing I was just bitching about – obviously there's no way that happens with a real pinball machine. But ... somehow I didn't mind. It was still actually fun. And I started wondering how many other tables might be revealed.

Not that many, as it turns out. There are a total of four tables, starting with a fairly generic layout with a purple background and a redhead with flaming hair as the featured art. Subsequent tables have more definitive themes, including bowling, video poker and a slot machine.

What makes the game work is that, while the layout and rules for each table change, all of them preserve the simplistic essence of classic pinball tables where the not-always-obvious extras are revealed by triggering a series of achievements.

(That right flipper control problem, by the way, was due to a default MAME setting on my computer assigning the key a dual purpose. Once I changed that, all was good.)

Despite my praise, pinball purists who shudder at the thought of a video screen aren't going to find Pinball Action to their liking (and I can't think of any title offhand they would). The all-important ball physics are competent in terms of

gravity and bounce, with no absurdities like balls getting stuck or endlessly rebounding, but don't make the leap from logically predicable to realistic. Animation and collision detection are smooth, so there's no worries about a high-speed ball "blinking" its way halfway across the screen or past a flipper. Sounds are purely from the video game spectrum, so forget any nostalgia there.

While the graphics won't wow anyone, the initial table is the least appealing both visually and in terms of gameplay. The two are intertwined, as the more distinctive visual themes of the subsequent tables also make it easier to grasp what you need to do to attain bonuses and such (the idea of completing a poker hand is a lot more comprehensible than, well, whatever it is Flaming Woman needs to be satisfied).

DIP switch settings are an usually noteworthy highlight. They including starting with two to five balls, a wide range of bonus-point settings, making it difficult or easy to earn an extra ball, and four difficulty settings for each of two elements (distance between flippers and outlanes). The last two settings in particular make the game more fun and increase its longevity. I've always wanted to extract vengeance on "sucker" pinball tables, but when I can tweak it that way just to compare scores...

But while MAME players can control the DIP switches, what they'll lose is the coin-op's pinball replica console, with side buttons and the screen where a "real" playfield would be. I'm lucky enough to have one of those X-Arcade controllers with pinball buttons, making up for half of that deficiency.

As for comparing it to other video pinball coin-ops, the competition is surprisingly limited and disappointing. A large part of the reason is most of them are X-rated and I have no urge to include them (and it has nothing to do with their being every bit as titillating as a strip poker game on the Commodore 64). The remaining games have their pluses and minuses compared to Pinball Action, but none struck me as clearly superior.

A rather obvious pick for a better game would seem to be Super Pinball Action, offering multi-ball and multi-flipper play on four different tables. It is flashier and, arguably, better overall in terms of gameplay. But the goal is to basically trigger stuff that reveals R-rated (at least) women. Scratch.

Alien Crush, a 1988 NEC title, has a sparse table that's too much video game verses pinball. The 1994 game Grand Cross Pinball takes that space theme well past that. Tecfri's 1987 Speed Ball is closer to the real thing, but too many table elements look like tacky early-computer creations (square "buttons" that are basically computer numbers in a box). I've skipped a few others that failed to equal even these tepid impressions.

Bottom line is video pinball is an exceeding weak field (to the sorrow of exactly no purists), which means Pinball Action qualifies as Good Enough if this happens to be a genre you want to try (or actually enjoy). In a way, it's sort of a second- or third-rate arcade version of Little Wing's classics, being an entry entrant others have tried and failed to surpass despite better features and technology. But that also suggests that, while this is an OK way to kill time, it's the home console/computer titles ranging from the Apple II's Raster Blaster to the iPad's Pinball HD that really have the wizard's touch.



Final Verdict: Thumbs Up!



NES'cade

by David Lundin, Jr.



Contra

Let's get down to it, the edition of NES'cade that I've been dreading the most. The one where I tear apart an arcade classic and cast it aside as unentertaining in the face of a port that came a year later. The one that will lead to even more e-mails from those expressing complete repulsion concerning my thoughts on games they consider legendary. Now before clicking on my name above and starting to compose that e-mail, give me a moment to state my case why being influential doesn't necessarily make an arcade game classic. Released to arcades in 1987, Konami took the concept of power-ups and special weapons from Gradius, gave them to a couple military commandos, and called it Contra. A watershed moment in the early history of run and gun games, the result was a short but extremely frantic two player dash through hordes of enemies, tons of explosions, and the aforementioned heavy weapons.

The story of Contra has been severely altered between regional releases but the Japanese release is the one I'm going to go with since it's both the original and most fleshed out. In 2631 a mysterious meteorite falls into the fictional Galuga Archipelago near New Zealand. Two years later the terrorist invader Red Falcon begins to plot the downfall of all mankind. Bill and Lance, marines in the "Contra" unit, are ordered to infiltrate and destroy Red Falcon's stronghold. Both are equipped with a standard rifle and endless ammunition for this base gun. In addition five different weapon power-ups can be collected by shooting out weapon capsules either in the air or embedded in the stage walls. The machine gun fires a constant spray of bullets when the fire button is held down. The fireball upgrade fires a swirl of fireballs. A laser upgrade can be obtained that fires a jet of energy. The fan favorite spread gun fires a fan of bullets that expand in size and spread apart as fired. Last is the power up no one ever likes to get - rapid fire bullets that travel just a little faster than your stock gun. All weapons have infinite ammunition but are lost if killed, knocking your armament back down to the stock rifle. A special defense barrier can also be picked up that will provide temporary invulnerability. In addition to shooting out capsules, weapons can also be obtained by killing red guards during the base infiltration stages. All these weapons are easy to use with the basic controls of an eight direction joystick, a fire button and a jump button.

A year after the arcade release, Contra was ported to the Famicom and very shortly after to the NES. In addition to expanding the size and scale of the game's stages, the Famicom version featured some enhanced graphical effects. As publishers manufactured their own cartridges in Japan, they could use custom hardware and this was the case with Contra on the Famicom. Sporting the VRC2 custom memory controller, the Japanese release it featured wind blowing through the trees, an actual snowstorm in the Snow Field, and a much more over the top final stage. Additionally the Famicom release had a full introduction sequence, cutscenes between stages outlining Bill and Lance's progress throughout the game, and a more fleshed out ending. The custom effects being cut out of the NES version make sense as the cartridge couldn't have the same hardware but all the text being removed, I've always thought that had more to do with wanting to make the localization and release as fast as possible. Even without the enhancements, the NES and Famicom versions differ quite a bit from the arcade original and this column would be incomplete without mentioning the changes, as they really illustrate why the home version is better in almost every way.

To begin, arcade Contra uses a vertically oriented display, sparking the question, "Why?" There's no reason that this game should have been presented in this way. Sure half the stages move upward but the base infiltrations only really use the lower part of the screen and the extra real estate during the vertical waterfall climb never really comes into play. Due to this, the game seems overtly compacted, especially when playing with two players. Stage breaks aren't as apparent in the arcade version as there really aren't any clean breaks that spell out that you're moving into the next area. Additionally the arcade stages all seem at least a little shorter than they are on the NES version, giving the home release a feeling of more to do and a sense of actually covering some ground rather than just advancing the screen for a couple minutes. Things start off much the same in the first stage, Jungle, between the two versions although the NES

release has an additional exploding bridge to cross, adding to the stage's length. At the end of the stage the enemy base must be blown up and entered, which leads to stage 2, Base 1.

On the NES the two base infiltration stages utilize almost all of the screen real estate, with a small border around the outside edges. Originally the base stages had a large map and time display that took up the top third of the screen. Sure, the arcade version featured corners to turn in the corridors but all this boiled down to was running off the correct side of the screen once reaching the end of the hallway. In all honesty it's identical to the constant forward advancement of the NES version as the corridors always had the same layout, there were no dead ends, and as I stated before, a huge unnecessary map took up the top third of the screen. Now if these were randomly generated or had a half dozen or so different layouts that would be randomly chosen, that would be awesome. However there aren't and the base infiltrations in the arcade are short and boring. One thing that does mix it up a little more in the arcade are destructible panels that can cover both enemy soldiers as well as gun turrets. These can be shot out with a little work and were replaced on the NES by wall mounted blocks which had to be shot out to uncover the lock orbs behind them.



Stage 3, Waterfall, is a vertical climb up to the entrance of Base 2. One would think this would be the optimal stage for a vertically oriented game but it never really comes into play, even in a two player game. The NES version requires a little more platforming skill to traverse and the climb itself feels longer. Once reaching the top in the arcade version there are a few gun ports to shoot out before the base opens up. Of course this was given a big graphical enhancement on the NES, becoming what is probably the most well remembered Contra boss, the giant alien head with twirling arms - inspired by the Alien films. Although they're both really just gun turrets, the moment in which the NES version's boss fades into view is one of the most classic moments of the entire game. Stage 4, Base 2, plays out much the same in both versions other than the turns and map of the arcade original but the boss is the same. Stage 5, Snow Field, is where things really start to change between the two releases. The arcade version opens with the spacecraft that serves as the boss of this stage in the NES version, now relegated to be a simple enemy troop deployer. The Snow Field itself is the same for the most part other than it being a much shorter stage in the arcade version. Once you reach the end, since the spacecraft has already been destroyed, the boss is instead the Giant that hangs out at the end of Stage 6 in the NES version. After destroying him the game simply transitions into what is known as Stage 6, Energy Zone, on the NES.

The Energy Zone is a lot less complex in the arcade version, barely even qualifying as a scenery change. Then would you believe at the end of this stage the boss you fight is the Giant once again? Well that's exactly what the game throws at you but at least the arcade and NES versions are back to having the same boss at the end of a stage again. However yet again the arcade version simply transitions to what is known as Stage 7, Hangar, in the NES version. If the arcade Energy Zone was a lot less complex than the NES version of the same stage, then comparing the arcade version of the Hangar to the NES version is like the game "Tank!" being compared to the game "Metal Slug." Sure, it's the same basic concept but the latter takes the concept and runs with it. Barely any dodging of retractable claws, no spiked walls growing out of the floor, and no platforming required what so ever - that's the arcade Hangar. As the end of the Hangar is reached you're probably expecting to fight yet another Giant but the game gets even lazier here, if that's possible at this point. There is no boss of the Hangar stage in the arcade version, it just abruptly transitions to what the

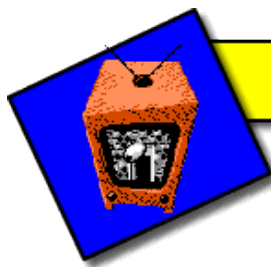
NES version calls Stage 8, Alien's Lair. As for the NES, rather than repeat a boss already encountered previously, the entrance to the Alien's Lair must be blown open while contending with a pair of ground based cannons and an onslaught of running troops.

Stage 8, Alien's Lair, is the final stage in both versions of the game. The Famicom version's enhanced graphics capabilities allow the walls and background of the entire stage to pulse and move, it really is an awesome effect. During the run to Red Falcon the arcade version has you fight an alien head mini boss, again, inspired by those in the Alien films and this is the same on the NES. However the NES version of the stage feels longer with more enemies and more platforming. Red Falcon is the same in both versions, a giant heart surrounded by alien creature generators. There are more generators around Red Falcon in the arcade original but the fight is identical and compared to some of the encounters earlier on in the game, relatively easy. In the arcade you get a staff roll and the game ends right there, while on the NES a helicopter is shown leaving the island as Red Falcon's base explodes. The Famicom version has an additional scene showing Bill and Lance hop into the awaiting helicopter before evacuating the destruction. There's also a hidden ending cutscene in the Famicom version that states Red Falcon will rise again.

It isn't just the expanded gameplay and better structure that make the NES version a better game. While the music and sound effects are in essence cut from the same cloth between both versions, the NES music sounds more fully realized and complete. Contra's arcade soundtrack is excellent, don't get me wrong, but the NES soundtrack is immortalized. The control also feels tighter on the NES and I suppose that would be the best word to describe the total home package here, everything is tighter, more refined. For the arcade portion of this column I used an arcade quality joystick (in fact I used the control panel off one of my arcade cabinets) to make sure this comparison was valid; it just plays better on the NES. Graphically it's going to come down to personal preference which you prefer more as while one version isn't noticeably better than the other, they are both decidedly different when it comes to visuals. Personally I prefer the look of the NES release. Now, there are a couple things I like better in the arcade version and they have to do with special weapons and power-ups. The spread gun's orbs not only fan out after being shot but they also grow in size in the arcade original, making the weapon even more useful than on the NES. I also like the way the barrier power-up is portrayed in the arcade as little spiked orbs that float around your character, rather than just making your sprite flash as on the NES. The NES version adds in a screen clearing special bomb power-up but it's not all that useful since it never comes by at the right time. The NES version also redesigned all weapon pickups to the simplified falcon icon with the letter for the power-up in the middle, rather than the machine gun and laser being actual guns as in the arcade, making it far easier to tell what you're picking up.

The place where Contra really shines as a game and as a concept is how easily you can move your character exactly where you want them to go. There aren't any convoluted button presses or need to find a ladder or specific place to get from platform to platform. Just hold down and press jump and you drop through the current platform to the one below. This is simply genius and prevents there from being any break in the action. This simplicity in motion is what would open the door for the run and gun genre to really take off. After all, that's what Contra is all about, crazy and frantic action with a friend. Taking a step back and looking at the arcade version of Contra in the mindset of when it was released, it is an incredible game. The problem is one year later it was overshadowed and straight up outclassed by the NES home conversion. The key reason for this being that the home version is an expanded and refined build of a great concept. It's almost as if the development team said, "We're going to take this great game and make it even better, and make the original almost a backwater title in comparison." For these reasons I've never really liked the arcade version of Contra while the NES and Famicom ports are amazing, must have titles for the respective platforms.

Growing up my best friend and I would tend to get complementary NES games as gifts unless it was something that everyone had to have, Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!! for instance. I tended to enjoy a pretty eclectic mix of games, even as a kid, so my friend would get a copy of Bubble Bobble and I would get a copy of Tiger-Heli or I would really want A Boy and His Blob and he would want Life Force. I would want Super Mario Bros. 2, Cobra Triangle, and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and he would want Donkey Kong Classics, The Legend of Zelda, and Adventures of Lolo. Somewhere among the cycle of Christmases, birthdays, and weekend game rentals, he would get a copy of Contra (for the record, I think it was around the same time I got a copy of The Goonies II, which I still to this day have yet to complete). Many cool spring and summer mornings in Silicon Valley would be spent playing Contra as a bit of a "warm up" game when we would play together. It was the perfect game to start with or come back to when another title was proving to be just a little too frustrating. Way back then I settled into the machine gun being my weapon of choice in Contra, which it is to this day. I'll never forget when we figured out that in a two player game, a player out of lives could steal one of the men in reserve from the player still playing. For whatever reason this act became known as getting an extra life wholesale or to "go wholesale." I have no idea why that came to us or if we even knew what wholesale meant but the term stuck for many, many years. "Stop going wholesale!" became a battle cry in the scorched jungles of New Zealand, circa 2633.



Turn To Channel 3

by Nick DeMarco



Maniac Mansion

School has begun in Northeastern Pennsylvania, in the city of Scranton, September 1990, and like a lot of kids my age at that time, 9 years old, I really didn't want to go back to school, despite welcoming any and all opportunities to sit at lunch with my TMNT Thermos lunch box and talk about all things gaming. Oh sure, spelling was important, and soon I'd be learning a new musical instrument, the trumpet, that I would end up playing long into adulthood, but for me, I was concerned about one thing and one thing only, this bizarre, quirky, and interesting looking game for the NES called Maniac Mansion.



I was an awkward child, with my high water pants and my shirts no kid in their right mind would want to wear, so I think it was natural for me to gravitate towards games not every kid cared about. The same was true of Déjà vu, another hidden gem for the NES, and one of my all-time favorites, but what I certainly didn't know at the time was just how popular a game Maniac Mansion would become, developing a following uniquely its own.

So, without further ado, let's take a look at a game that dominated a majority of my summers growing up, and is still a summer favorite of mine today, Maniac Mansion!

Sound

9

One of the first things you notice about Maniac Mansion, and something that often goes overlooked and underappreciated about the game, is the music. While the title screen music is great, obviously the main points here are the individual themes for each character, each distinct and unique to that character. Everyone has their favorites, but if I had to single one out it would be Michael's theme, it just a very funky beat to it (Yeah, I know, who says funky anymore, right?) with some honorable mentions being Dave's theme and Syd's theme. You also had that quirky and lovable music for those in between scenes that carried the game and story along. If the fact programmers and developers making individual themes wasn't enough, there's also sounds like the ding of the microwave (more on that later), the chime of the doorbell, water running, and the radioactive alarm that goes off, just to name a few. It just seems like they did everything right in this game with the soundtrack and sound effects, yet the game doesn't often get the credit it deserves in this department.



Graphics

8

While the characters themselves are a sight to behold, along with those iconic tentacles and all those bizarre folks living inside the mansion, it really is the attention to detail and all the great examples of stellar graphics as a whole that makes this game stand out. This game was created at a time where the NES was no longer considered in its heyday, but we had still yet seen the greatness that would become the SNES, and yet, everything from the outside of the house to each individual room and the contents in it were so well designed, it really enhanced the overall feel and joy of exploration in the game on this alone. Everything looked so welcoming to the gamer, inviting them to point and click on an object to see what happens. While I don't view the graphics as quite the defining piece of this game's overall presentation, it is still worth marveling at the fact that most games during this time were giving you one screen or several other screens that all looked very similar, and yet here was Maniac Mansion giving you rooms and rooms of fun to interact with, all within this "universe" known as the mansion itself. Seems kind of a given nowadays to have this fully immersive worlds we can play in, but in 1990, on the NES, this game showed it was ahead of the game graphically.

Gameplay

9

Truly, what can be said that hasn't been said a million times over? You have a game with a nice interface, the ability to try just about anything out on practically any object, a great storyline, memorable characters, and a difficulty that gets amped up as you get closer and closer to the end. It's also worth mentioning that this game has more than one possible ending, and, oh you didn't think I'd forget the fact YOU CAN NUKE A FREAKIN' HAMSTER! Still, to this day, I don't know why Nintendo had so many things edited out of the C64 original, and yet still kept the merciless killing of a pet hamster. I mean, I'm glad they did, because it just added to the mystique of the game. You can't tell me kids in 1990 weren't clamoring to play "the game where you put a hamster in the microwave." Were you one of those kids? I know I was! I'd also like to mention, because I would be remiss not to, that each character has different strengths and weaknesses, skills only that one character has, which definitely made you have to choose wisely, requiring more strategy to the game that at first glance would appear necessary.



Overall

8

Maniac Mansion, if I could offer a comparison, is kind of the Rocky Horror Picture Show of retro gaming. Not everyone liked it, and some prefer the less toned down C64 version, but it has also built quite the cult following for itself, along with its sequel Day Of The Tentacle. Maniac Mansion is a game that you owe it to yourself to experience at least once, for if nothing else, the chance to mercilessly kill a hamster or even yourself with radioactive pool water might be up your alley, you sick and twisted human being. Maniac Mansion, in so many ways, was ahead of its time, and I think that's why a lot of gamers gravitated towards it during the time of its release, because it was something new, something fresh. It wasn't Link taking down foes with his sword and saving Hyrule. It wasn't Mario saving the Princess and the Mushroom Kingdom from Bowser. It was you, some nerdy looking guy, being scared to death by this green tentacle thing that we had never seen before in gaming. Probably one of the weirdest games on the NES (and there are some weird ones) it is also a hidden gem worth discovering.



Hope you enjoyed turning to channel 3. Down the road we'll be looking at the Streets Of Rage series with my pals Rob and Landon from Retro Junkies, as well as reviews of Déjà vu and so much more!



With all this talk about licensed games, it reminded me of a story I came across about a month ago about a film crew digging up a New Mexico landfill site where supposedly 3.5 million copies of E.T. are rumored to be buried. Those who are unfamiliar with the story can read more about it [here](#). It should be interesting to see what they find, since there could be in addition to the E.T. cartridges, unsold consoles, computers, prototypes, etc. I remember coming into the classic gaming community back in the late 90s and this was one of the top rumors you always heard about, the New Mexico E.T. landfill story. It's something that intrigued me back then and still does to this day. On one hand I am sad to see an end to a famous rumor, regardless on if something is found or not, the rumor will be either proven true or false. On the other hand, I am anxious to see what exactly lies underground. It does appear that one Atari spokesperson says they dumped items there, but what they dumped is in question.

Some people are comparing this situation to Geraldo Rivera's Al Capone's Vault debacle, where all that was found was an old stop sign and some bottles. However, since we have a former Atari employee on record saying they used this site, there very possibly are things hiding below, but what those things are remains to be seen. For all we know, it could be rejected chips/consoles. I did read somewhere that someone mentioned that Atari most likely would have reused the good shells or chips from those E.T. cartridges for other games. In either case it will be interesting to see what comes from this. I might be in line to buy the documentary once it comes out, regardless on what's found, since it would be interesting to just see this old rumor being unearthed.

In other news, Rob Luther (one of the Retro Junkies) is taking bets on what's found there (<http://www.retrogamingtimes.com/forum/YaBB.pl?num=1370187770>)!