

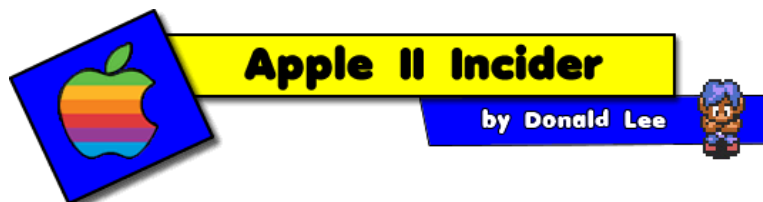
Issue #116 - January 2014

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Well folks, this is the last issue on the Retrogaming Times site! Next month we'll be a part of The Retro Junkies at www.theretrojunkies.com. It's an amazing community of retro minded folks like the people who read this magazine and is filled with fun and interesting features. You'll now be able to get all your retro gaming fun in one place. Therefore, even though this is the final issue on this particular site, it will not be the final issue of RTM, it will just be moving to another location.

Needless to say I will no longer be the editor of RTM with The Retro Junkies takeover, so this will be my final issue. I want to take this time to say thanks for these last 5 years (5 years come February). It's been a blast, and I've enjoyed getting to know the staff and readers of this magazine. It's been a fun 5 years, and I can only hope that with RTM joining the larger Retro Junkies community, it will flourish even more. Therefore, enjoy this final Bryan edition of RTM so to speak!



The Undiscovered Country

"It's about the future, Madame Chancellor. Some people think the future means the end of history. Well, we haven't run out of history quite yet. Your father called the future the undiscovered country. People can be very frightened of change."

James T Kirk - Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country



Happy New Year everyone! Or at least it will be by the time you read this issue. I am writing this a few days after Christmas. I am actually late in submitting this as I forgot about the due date. As usual though, Bryan will be understanding!

If you are wondering why I opened with the Star Trek quote, please note that the January 2014 issue of Retrogaming Times Monthly (RTM) will be the last "standalone" issue you will see on the website. After some internal discussions, RTM will be merged with The Retro Junkies next month.

There are many reasons why this move makes sense. One of the primary reasons is to streamline the creation of the magazine each month. To edit and put the magazine together in the past required a lot of manual effort. I know this because I did it for several months when Bryan wanted to transition out of the duties several years ago. Somehow Bryan stayed on and the magazine continued in its current incarnation.

However, Bryan has a lot of other things going on besides the magazine and just did not have the time to edit and put the magazine together anymore. These days, I can barely commit to writing more than one article a month. Editing and putting the magazine just isn't something I can do right now.

While the idea of the change is great, I'm a bit of a traditionalist. I really don't like change until it is forced upon me. With some personal things happening over the past few years, change has been thrust upon me hard and fast. I've grown to see that change is just a part of life, even if it's not something I particularly enjoy.

While moving RTM to The Retro Junkies makes sense logistically, it is sad that an era of RTM will be closing. It's hard to believe RTM's been around since 2004 while the original Retrogaming Times (RT) started in 1997. I was still in college in 1997! Yet, change is necessary for RTM to remain viable in 2014. Bryan has a good plan to streamline the production of the magazine and allow RTM to be produced for the years to come.

Just in case anyone's wondering, I plan to remain writing and I think all of the current writers will be coming along as well. With a lot of personal stuff going on, I had thought maybe I would step away from writing for a time (not permanently). After all, when I had started writing for RTM, the magazine was on it's death bed. There weren't many writers and we had a revolving door of editors until Bryan showed up. However, I enjoy writing too much to step away even if I haven't played a retro game in many months. As most people notice, there's usually a ton of other things I can write about.

Thanks to all the readers for staying with RTM for all these years. I hope everyone will follow us as we start a new era at The Retro Junkies next month. Take care!

The future's so bright, I gotta wear shades
-Timbuk 3



The Colorful History of Tandy's Underdog Computer

CoCo: The Colorful History of Tandy's Underdog Computer is a documentary written by Boisy Pitre and Bill Loguidice. As the title blatantly states, it is a historical account of the TRS-80 Color Computer. Before I get to the book itself, let's look at the credentials of the authors themselves.

Boisy Pitre - A longtime advocate for the CoCo. Along with another long time CoCo Community member, Mark Marlette, Boisy operates a business to provide up to date software and hardware to augment today's Color Computer users – Cloud9.

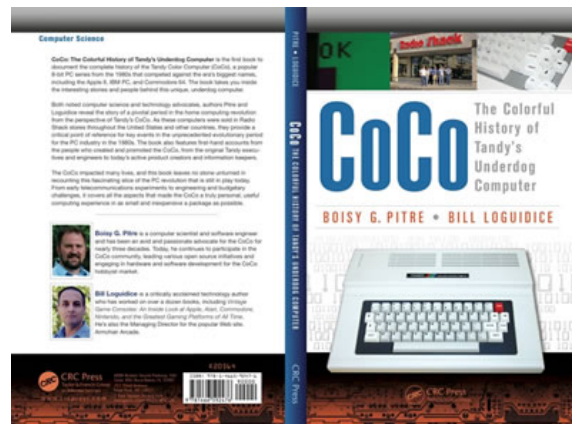
Bill Loguidice - Managing Director of the Armchair Arcade website, Bill has also worked on over a dozen books related to retro computing and video games. Bill is also an active member of the CoCo Community (and others).

So, both authors are well suited for undertaking an historical account of the CoCo. And undertake it they did.

In September of 2013, I had become aware of their endeavor and as soon as it was announced that Amazon was taking pre-orders, I placed mine. In fact, I requested to be placed on the reviewers list as well (which has it's own story...). I'm very happy to

announce I received my copy of the book on December 23rd. Due to family get-togethers and visitation with my daughter, I still haven't completely finished it – I have one chapter left – but the article needs submitted for the final issue of RTM as a standalone magazine. So, on to the book!

In CoCo: The Colorful History of Tandy's Underdog Computer, the authors explore many facets of the TRS-80 Color Computer. For example, while many people know of the CoCo's design being a descendent of the standalone Videotex terminal, how many knew that both machines were spawned from another project called 'Green Thumb'? I didn't. How many people knew that a Deluxe Color Computer made it to pre-production? Well, if you read my article on the CoCo3, or Nick Marentes' book "CoCo Nuts", or are a long time CoCo Fanatic, you may have. However, you'll still learn a few things about it from this book.



Cover image provided by Boisy Pitre

What would a historical book about a classic computer be without discussion with the engineers who designed it? Not much more than guess work, really. Fortunately, the authors conducted numerous interviews for this book. People like Mark Seigel, Jerry Heep, John Prickett and many other Tandy employees, prying for secrets that might still be out there. Topics of discussion include: development of the CoCo1, CoCo2 and Deluxe Color Computer; development of, and initial specifications for the CoCo3. Of much interest too me were the discussions of engineering meetings concerning design and development and concessions that had to be made.

There's also a section discussing Tandy's interest in entering the video game console market. Many people know that Tandy rebadged a video game console and sold it as their own in the '80's (Sears did the same). However, Tandy also considered several other options related to that particular industry. What system was it? What was Tandy's decision? And how did Tandy leverage their assets for the gaming industry? The answer is in chapter 5 – this is a review, not a spoiler page!!

Many of the personal computers of the day had support systems in place in the form of computer clubs, third party software suppliers and magazines. The Color Computer was no different. CoCo: The Colorful History of Tandy's Underdog Computer goes into some detail regarding the third party software support, events in support of the CoCo, magazine support for the CoCo, and other areas common to most computers of the era. There's been much said over the years about why the CoCo didn't have a lot of officially licensed products – and it's discussed here as well.

The biggest and most popular magazine in support of the CoCo was one called 'The Rainbow'. There's no secret there. What made it special? Who were the people behind the Rainbow? There's plenty of interesting commentary about this special magazine with comments from many of The Rainbow's contributors. I found it very intriguing reading about the progress the magazine made in a very short time in becoming the CoCo's premier publication – and the history behind it.



Bookmarks for the book

Why was the CoCo3 unceremoniously retired? Were there plans in place for a CoCo4? Were there clones of the CoCo, like many other computers of the era had? What were the MM/1, TC-9, and TC-70? What did they have to do with a Color Computer? What is a 6309, and what is so special about it? These questions and many more are answered in the book. Facts and history too numerous to list are laid out in an entertaining, easy to read fashion that is a testament to the authors desire to made an informative, easy to read historical narrative about the TRS-80 Color Computer.

During the history of the CoCo, there are examples of excellence everywhere. In CoCo: The Colorful History of Tandy's Underdog Computer, the authors did their best to convey that excellence. Several discussions with the engineers include talk about the development of the various CoCo incarnations, and the ever mysterious CoCo sales figures. Several prominent programmers are

also mentioned in the book – and their contributions to the CoCo Community are nothing short of excellent. Some parts of the book truly read as a whos-who of the Color Computer, and rightfully so.

In closing, I'd like to say I read a lot. However, I cannot. My time right now is so divided that I rarely have time to read at all. What I can say is that I was REALLY looking forward to this book arriving so I would make myself set aside some time to read it. And read it I did. CoCo: The Colorful History of Tandy's Underdog Computer is laid out and presented in a very fun and easy to read manner. Once I started reading the book, it was difficult to put down. I gave the book a quick five star review on Amazon; not because I have talked to both authors on several occasions. Because it deserves five stars. The book is a joy to read, and is loaded with useful information any retro computer fan would find not only useful, but, enjoyable.

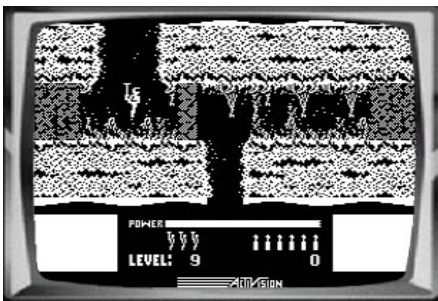


Rejects Gaming Hall Of Fame

After a decade as RTM's resident misfit, writing about the machines and games everybody ignored or made fun of, I'm guessing a sentimental rant about why I love losers is the last thing anybody wants to read in this goodbye to the site in its current form.

So, getting immediately to the point for maybe the first time ever, here's a Hall of Fame unlike any you'll find elsewhere – a "best of the worst," so to speak (along with a few "worst of the worst," because Classic Badness is sometimes just too much fun to ignore).

ZX81: 1K hi-res games



HERO on the ZX81

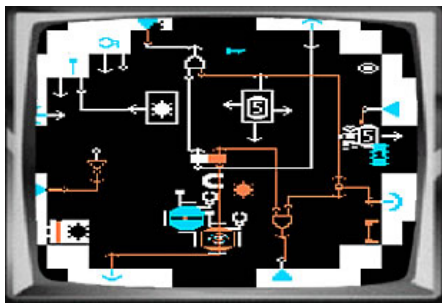
Easily the top achievement in the "getting the most out of inferior hardware" category is this collection by Johan Koelman (a.k.a. Dr. Beep), now totaling about 20 games and still growing. It's not just coaxing 256X192 graphics from the computer's supposed 64X48 maximum resolution, but that he's doing so on a machine with no video memory – which means squeezing both the display map and game code into that single kilobyte.

An initial 10-game collection I reviewed about a year had a mix of gems and (relative) duds, but the scary thing is his more recent efforts keep getting more impressive. They include arcade games like Qbert and Hogan's Alley (titled Saloon City), puzzlers like Locomotion and Sokoban, and two-player games like Outlaw. Among the best of the older games are Blocky (sort of a Doodle Jump in reverse), bowling, a couple of 3D maze escapes, a Spy Vs. Spy strategy game and a 100-level puzzler called Police Patrol.

You can download them all free at <http://tinyurl.com/q7vhde8>, but he's also selling the collection on cassette as a cancer-prevention fundraiser (his wife, unfortunately, was diagnosed with the illness after he made the announcement). Details about ordering the cassette are at <http://tinyurl.com/or5vk63>.

Honorable ZX81 mentions: Some other ZX81 "must-tries" are Martin Korth's unofficial hi-res port of H.E.R.O. (plus other amazing stuff) at <http://nocash.emubase.de/zx.htm>, everything written by Bob Smith (ranging from a 3D Pac-Man to the Xbox 360 puzzler Cool Shapes) at www.bobs-stuff.co.uk/zx81.html, the world's best ASCII version of Donkey Kong by Paul Farrow and two platform games by the Mojon Twins. The latter items are available at www.rwapsoftware.co.uk/zx81/zx81_software.html.

TRS-80 Color Computer: Robot Odyssey



There's at least two mainstream gaming hall of fame titles for this second-rate clunker that was my first and foremost love from the old days. The first is the 3D RPG Dungeons of Daggorath with its real-time "beating heart." The second is the Sock Master's perfect emulation of Donkey Kong for the CoCo3 released in 2007. But my hall of fame award goes in a totally different direction to make the last of several plugs for a game that was not only mostly ignored, but falls in that horrific category of "edutainment" as well.

Robot Odyssey (also released for the Apple II and DOS) blends a bit of everything – adventure, puzzle solving, mazes and the occasional need for arcade-like reflexes – into what may be the finest circuitry/robotics programming exercise ever. You play a guy with a soldering iron who must escape from a five-level futuristic city by wiring the circuits of three robots with different capabilities to make them perform a mind-bending array of tasks.

The first level (after an incredibly user-friendly intro that's essentially a basic class in electronics and logic circuits) features single-minded tasks like flipping a switch, but after that you'll need to multitask your robots with precise timing and custom-burned chips. It takes a long, long time to get through all five stages and, of course, there is no single "correct" solution to make the robots behave how you need them to. There's also a separate lab feature where you can test, or just play around with, robots and chips.

Maybe it's because I loved those 150-in-1 electronic kits as a kid, or taking apart and trying to fix broken computers starting in my early teen years, but Robot Odyssey remains the sentimental favor I'm most inclined to play despite my fondness for dozens of other CoCo games. For those not wanting to mess with emulators, a perfect remake in Java named Droid Quest is available free at www.droidquest.com.

Dishonorable CoCo mention: Mr. Dig. It may not be possible to determine the single worst copy-protection scheme of all time, but this unauthorized Mr. Do clone has to be a finalist. If the program didn't get a perfect error-check reading of the disk in the first drive, it proceeded to erase the disk and replace the contents with ""BUY YOUR OWN" messages. A bug in the program ended up wiping out many legitimate copies, and there were plenty of anguished cries from people who tried to take a break from work by booting the game from their second disk drive, only to see critical applications and projects wiped out.

TRS-80 MC-10: Pac-Man



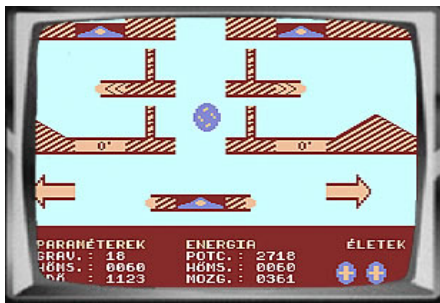
OK, even I despise Tandy's "mini CoCo" and I got tired of Pac-Man long ago, so why on Earth is this in the hall of fame? Put simply, Greg Dionne's unofficial homebrew version is among the first to use the arcade game's code for ghost AI, energizer timing, etc. It certainly still has the honor of being the "authentic" version that runs on the most primitive hardware. The graphics are flat-out ugly in screenshots (even though they're stellar by the MC-10's low-res standards), but animation is smooth and control is precise during gameplay. You can play it and most of the other games available for this machine in a Javascript emulator at <http://mc-10.com>.

Video Technology VZ-200: Hamburger Sam

While we're handing out awards for the world's cheapest color-capable computers (in all senses), here's a nod to this Burgertime clone for the least expensive machine of all. I was actually rooting for this little computer when it was released back in 1982 with a \$99 price tag since it had a lot of similarities to the CoCo at a far lower price. Instead the thing barely existed on the market, making a minor impact in Europe and Down Under, but the sheer quirkiness of its limited game collection is worth killing at least a weekend with. Hamburger Sam, which originated on the black-and-white TRS-80 Model I/III, is much like the MC-10's Pac-Man with graphics that are badly pixelated, but gameplay that is surprisingly true to the arcade original. It and just about everything else VZ-200 related can be found at www.vz200.org.

Honorable VZ-200 Mention: Dawn Patrol. A stripped-down unofficial version of the Apple II classic Choplifter that manages to keep all the essentials intact despite running on a computer with far less memory and power.

Commodore 16: Platina



I described this game in a review as "Mario meets Marble Madness, as the player guides a barrel around mazes with ramps, walls, pits and other things that may aid or hinder efforts to get up, down and around." It's the sort of game that's all the rage these days on mobile devices, but back then it was one of the few truly great games for Commodore's biggest flop ever (actually it shares the award with its fraternal twin, the Commodore Plus/4 - they were "successors" to the Vic-20 and Commodore 64 that were incompatible in every way with their predecessors). The action is Platina is fast, user-friendly and charmingly whimsical. Find it and the rest of the Commodore 16 library at www.commodore16.com.

Dishonorable Commodore 16 mention: Jack Tramiel. Blame the incompatibility issue on the most evil man of the retrocomputing era, whose double-crossing, f*** the employees/customers/dealers attitude wrung out a short-term fortune at the expense of long-term survival. His logic with the C16-Plus/4 twins was customers should have to throw away their old machines and software, because starting over meant a lot more profit – a mentality adopted by more than a few cretins today. When the company fell into peril he went over to arch-rival Atari, immediately fired almost all the workers and basically wrecked that company within a couple of years.

BBC Micro: L – A Mathemagical Adventure



This text adventure – an "edutainment" one to boot – is so far from being the best game for the Beeb I'd be laughed off the planet if I didn't admit it up front. But it's inexplicably, maddeningly addictive, and I wound up playing it long after I bailed out on all-time mainstream hall of famers like Elite (which originated on this machine). The math stuff is almost entirely buried in a variety of clever puzzles, often depicted with ASCII graphics, and the depth of this game ensures you'll be playing it for a long time before you finish, although you'll rarely feel like you're unfairly trapped. This computer is my pick for the best of the retrocomputing era based purely on its hardware specs and since its limited success is mostly due to a government contract with U.K. schools it seems like an education game ought to get some love in this honor roll.

Super Pixel Bros



This eight-by-eight LED pixel version of Super Mario Brothers was the ultimate find when I was writing reviews of standalone games (Mattel Football, etc.) a couple of years ago. It would likely be a confusing mess of lights to someone who's never played SMB, but since there are no such people left on Earth the result is the ultimate Impressionist demake where enemies, castles and everything else are captured wonderfully in the gameplay. Although you can buy assembled units, the DIY kit version feels like the way you need to go with this if you have the ability (a few sessions with Robot Odyssey will be a huge help). It's even possible to program custom levels, albeit in an obscure coding language few people are ever likely to learn. Does all of this sound too troublesome and/or expensive? Then the truly awesome part is a 99-cent OS version titled Super Pixel Bros. does a great job of replicating the experience without the need to assemble anything yourself.

Dishonorable handheld mention: Laden VS USA. I was so fascinated/mortified by this primitive LCD game where you try to fly planes into the World Trade Center (or defend the buildings if you're playing as the U.S.) it was a must-write on my list, only I couldn't verify for certain it was actually released commercially. Supposedly made by a Chinese company, Life magazine claimed

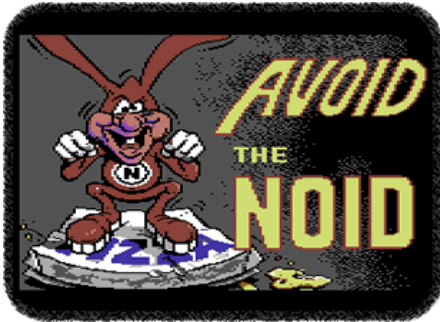
it was "popular among Pakistani children" while The Guardian of London said it was banned by shops in multiple Western countries. Versions that may have been made by counterfeiters have reportedly shown up at places like eBay on occasion.

Finally, at the risk of repeating the farewell in every other column this month, thanks for reading all these years and hope you'll tune in at our new site.



Avoid The Noid

If your pizza delivery is late, you get a free pizza. If your review of a game involving pizzas is late, what happens? Issue 111 may have been the pizza issue, but it's only recently (thanks to Vinny at the C64 Endings website) that I was aware the infamous Noid had made an appearance on the Commodore 64...



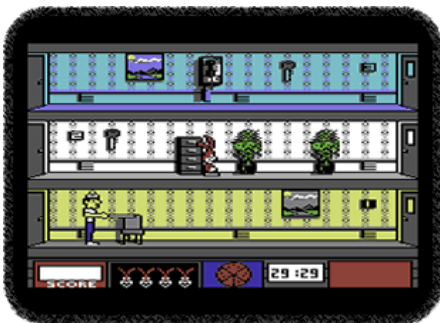
Released in: 1989
Published By: Sharedata Inc.
Developer: Bluesky Software
Programmer: Keith R. Freiheit
Players: 1 player only

What is the Premise?

You are the pizza delivery guy, tasked with delivering a tasty pizza to the penthouse apartment at the top of a very tall building. But there's bad news. The Noids have taken over and are out to stop you so they can get their hands on the delicious slices. It's not going to be easy to make that delivery...

What is the Gameplay Like?

Our peripatetic food server has two main moves. He can make an athletic leap and forward somersault over a Noid, by pressing diagonally up in the direction he is facing. Or he can duck under a leaping Noid, rolling along the ground by pressing diagonally down. Reaching the left or right hand side safely allows the player to move up a level, with each screen containing three floors to negotiate. Throughout the levels there are trapdoors in the floor, sending you plummeting back down a level without warning - these can also be jumped over once you know where they are. And at later levels the Noids are armed with pizza-seeking missiles that have to be dodged.



On the back wall you will also find telephones. Some of these have bonus objects hidden in the coin slot. These include keys, also found hanging on the walls, that are needed to open locked doors. However, some phones will only connect you to the Noid - who will laugh as he blows you up, costing a life. Scattered through the building are three phones that hold a digit of the security code needed to open the door to the penthouse. And there are limited Noid eradicators which can be used to eliminate all the onscreen enemies.

Once the penthouse is reached, the player must race across the roof to the door...which is locked with three locks. So now the player must pick up the keys from the roof, all the while being bombarded with water balloons from the Noid flying overhead.

What makes it Special?

This is a very tough and frustrating game, even though it is quite short. The movements of the Noids and the trapdoors will test your patience. The random nature of the telephones is also awkward. Still, there is a pleasant bitmap screen at the end as reward for completing the game.

What did they do next?

Sharedate Inc. published a variety of licensed titles across formats including the NES and C64. The most famous were titles based on TV game shows Family Feud, Jeopardy and Wheel of Fortune.



What to play next?

For more fast food shenanigans, check out Mr. Wimpy by Ocean. This was based on a British hamburger chain, which is still in existence, and adds a basic "collect the ingredients" level to a clone of Burger Time. Or there's the Garry Kitchen Atari 2600 classic Pressure Cooker, where you have to assemble the burgers and put them into the wrapping machine.

Web Links

<http://www.c64endings.co.uk> – you can see the ending screen of Avoid The Noid here, along with many pictures and videos showing what happens at the end of C64 games.

<http://www.gb64.com> – the Gamebase 64 website where you can download many great games.



The Simpsons

As we all learned recently, this review column is all about games that this one writer spent hours playing, mainly during the summer months, but in reality, every chance I got, spending countless allowances, sometimes even birthday money on these beauties. What? You mean you didn't spend every quarter you could find on true arcade classics like these? Stop lying to yourselves, readers.

Today we take a look at a game that was featured at a lot of my local arcades and thus quickly became one of my absolute favorites, and it was a shared bond I had with other young gamers in the area that just had to get their fix. During the heyday of it's popularity, The Simpsons and its creators could do no wrong, and thus The Simpsons arcade game was made, and it would go on to eclipse any Simpsons game since, but why? Read on, fellow gamers.

Sound 9

Konami is a company that really doesn't get enough credit for all the great arcade and console soundtracks they've created over the years, and I think, when making a game like this, it's easy to fall into the traps of just having the theme song be good, but the rest of the game to be trash in the sound department. Thankfully, that isn't the case here. While the theme song is there, and it's nice, the themes and sound effects through the levels are also pretty good. The sounds of this game fit the whole cartoon style of the game.



Chaos..film at 11!

Graphics 8

Obviously a game like this needs to have good graphics, and while there may be other arcade classics with better graphics I feel the whole Simpsons license was handled well in this aspect, and I can only imagine how difficult it was to honor a show like this in an arcade game when it's already an animated cartoon. All the characters were designed well, and were coupled great with the voices. The level designs were also fairly well done too, and while some folks would have liked to see more Springfield landmarks, there was still enough there to keep fans of the show happy.



As happy as Marge attacking an invisible man AND as happy as that fat guy getting too friendly with that Simpsons arcade cabinet. Come on, fat guy, think of the children.

Gameplay 8

Oh sure, developers of this game could have just hung their hats on the fact that it's The Simpsons and that everyone would love this game just on that fact alone, but they went that necessary step further and created a beat em up that all fans of the genre could enjoy. The game gives you just enough of that balance between humor and serious brawling and it's a nice mix. If this game has one flaw it's the fact that the hit detection can be a bit off and enemies can get in cheap shots, but to be honest, a lot of arcade brawlers were prone to this in their heyday. Still, there's enough difficulty here to challenge you, while not hurting the overall enjoyment of playing the game.

Overall 8

Obviously I can't speak for every gamer out there, but for me, I love this game less for what the subject matter is and more for how well it still plays after all these years. It is still highly regarded as one of the best arcade games out there, and for good reason, because it still has a great story, some awesome levels, and of course, memorable characters. Would it have been cool to have the voices of Smithers and Mr. Burns have been more accurate? Certainly. But they did the best they could with what they had, and that's worthy of being commended.



And commended they shall be..with a rendition of Do The Bartman!

Tune in next time for another great arcade classic! Welcome to 2014!



Mega Man X

I really could go on and on about my love of all things Super Nintendo, or how I still feel, to this day, it is superior to the Sega Genesis in every way possible, but that's not the point of this article. No dear readers and misled Sega Genesis fans, this is to illustrate that superiority by reviewing a game that NEVER appeared on the Genesis, and if it had, I highly doubt it would have fared as well as it did. More importantly than all this venom I am spewing towards the Genesis and it's legion of fans, this is an article about a game that filled the television screens of many of my friends in the 1990s, Mega Man X. So what makes Mega Man X such an SNES classic? Well get your Mega Buster ready, dear readers, and continue on.



Mega Man X Box

Sound 9

I've always felt that the best games, SNES or otherwise, are those that immediately drop you into a world you feel comfortable in, one you want to take an active part in, one you can fully immerse yourself in for however long you choose to play the game. Taking that a step further, any game that has a soundtrack that really fits that environment, that theme, is thus that much better, and Mega Man X does that very well. From the opening beats of the introduction level, to that truly amazing Storm Eagle stage, all of it makes for a very well rounded soundtrack, and quite possibly among the best of any Mega Man title in the history of the franchise. The sound effects are also very good, from X's Mega Buster, as you add weapons and get stronger, to the enemies and their own attacks at our hero. This was a proper step in revitalizing the franchise while creating a new chapter in its vast history.

Graphics 9

I think one of the many things that turned a lot of gamers off from the Mega Man 7 experience was I think they felt that there was more that could be done with the franchise overall, and I think a lot of it stemmed from the graphics. Often times in Mega Man lore, our hero is often criticized for looking too cartoonish, and I think this was especially true of the franchise prior to this game. What developers did with Mega Man X is create, what at the time was a more modern and sleek version of our heroic Blue Bomber and his world. It was like finally seeing a franchise grow up and become something new. X is brilliantly designed, with that blinking eye mechanic being the most notable, and as his weapons would get powered up, the colors and hues were really something to behold. Each level was designed well, which is a staple in Mega Man games, but again they looked more mature, if that makes sense. The enemies were well designed, especially the bosses who just looked simply awesome, again with the likes of Storm Eagle being the most notable.

Gameplay 8

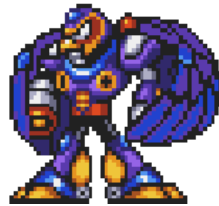
Like many Mega Man titles, Mega Man X sucks you in from the very beginning, and in some instances makes you believe you've got everything well in hand. Then the difficulty increases, the levels get harder, there are hidden capsules to find to power up X, and you are left wondering if you ever really had a clue what you were getting into when you put the cartridge in your SNES. This isn't to say the game isn't great, it certainly is, but it lures you in only to, in video game form, punch you straight in the gut later with it's difficulty. If there's one thing I found kind of annoying, and I have in practically every Mega Man game I've ever played, is there are spots where you make a jump, and you swear you timed it right, pressed the right button, and yet you still go spiraling to your doom. Despite the steep difficulty at times, and the tedious work of finding all these capsules, I still feel the rewards are great for those who choose to forge ahead.



Even though killing giant metallic bugs is awesome.

Overall 8

Mega Man X really did revitalize what was a stagnant franchise at the time that had truly grown long in the teeth, with fans looking for something new and fresh. What it created far outreached its initial goals, spawning a whole new dimension to the way we looked at Mega Man games. It is a game that is continuing to increase in value because so many people are just now discovering how great it really is. If you are a collector of all things SNES, it certainly deserves a place on your shelf.



Of course it does. Would you argue with this guy?

Well then, that's a wrap. Tune in for Retro Junkies exclusive versions of this review column as well as more reviews on RTM as we charge into 2014!



Shining Force II

As you saw in another article of mine, I'm not a fan of the Sega Genesis at all, and truth be told, as a young man I thought it was simply because I was such an avid consumer of Nintendo products. I was drinking their Kool-Aid, so to speak, but it wasn't THAT I was a loyal Nintendo consumer, but WHY I was, and in the case of the SNES it all came down to one thing, the fact that when I was younger I was a diehard, almost to the point of it being a religion, RPG fanatic. I couldn't get enough of them, and I think the fact that most SNES RPGs are going for big bucks tells you I'm not alone in being charmed by them.

There were, however, some RPGs on the Sega Genesis worthy of admiration, and for me none so much as the topic of this review, Shining Force II. Oh sure, the original Shining Force as well as Shining In The Darkness were all great games, but I really cut my teeth in Genesis RPGs on the sequel. So fire up your blast processors, try to ignore the terrible audio quality, and let us journey into Shining Force II!

Sound 9

Despite my joking about the sound quality that comes out of the Sega Genesis, the music in this game is actually quite good, really brought you into the world you were in as you played the game. The battle music was great, as was the tune that would play when you entered a town, it was all very nicely packaged, and the sound effects, from the hits of weapons to the use of magic, all really helped set the tone for this epic adventure you were going on. If the little sound that would play as you switched from different characters or through dialogue was pretty awesome too.



Good news, no cute Mogwais were harmed in the making of this game.

Graphics 8

While not terrible by any means, I regard the graphics, away from battle scenes, as pretty average at best, pretty much your standard RPG fare for the time period. The little pictures of the characters during dialogue were pretty nicely designed, but the battle scenes would be where things really stand out on their own. The brilliant artwork resembles something out of a storybook, and it's definitely one of the finer points of this game.

Gameplay 7

Sure, having to fight a strategic battle all over again is no fun, but that's not the one glaring problem with this game that REALLY drives me nuts, and it's the only one really, and that would be the fact of how limited characters are with their item storage. There's nothing more disheartening then being in a battle that's kicking your butt (hello Kraken) and only be allowed a few items for use to get through it. Other than this one flaw, this is a game that has a lot for gamers to look forward to, and the mechanics of it are simple enough for any gamer, RPG fan or otherwise, to fully grasp over time.



Ok, but which side? The right side? The left side? And how much of this light can we take before we have to flip ourselves so that we don't burn?

Overall 8

Personally, for me, I've always preferred this game and the other Shining Force title to the Phantasy Star series, but that's just one gamer's opinion. I do feel, had Sega produced more games like this, I'd have more of a soft spot for the system than I do. Shining Force II is still an excellent example of what good storytelling, an excellent soundtrack, and some solid graphics can do for an RPG overall. If you own a Sega Genesis, and love RPGs, while you certainly don't have many options, this game may just make you feel you don't need many after all.

Tune in next month for another look at a classic RPG, and remember to KNOW YOUR ROLE!



NES Remix



What is wrong with Nintendo? Yes, I said it. Nintendo is apparently has one of the worst marketing strategies on the planet. Let's not tell fans about an upcoming awesome retro game release that incorporates many of the original NES black box titles. Instead, let's release the game directly after a Nintendo Direct that only a handful of gamers watch. Talk about missing the mark!

Anyhow, lofty soap box stepping aside, NES Remix was released a few days back and I simply could not put it down! While this is not a brand new game, it does breathe new life into old classics. It does this by offering up multiple challenges for each game that vary from retardedly easy to moderately difficult. Nothing here is going to take your skills as a retro gamer to the limit, but it will definitely help train you up on a few games you may have never been that good at (I'm looking at you Clu Clu Land).



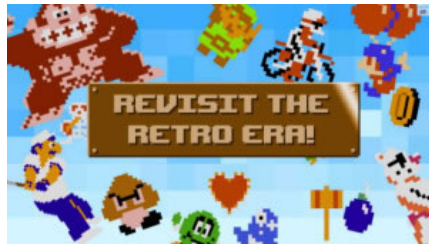
Where the real challenge in NES Remix lies is the "Rainbow Challenge". Some of my buddies and I made the name up and basically this is how it works: If you complete a level with a fast enough time, you not only get 3 stars but they glow with a rainbow shine. To make things even more tempting, once you "Rainbow" all the levels in a tier, the top shines as well. To get rainbow on some of these is so easy that I did it by mistake or by chance, like getting a hole in one on Golf; however some of these bastards are becoming the bane of my existence. There is a Super Mario Bros level, for example, that is extremely difficult. You need to run the entire time and make perfect jumps and swim in 3 separate levels. One or two missed pixels and you are a couple seconds off which only grants you a lofty 3 stars.

Another highlight of NES Remix are the remix levels themselves. There are 3 separate 25 challenge tiers that offer crazy versions of the classic staples. One will have you ice gliding through Super Mario Bros levels and another will narrow the view window on Balloon Fight so you can only see yourself. The most unique challenge is using Link from Legend of Zelda on the first level of Donkey Kong. This becomes much more challenging due to the fact that you do not have any weapons and cannot jump. Time is crucial and you must tackle the classic level with all new tactics. Unfortunately, these types of truly innovative challenges are few and far between.



So what else would I like to see out of NES Remix? First off, I'd like to see more challenges and new NES classics in the form of DLC. This is a must for a sleeper hit such as this. There is a huge NES library for Nintendo to take advantage of and I am willing to bet that many companies would jump at the chance to feature their games in it. Also, having a few more innovative challenges wouldn't hurt. Let's see DK Jr floating around in Clu Clu Land or going through Super Mario Bros with the main character from Urban Champion, an entire crossover tier! Free would be the smart way for Nintendo to go about it due to the fact that the game costs \$15, which is obviously an expensive amount for a downloadable title. Secondly, there needs to be options to allow for buttons to be remapped and the ability to use wiimotes and pro-controllers. Not allowing this from the get go is a huge omission from Nintendo and needs to be fixed ASAP. Finally, there needs to be an online leaderboard integration. What the heck is going on that you wouldn't offer this right from the get go Nintendo? Being able to easily compare scores around the world and with friends seems like a no brainer as this would increase the competition worldwide and increase replay-ability. There could even be an ultimate platinum star ranking based on being in a certain percentage of the world-wide leaderboard, which would change if others knocked you out. Talk about opportunities for awesomeness! But I guess you can't expect much from a company that would just release this title like throwing poop against the wall and seeing if it sticks.

Overall, NES Remix is an amazing release that all gamers will find common ground on. It brought out my competitive nature, which rarely happens with newer game releases. While I would like to applaud Nintendo for a step in the right direction, there needs to be a few fixes to this release to truly make it the A+ - 10 out of 10 title that it can still be!



And now the final issue of RTM with me at the helm has come to an end. I'll still be reading RTM each month over on The Retro Junkies (www.theretrojunkies.com), so I'll not be completely out of the loop! It's been an interesting 5 years, some of the memorable highlights include:

- The creation of the www.retrogamingtimes.com domain name in 2009, as before I came on board the magazine was hosted on Alan Hewston's personal website.
- New authors coming on board to help breathe new life into RTM, which in 2009 was starting to get thin
- The launch of a newly designed website last year
- Creation of an RTM article index
- We even had some drama where one of our columnists was accused of stalking someone else in the retro gaming community on the Internet. Before this I had no idea the retro gaming community had such drama, but that opened my eyes up.

It's been an amazing 5 years, and I expect even more amazingness to come out of The Retro Junkies now that they've bought out the magazine. I should mention that most of the authors will be transitioning with the magazine, so expect to find familiar faces next month in issue 117 over on The Retro Junkies.

Hope everyone has a happy new year and here's to the future of RTM!