video game fanzine

no frills

In this new feature, we will be going far back into the DP archives and looking at some of our past work. We might add in commentary, correct errors that slipped through the cracks, poke fun at ourselves, or simply re-run an article that's so entertaining we had to publish it again. Anyway, here it is, from issue number 1.

ATARI 7800 CHECKLIST

Believe it or not, Atari and a handful of software developers are still supporting the 7800, the system that made the MARIE chip famous. The MARIE chip allowed more sprites onscreen without flicker. Owners of the 7800 often point to *Robotron 2084* as a groundbreaking achievement - the number of characters moving around all at once without disruption in speed or gameplay was truly amazing. Recently, several new cartridges were released for this outstanding little system. The new ones are marked with and asterisk (*) here, but since the inventory is so finite, here is the complete (?) list. All cartridges were manufactured by Atari unless noted in parentheses:

Ace of Aces
Alien Brigade *
Asteroids Deluxe
Ballblazer
Barnyard Blaster
Basketbrawl *
Centipede
Choplifter!
Commando
Crack'ed
Crossbow
Dark Chambers
Desert Falcon
Dig Dug

Donkey Kong
Donkey Kong Jr.
Double Dragon (Activision)
Fatal Run
F-18 Hornet (Absolute)
Fight Night
Food Fight
Galaga
Hat Trick
Ikari Warriors (SNK) *
Impossible Mission
Jinks
Joust
Karateka
Kung Fu Master (Absolute)
Mario Bros.
Mat Mania Challenge (American Technos) *
Mean 18 Ultimate Golf (Accolade) *
Meltdown
Midnight Mutants
Motorpsycho *
Ms. Pac-man
Ninja Golf *
One on One Basketball
Pete Rose Baseball (Absolute)
Planet Smashers *
Pole Position II
Pyromania (Froggo)
Rampage (Activision)
Realsports Baseball
Robotron: 2084
Scrapyard Dog
Summer Games
Super Huey
Super Skateboardin' (Absolute)
Tank Command (Froggo)
Title Match Pro Wrestling (Absolute)
Tomcat F-14 Simulator (Absolute)
Touchdown Football
Tower Toppler
Water Ski
Winter Games
Xenophope
Xevious

This list may not be complete or entirely accurate. Please write if you know something we don't know!

Now

-*Ikari Warriors*, *Mat Mania* and *Mean 18* were all published by Atari, not the companies in parenthesis.

-*Pyromania* never came out.

-"*Asteroids Deluxe*" should really be "*Asteroids*."

-The European-only *Sentinel* was missing

Those are the only errors for the entire list. It is quite an impressive list considering it is 18 years old.

Micky Wright

From the editor's desk...

Greetings again from New Jersey. Those of you far from Digital Press HQ probably wouldn't paint a pretty picture of our home state. Can't say I blame you. New Jersey has a rep for being industrial and all the things that go along with that descriptor: dirty, polluted, run-down, crime-ridden, dingy, bleak, etc.

I love New Jersey. Was it strange to read those words? It was strange to type them.

The reason I love New Jersey is that we have a little bit of everything here, or just a few miles out of state. Anywhere you want to go is within a 2-hour drive. Snow-capped mountains, sprawling pine forests, beach resorts, wildlife preserves, skyscrapers, small towns, shopping malls, country clubs, amusement parks...it's all here. There are also areas that are dirty, polluted, run-down, crime-ridden, dingy, and bleak if you're into that sort of thing.

We have every type of weather, but are rarely threatened by the more dangerous kinds. Would it be better to live in San Diego where it's 75 and sunny every day? I would miss brisk fall days such as this, curled up on the sofa in a big comfy sweatshirt with a nice warm laptop.

Enough about The Garden State. The evolution of this 2.0 version of the DP 'zine marches forward. Kind of. Actually, in the process of going forward we are reinventing some of the things we missed from the old DP. Game reviews and issue themes are back. We didn't include reviews in issues 66 and 67 for several, much-discussed (argued about) reasons that I won't bore you with here...the bottom line is our readers look forward to the reviews. The themes are really more for "us" to give our writers some focus and define the overall style of the issues. Speaking of writers, please join us in hazing, uhh I mean welcoming Kevin Bunch, Nate Dunsmore, and Micky Wright. Now that our rookie roster is set, look for a couple of veteran players to return next issue...???

Enjoy,

Jeff

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ON THE COVER
"Generic"
by artist

In the early days of home video games, programmers received no credit for their work and games were given non-descript titles such as "Football" and "Combat". Now you can't even start a game without cycling through the logos of five different development studios and publishers. Given the ubiquity of games on everything from cell phones to cable boxes, we wonder if things are about to come full circle.

Your thoughts are welcome at dpzine@yahoo.com.

IAN BARONOFSKY

ON THE PROWL

"THE GENERIC SELL-OFF"

I'm not one to spend time attempting to predict the future of our collecting hobby. I'm not in it for the money. Well, I am in it to make money to spend on more games. Still, there are a significant number of folks in our collecting hobby who are speculators. I would be bored quickly with collecting old video games if that was my primary interest. Sometimes I wish I was bored with collecting so that I could just focus on enjoying the games I already have. I spend about half my time acquiring new additions to the collection, half my time playing games, and the other half selling stuff so that I can buy more games. This hobby takes more time than I have. I enjoy selling stuff, although not necessarily selling games. But I'd rather be enjoying the spoils. I like to think that I'm in it for the games. But am I really? Clearly I spend more time on the collecting habit than I do on the enjoying of the games.

I love video games. I can't decide if I'm embarassed by that fact. My basement full of games attests that I can't be. Unlike 99.9% of the population, I manifest the joy games give me by collecting just about every game out there. I can't delude myself. I'm not collecting all of these games because I think that I'll play them all. I know I'll be lucky if I play 1% of my games. Collecting is an activity in and of itself. It's primal, like the pre-civilization hunter-gatherers. Unfortunately, it requires constant injections of currency. Most of us hardcore collectors do some selling as part of the hobby. There is no shame in it anymore. In the past I was a trade-only collector, but I've long since given up that hard-line stance. Games are a commodity, and those who have them feel the pressure of owning a commodity. The pressure to liquidate all or some of their collection.

Those of you with blossoming massive collections probably understand the bittersweet joy of completing a system collection, only to find that you are stuck with a huge space commitment. And then what? On to the next system, and more space. You end up with about 20 games you actually want (or have time) to play and 300 games that look cool on a shelf.

That is one reason that so many of us buy AND sell. What we want to keep in our collections is a constantly shifting target. And we live with the fear that the collection or game we sold will be the one we regret selling. My commitment to keeping one of everything may force me to make a partial collection sell-off if I have to move and end up with less space for the collection.

If you aren't a bottom feeder like myself, you have to be worried about taking a loss. The biggest risk comes with the rapid turnaround. When I see a new collector or a speculator spending a wad on good or great items, one thought enters my mind; "easy come, easy go". You might have missed winning that auction against this hyper-collector guy by a dollar, but just wait a year or two. You may see that item back up for sale. Some guys who are new to the hobby get overexcited about the perceived rarity and value of an item. A really cool item. Unfortunately, in paying a premium they have subjected themselves to risk. The quick onslaught of collector insanity has caused them to buy a top-end item at a top end price. And if they need money for tuition or car repairs, collectibles are an illiquid commodity. It may take years for the price to rise to a profitable level, if it ever does. I've seen countless collectors unable to recoup their investment.

Over the years, I've known dozens of collectors who purged themselves of their goods. Almost everyone eventually sells. I can't blame them. Having a huge amount of stuff weighs heavily on my psyche. Getting rid of it all and converting it into money is a satisfying and liberating experience. When a fellow collector tells me that he is selling off all or part of his collection, the first thing I do is try to rook him out of his finery. Then I always make the same recommendation; keep the 10 rarest items. If circumstances change and you decide to collect again, you will be glad you have the most sought after items in the collection. Ten games never take up much space. The 10 toughest games are the ones you'll regret pitching. The 10 toughest games are always the biggest hurdle to completion. Of course, the downside is that the hardest items to find

you have are always worth the most. The entirety of the remainder of the collection could net you the same amount or less than those 10 games. If you need cash, this is generally a tough option to swallow. Those 10 games will be the easiest money you made in selling off your collection. For the spendier collectors, keeping those last 10 may be a financial imperative. Those top 10 games may take time to reach a market value to recoup the investment. If you can afford to wait on those, not only will it be easier to start collecting again, but you will have the games with the most significant run up in value over the years.

Every year or so, a new super-spendy collector comes on the scene. Some of these guys last a few years. Most are only interested in one system. Few last forever. They run out of money. They get a girlfriend. Or they get married. Or they have children. Or they get divorced. Or they move. Or they run out of space. Most people can't spend forever. And when that life-changing or attitude-changing event occurs, it's time to purge. And when they purge, I'm there. I've been in this hobby for a long time. I'm waiting. And so are a dozen other collectors. Sometimes the collection has appreciated in value. I might even pay a premium for a few weird items. Much of the time, stuff is sold for what the guy paid or less. Churn is a part of collecting hobbies, people getting in and out of it. From a collector's standpoint, churn is an asset. It means money is going into the hobby.

It's not easy to make money collecting classic games, unless you set your spending limit at $1 per item. At that rate, you won't have much of a collection after 5 years. Oh, the good old days when I had a dollar limit and my collection still grew. I've seen a few guys work the high end and double their money. They are most often mercenary in their approach. Most people just don't have the accumen or luck. So if you're thinking these classic games are a good investment, think again. To experience a significant run up in price, you will have to wait 5 years, perhaps 10 years, assuming that you paid on the low end. In the meantime, you have to keep

the games in a clean, dry place where they won't be damaged. And hope that the games still work when you sell them. Being a collector and trying to turn a profit from collectible games are most often conflicting goals. Sell with care.

PAUL Z. CORTEZ

GENERIC DP FEATURE

"WII ENNUI"

Odds are good that, if you're reading this right now, you are somebody who really enjoys playing and/or collecting video games. Acquiring a copy of the DP 'zine-suggests a deeper level of commitment to this hobby than that of the average gamer who contents himself with the publications readily available at Barnes & Noble or GameStop. You're probably also the kind of person who systematically rummages through thrift stores on a regular basis, looking for holy grails of gaming and other opportunities for serendipity at bargain prices. You probably also spend a good deal of time online, not only combing through eBay or Craigslist for more treasure to add to your hoard, but also vigorously debating the merits of your favorite (or most despised) consoles and games with other equally zealous folks. You have probably been to at least one video game-themed gathering such as the Classic Gaming Expo, E3, or a similar event. Odds are very good that a great deal of your free time is devoted to either playing or acquiring even more video games than the large pile which presently occupies your home. These pursuits are, in large part, your life, and you feel as if this passion is never going to end.

Of course, this is not to say that this passion won't ever end.

Strange as the notion may seem in the here and now, there is a chance that you could very well one day find yourself abandoning the whole video game hobby (or lifestyle, depending on how deeply you are presently immersed) with little more than a resigned sigh for a denouement. There are numerous reasons why this could happen, yes, even to you, and they bear exploring. It should be said from the onset that this exploration is neither an indictment of anyone who has become disenchanted with gaming, nor is it necessarily intended to be a "survival guide" of any sort, by which one would recognize and feel compelled to countermand the signs of impending indifference. The individual's choice to persist in, or leave, this hobby should always be respected.

As an active retrogame collector for 15 years, I've come to realize that the most common reasons for people leaving the video gaming world have to do with having either too much, or not enough, of any one particular thing.

"You're too old for them."

In DP issue #66 I wrote about the phenomenon of second-generation gaming. The gamers who never outgrew the systems of their youth such as the Nintendo Entertainment System are now in a position to pass the fun along to their children of the Wii generation. While this might seem like a prevalent trend when considering the size of the overall population, the truth is that there are vastly greater numbers of those "'80s kids" who played the heck out of their Nintendos or Intellivisions, grew out of their

teens, put those consoles in their parents' attic, and never looked back once.
For those of who have been heavily involved in the hobby for several years, such an act might seem as alien to us as breathing air would be to a fish. But there are several possible explanations. Perhaps they accepted the common perception that the arcade and its accompanying amusements was the exclusive domain of children. Alternately, they might not have been the kind of young people who were very technical-minded, as there seems to be a causal correlation between the people

who not only want to play the games, but also to modify, reprogram, and otherwise tinker with the toys. Not everyone is cut from the same mental cloth, nor should they be. Still, among those who "outgrew" the video games of their youth, one would be hard-pressed to find such an individual who looks back unhappily or dismissively on all those hours spent plugging away at *Super Mario Bros.* or *Asteroids*.

"You don't have enough money."

Here's a grim scenario that could happen to any of us, especially with the economy in its current state: Do you keep that sealed limited edition *Rock Band* controller set, or do you pay the rent that is due this week? The sensible gamer sells the controller set (I suppose you could keep it, but I don't think you'd find enough room to

sleep comfortably inside the box), as much as it pains him to do so. In even more extreme circumstances the devoted gamer sells his entire collection out of necessity to pay for something critical such as a needed car, medical treatment, tuition, etc. In this situation the gamer hasn't necessarily lost interest in the hobby, but is compelled to sacrifice what he has in exchange for something he needs. This will lead to, at the very least, a diminished enthusiasm for gaming, since the cash-strapped gamer may potentially never reacquire a collection of games and accessories as compre-

hensive as what he once had. At worst, the discouraged gamer will remain bitter forever about games owing to whatever dire financial straits forced him to clear everything out. It is not a happy ending by any stretch.

"You have too many games."

I have a sister-in-law who grew up under the old East German communist system. On her first solo visit to an American supermarket, she needed to buy a tube of toothpaste. When she found the toothpaste aisle, she was so overwhelmed by the amount of choices before her that she stood and stared at the toothpaste shelf for about 10 minutes before breaking down in tears and leaving the store empty-handed. For the gamer, the simple question of "what game shall I play next?" may become rather daunting when confronted with hundreds (or thousands) of choices. It can lead to a conundrum commonly referred to as "analysis paralysis," wherein the excessive bevy of choices before the gamer prevents making any choice at all. At this point the collection is possibly less enjoyable than it might be if only he or she could find something to play.

I can hear some of you now: "Oh but you can never have too many games!" Maybe, but do you really need a copy of *Atari Anthology* for Windows and Xbox and PS2 on top of the original Atari 2600 cartridges you already have? Which one will you play? Perhaps paring down some of those duplicates might save you from the overload of analysis paralysis.

"You don't have enough time."

In the video game documentary *The King of Kong* there is a scene early on wherein Steve Wiebe, on the verge of beating the *Donkey Kong* world record on an arcade machine in his own house, is interrupted by his 3-year-old son who just finished going to the bathroom: "Dad! Wipe my butt! Stop playing *Donkey Kong*!!!" It is probably the funniest part of the whole film, and quintessentially defines why so many gamers with families to take care of run the risk of losing interest in the hobby. Family needs have to come first, and there may not be so much time or money later for more games. The married gamer with children might come to feel convicted that he or she is not spending enough time engaged with the family and abandon gaming to compensate.

Apart from those with family lives, high school or college students might be compelled to move away from gaming, at least temporarily, owing to a desire to improve their current academic standing. Even the average working Joe might one day realize that those all-night *Call Of Duty* sessions are hindering his performance on the day job to the point that it might be time to hang up the controllers for good. Regardless of who we are in the real world, life sometimes gets in the way of the video games and we need to make the hard choices.

"Meh."

This last class of gamer disinterest does not necessarily arise from either excess or deficiencies. It's marked by the gradually unfolding opinion that there is nothing new under the gaming sun in terms of playability, or the realization of weariness after dutifully ransacking the same thrift store three times a week for the last 5 years. It's logging onto the *Quake 3* server and realizing you're the only one in the arena, or at least the only one with any passable level of skill. It's the indifference you experience when looking at that dusty NES *Duck Hunt* cartridge and not feeling like it's worth the effort to blow hard enough on the game to get it to load. There may not be an explanation. It's just…meh.

If you still think you will never lose interest in games, that's fine. If they make you happy then I hope you're right. Bear in mind, though, that there seem to be more ways out of life's arcade than there are to enter it.

JARED BOTTORFF

THE BREWERY

"WHAT'S HAPPENING ON THE HOMEBREW SCENE"

One of the most active and intriguing platforms for homebrew these days is the Game Boy Advance. With new games and ideas being developed all the time, coupled with the fact that development tools and flash cartridges are widespread, the GBA seems ripe for perusal. A game that caught my eye recently was *Super Wings* by Mukunda Johnson. This game piqued my attention for two reasons: One, I like shooters (though I suck at them), and two, it reminded of one of my favorite Game Boy games, *Solar Striker*. So, I sat down and put some time into this game.

Originally released for a PDRoms coding competition, *Super Wings* is your standard "infiltrate-the-enemy-base-and-blow-everything-up-in-the-process" game. Mukunda explains in the readme that he ended up having to do the graphics and most of the music by himself as a one-man effort. Stylistically, it borrows heavily from such games as *Raiden* and *Aero Fighters*. Your ship's power can be increased through the use of energy pick-ups that the enemy's battalions sometimes leave behind, as well as arming yourself with more missiles through this manner. Compare this with the aforementioned games, and you'll see there's not much difference. However, there's no real need to reinvent the wheel in a genre such as this; if it plays good, then it works.

The first thing that players will see when they start *Super Wings* (other than the Engrish-y introduction, which may or may not be intentional) is also one of the game's major shortcomings. Everything, from the player's plane to the enemies on the ground to the environment all around, is covered in a drab olive green, much like the original Game Boy palette. I understand using the retro feel to give the game a type of "Game Boy throwback," if you will, but come on! This is the Game

Boy Advance! Take advantage of it and use some color. It would have been nice to have some blue for the water, some brown and black for ships and tanks, red and yellow explosions for the missiles, and so on. If the green is intentional, why not just program this homebrew game for the original Game Boy?

Thankfully, not all areas of the game suffer like the graphics. The music is actually fairly decent. An interesting thing to note, technologically speaking, is that the music was originally tracked into an IT format (IT, being short for *Impulse Tracker*, a popular music tracking program from the DOS era). This IT music was converted for use with the Game Boy Advance by Mukunda's sound engine called MaxMod, which works great in *Super Wing*s. Some players may complain about the amateur feel of the music, but I thought that it fit the game and didn't draw unwanted attention to itself unnecessarily. The sound effects are superb, as the explosions and bullet fire come through crisp and clear. The SFX also include stereo panning, depending on what side of the screen you are shooting from, which I thought was a great effect.

Controls are simple. The D-pad controls your ship, B fires your regular shot, while A deploys the large missile. L and R are thankfully absent. The game also boasts a multiplayer feature in which two Game Boy Advances can link up and play alternating turns using their own screens to control the action. It sounds good on paper, but the actual multiplayer protocol has yet to be implemented in the game. I hope Mukunda revisits this title and programs it in, because it would benefit the game in two ways. One, shooters are always best played with a friend. And two, so little homebrew actually bothers to include options to play with another person. As far as I know, if *Super Wings* were to actually support multiplayer, it would be the first Game Boy Advance homebrew title to do so.

Is it worth the download? I see *Super Wings* as a great "pick up and play" title, good for 10 or 15 minutes of game play at a time. There are certainly things that could be improved, and the monochromatic look of the game could turn people off of it before they even get a chance to play it. But, for a one-man effort, it's a solid, if not basic, shooter.

Super Wings can be downloaded free of charge from Mukunda Johnson's Web site: http://www.mukundazone.com

For more information about Mukunda's MaxMod sound engine, visit http://www.maxmod.org

"Nobody races on my team until he's made it to Italy."

"DP INTERVIEWS GARY STARK, ATARI GAME DESIGNER"

DP: What's your educational background?

Gary Stark: I earned a B.S. in General Engineering and a Mathematics Minor from San Jose State University, CA.

DP: What inspired you to go into game design? Were there any programmers or games that inspired you?

Gary Stark: I applied to Atari right out of college. Prior to that I created my own video games on a Z80 Microcomputer I got from my father who worked at Zilog at the time. So it seemed like a fun occupation, but honestly, I didn't really give it that much thought. It just sorta happened.

DP: What was your first job after you graduated?

Gary Stark: At Atari, in the Consumer Division (Steve Wright's group), working on games in conjunction with *Sesame Street*.

DP: How did the opportunity at Atari come about? Was Atari the first game company you worked for?

Gary Stark: I applied, they hired me. It all happened very fast and without much planning.

DP: What was the development process like?

Gary Stark: Absolutely nothing like school. No complex mathematics, instead learning to master in 6502 assembly to the point of knowing how many machine cycles every instruction took to execute, turning the electron gun on and off as it scanned

across the screen every 76 machine cycles. Very different than "school" programming where we learned with punch cards, etc.

DP: What were the hours in your department? Was your schedule fixed (i.e. 9 to 5) or could you basically come and go as you pleased?

Gary Stark: I don't recall. I suspect it was a fair amount of overtime, but I enjoyed the work so it didn't really matter.

*DP: We know of several Atari titles you were involved with, such as **Cookie Monster Munch**, **Dune**, and **The Last Starfighter**. Can you talk a bit about what you recall about those? Such as, what was the inspiration for this game? Or, what was the easiest/hardest part of designing it?*

Gary Stark: *Cookie Monster Munch* was basically handed to me to implement from Steve Wright. *Dune* was up to us, but didn't go anywhere. *The Last Starfighter* was our design (Bruce Poehlman and myself).

*DP: Regarding **The Last Starfighter**, were you involved with doing a VCS/2600 as well, or just the 8-bit (400/800/5200) version? From the notes we have in our database, a version for the VCS was rumored to have been in development but no proof has yet been found.*

Gary Stark: I was only involved in the 800/5200 version. I don't recall the 2600 version.

*DP: Any involvement with the Atari computer version of **Star Raiders II** (which is basically the same as **Last Starfighter** with some graphics changes)?*

Gary Stark: Yes, Bruce Poehlman and I did it on contract. Totally ours.

DP: Were the titles you worked on assigned, or chosen by yourself?

Gary Stark: *Cookie Monster Munch* was assigned, but the rest I chose.

DP: Did you work with any graphics or sound artists? If so, do you recall who helped with what? I know Preston Stuart was involved with a few of the CCW games for the VCS…

Gary Stark: For the 2600 stuff we did our own music (if you can call it that). I also did my own graphics (using graph paper to plot it out). I also did the graphics for *Star Raiders II*.

*DP: Do you recall anything about the VCS CCW titles **Counting with the Count/Count's Castle**, or **Honker Bonk(er)**?*

Gary Stark: No…too long ago.

DP: Were there any plans to make CCW games for the 5200?

Gary Stark: I don't recall any such plans, but that doesn't mean anything. I certainly wasn't involved in any such efforts.

DP: Were there any other games that you worked on besides those mentioned, or other game companies besides Atari?

Gary Stark: I also made a music composition cartridge to help me develop music for my 2600 game, but of course that wasn't a production product. I also recall obtaining the code for 2600 *Space Invaders* and replacing the graphics with the letters in a couple of friend's names, just for fun.

I did games beyond Atari and also (later) arcade games for Atari. I was with Atari when it was taken over by the Tramiels. By then the chaos of the changes had prompted me to find another job, so I left at that point.

I also worked at Bally/Sente twice, and was laid off both times (I didn't learn my lesson the first time). The second time was when they let everyone go; I only worked on tools then (a graphic editor).

Atari Games was about a 10-year stint where I did all the games officially credited to me. Ed Rotberg hired me into coin-op since he had worked with me before (Bally/Sente). I helped a tiny bit with *Hard Drivin'* (wrote code to interpret MIDI music)… barely enough to warrant my name on the credits.

Konami was my last and worst game company. They were run (very poorly) by a Japanese management from afar. I finally quit in frustration after only 6 months.

DP: Occasionally, programmers would put little "Easter eggs" in some of their games that would reveal their name or a message. We know that the 5200 version of **The Last Starfighter** contains a few, one being the ship from **Star Trek** makes an appearance (although nobody has yet to figure out how to trigger its appearance). Are there Easter eggs in any of your other titles? Do you recall any fellow co-workers that did?

Gary Stark: I wanted to sneak in secret mazes that spelled my initials, etc. as Easter eggs, but Steve Wright wasn't too keen on that. This was a time when they didn't even include the game's credits. Everything after *Cookie Monster Munch* had Easter eggs, but none that people don't already know about, or at least none that I remember as still hidden.

DP: I'm surprised with your comments about Steve Wright not wanting you to include any Easter eggs in **Cookie Monster**, since Wright himself publicly claimed in late 1981 that, from then on, Easter eggs were to be intentionally planted in subsequent games (in response to the positive reaction about finding them from players).

Gary Stark: That may be, but I assure you...he was NOT interested in Easter eggs in my game when I brought up the issue. Could be he was in a hurry to get the game out or something (although mine was the first one completed as I recall).

DP: If you had a chance to redo any of your games, what would you change (if anything)?

Gary Stark: I would do *T-Mek* as I first envisioned it (as a strategy game). It was created during a time when dedicated "game designers" were being added to the team. While I respect Matthew Ford as a game designer, he didn't make *T-Mek* a game I wanted to play. Coulda...woulda... shoulda…

DP: I would love to have seen your version. Although I liked the coin-op, I saw it as a souped-up **Battlezone**, or even a modern version of Atari's (Kee Games) **Tank** game.

Gary Stark: It was a strategy-oriented game. Basically you had to find ways to attack enemy ships of differing capabilities. Although it only used sprite-based hardware (not polygon), it looked very 3-D. This was developed just as all the graphic development was moving towards rendering instead of artistic or, in our case, physical models that we had created and then filmed and digitized. The physical models were incredible and were made by a guy in Hollywood named John Ferrari.

DP: Did you ever attend any industry shows, such as CES, Comdex, or Toy Fair?

Gary Stark: I attended a few CES shows, but not much else.

DP: Since Konami, have you stayed within the field of game design?

Gary Stark: Nope. I'm currently doing IT and database design for a construction company. I'm also constantly changing the world through my personal Web sites such as www.UnitedDemocraticNations.org and www.PRTProject.com.

DP: Which of your titles are your favorite, and what types of games in general?

Gary Stark: I don't play games…I've never been much of a player. I was more interested in studying how others played.

DP: Do you still own any of your games for these systems, either as a keepsake or to show friends or family?

Gary Stark: I have boxed copies of the games I did, but not the consoles to play them.

DP: Have you stayed in touch with any of your former Atari co-workers?

Gary Stark: Barely. I occasionally say hi to Ed Rotberg and Dennis Koble. I was keeping in touch with Norm Avellar, but lost track a few years back.

DP: What are your thoughts on how the industry has evolved?

Gary Stark: Better graphics, but not much else. That's of course unfair since I don't play.

Softwareology
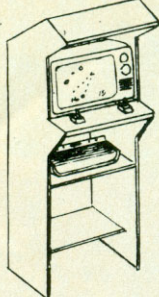
2600

Cookie Monster Munch
Dune (not completed)
Music composition development tool (not released)

5200

Last Starfighter, The (not completed)
Star Raiders II

Coin-op

Guardians of the Hood
Hard Drivin'
T-Mek

MATTERS OF IMPORT

"IMPORT-ONLY LICENSED GAMES"

Licensed titles have been a staple of video gaming almost since day one. From early Atari VCS titles like *Superman* and *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* to today's modern, multimillion-dollar film tie-ins, there's just no escaping them. Sadly, more often than not they're pure garbage, licensed shovelware that has no purpose other than to hype the big film/TV show/comic of the moment. But every so often, you'll find one that stands the test of time and even outlasts what it was created to hype.

Japan is no different than the U.S. of course. The amount of terrible licensed anime titles is staggering. But one thing Japan gets that the U.S. doesn't from time to time is licensed titles based on American franchises. Odd as this may sound, it's true. It doesn't happen very often these days, but during the 8- and 16-bit eras, it happened quite a bit.

Remember the Jim Henson film *Labyrinth*? You know, the one with David Bowie as Jareth the Goblin King? One would think that a game based on it would have made a welcome addition to the NES library. Sure enough, one was released, but only in Japan for the Famicom. Tokuma Shoten's *Labyrinth* followed the plot of the film fairly well, trapping Sarah (Jennifer Connelly) in a series of mazes as she tries to free her little brother from Jareth. Her friends Hoggle, Ludo, and Sir Didymus are also on hand to help out. *Labyrinth* is not exactly import-friendly as it does require a bit of reading. There is an English translation available online in ROM format, though.

Then there's *The Goonies*. Any child of the '80s should know the film. If they're lucky, they recall playing a Konami-made *Goonies* game in arcades on Nintendo's Vs. system. But where was the NES game? On the Famicom in Japan, of course. For whatever reason, it was passed over, which is a shame. It's a fun little action game in which you control Mikey (Sean Astin) and traverse areas from the film in an attempt to rescue all of the other Goonies from the Fratellis and find One-

Eyed Willy's rich stuff. Should you choose to import it, you'll find that it's very import friendly with virtually no Japanese text at all. On a side note, Konami did release a sequel to *The Goonies* in the U.S. for the NES, *The Goonies II*, which was more of a Metroid-style adventure than the straightforward first game.

Back to the Future, one of the greatest films franchises ever, has been treated like so much garbage when it comes to video games. Sub-par *Paperboy* and *Super Mario Bros.* ripoffs seem to be the only way developers can translate the films into videogames. Leave it to the Japanese to make a *Back to the Future* game and make it good. *Super Back to the Future Part II*, by Toshiba EMI/InvictU.S. for the Super Famicom, is to date the only *Back to the Future* game that's even remotely decent. It's heavily inspired by *Sonic the Hedgehog*, but unlike the other games I mentioned, this actually works. Marty (Michael J. Fox) races through the levels on his hoverboard, picking up coins, jumping and attacking enemies Sonic-style, and getting Sonic-esque force fields for protection. It follows the plot of the film closely enough, but infuses it with a heavy dose of Japanese super-deformed wackiness. Unfortunately, it's not easy to find.

Tim Burton's gargantuan 1989 smash film *Batman* spawned a number of video games, most notably for the NES, Genesis, Game Boy and arcade, all of which were developed by Sunsoft

(with the exception of the arcade game which was by Atari). But in Japan, another one exists. The PC Engine (Turbografx-16 in the U.S.) got its very own *Batman* game based on the film, again by Sunsoft. Unlike the others, which were all side-scrolling action games, this was a top-down maze/exploration title. It's worth checking out if you're looking into a different type of *Batman* game than the side-scrollers *Batman* is usually relegated to.

Star Wars is a film that needs no introduction, but the Famicom game is one you may not be familiar with. "Of course I am," you might be saying. "It's just the Japanese version of the NES game, right?" Wrong. Yes, the Lucasarts-developed NES game did get released in Japan, but several years prior Namco took a stab at making their own *Star Wars* game. What they made is unique, to say the least. It plays like a Famicom version of Sega's *Alex Kidd in Miracle World* and manages to stay faithful to the film, yet completely deviate from it at the same time. Remember the scene where Luke fights Darth Vader in a Jawa sandcrawler and Vader transforms into a giant scorpion? How about when Luke has to fly the Millenium Falcon to Kessel to rescue Obi-Wan Kenobi, or the part where Luke swam through the seas of Iscalon to rescue C-3P0, or when Luke rode on a whale on the ice planet Tina? No, I don't remember any of that either. It's all in Namco's *Star Wars* though. It's a unique conversation piece for *Star Wars* fans, and if you're a fan of the Alex Kidd-style of gameplay, it's worth checking out.
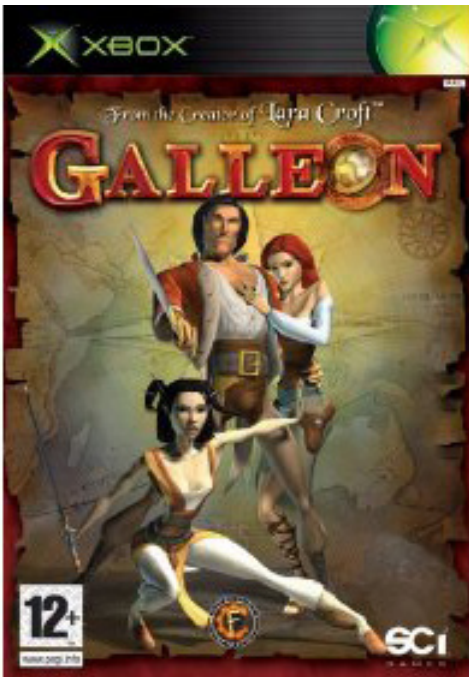
TIM SNIDER

BARGAIN BIN BLISS

"MORE GAME FOR LESS MONEY"

Howdy gang! For those new to this column, the underlying theme of Bargain Bin Bliss is to find those "good-n-cheap" games buried and forgotten in the slushpile. The games chosen for recommendation here must meet four strict criteria:

• Anyone should be able to purchase the game for less than $8.00 at any typical used video game store.

• The game must be somewhat under the radar, receiving very little to no advertising or publicity. The reason the game is priced to move is not because there's so many of them being traded in, but rather because no one's ever heard of it.

• Even if it's not particularly groundbreaking, the game should bring something new to the genre it represents.

• I gotta like it.
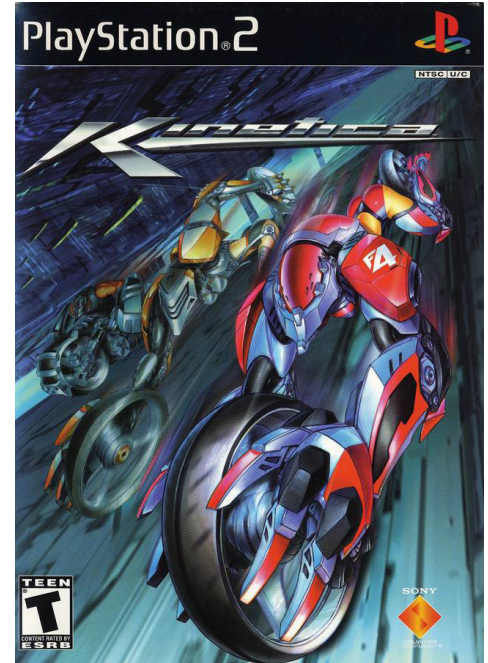
Galleon (Xbox, Atlas, 2004)

This is the first game I played since the original *Pirates!* on my Commodore 64 that gave me that over-encompassing sense of adventure and exploration on the high seas. But it's the tale that will keep you glued to this pirate adventure. In *Galleon*, you take control of Captain

Rhama Sabrier, rogue, scoundrel, and man-about-town, er, sea. The psuedo-3D gameplay was designed by the same folks who brought us the original *Tomb Raider*, and it shows in Rhama's fluid (and varied) movements as he runs, jumps, climbs, fights, and explores six large islands. The macguffin in the game is the standard "stop the powerful artifact from falling into the wrong hands." But what caught my attention is the "realism" of the characters, if there is such a concept in a video game. The characters talk and interact like real people and a budding romance figures prominently in the story as well. It's almost as if someone decided to build a game engine around a story and its characters, rather than vice-versa. Not often does the storyline propel you to keep playing. It's like a good book. *Galleon* is a great novel that you'll have trouble putting down.

Kinetica (PlayStation 2, Sony, 2001)

Imagine strapping motorized wheels to your feet and hands and racing in a zero-G environment. Now picture yourself hitting a ramp and doing all kinds of wild poses and stunts in the air, making sure to get your limbs back onto the track when you land. That's *Kinetica*. This racing game plays like most; hit a boost bar for extra speed, grab pick-ups on the track for bonus abilities, etc. But instead of a car, truck, or cycle, you're in a Kinetic Suit, which is basically an exoskeleton fused with a motorcycle. The suit is nimble, allowing the racer to flip, wheelie, spiral, and perform other feats of acrobatics while in the air (performing those stunts not only increases your score, it'll give you even more boosts and pick-ups). The wheels cling to any surface, so the futuristic tracks you race on twists and turns back upon itself in impossible ways. *Kinetica* plays like many other futuristic racers, but the wild stunts add a considerable dimension to the gameplay. Plus all of these characters zipping along at 400 MPH on basically jet-powered skates just looks cool. One fact you may find interesting; *Kinetica* was the first game created with Sony's then-new *Kinetica* game engine. Since then, the *Kinetica* engine has spawned *Jak and Daxter*, *Sly Cooper*, *Ratchet and Clank*, *SOCOM*, and the *God of War* series. This racer could be

considered the grandfather of some of the bigger franchises in PlayStation history.

RETROCOMPUTING

"GENERIC PAC-CLONES

In one of the earliest copyright lawsuits involving video games, Atari Corporation sued Magnavox over the release of their 1981 game *K.C. Munchkin*, claiming it was a direct rip-off of *Pac-Man*. Although Atari had previously purchased exclusive rights to publish the first home version of *Pac-Man*, they had not yet released their (infamously bad) conversion for the Atari 2600 when Magnavox beat them to the punch. Magnavox won the original lawsuit, but Atari had the ruling overturned on appeal, forcing Magnavox to pull *Munchkin* from store shelves. While Atari may have managed to temporarily stop its competitors from releasing Pac-Clones on home gaming consoles, they had no such luck in the realm of personal computers. As Pac-Mania swept the country so did generic Pac-Clones, invading every retro-computing nook and cranny.

One of the earliest Pac-Clones was *Scarfman* for the TRS-80 Models I and III, written by Philip Oliver and published by Cornsoft Group in 1981. *Scarfman* set many precedents that Pac-Clones would follow for years to come. The basics of the game are the same as Pac-Man: Avoid ghosts while eating dots. Eating a larger power pellet makes the ghosts themselves edible for a short period of time as well. What's different are the details; for example, there are five ghosts and five power pellets instead of four. Another obvious difference is that the maze does not resemble the original arcade version. This is partly due to the fact that the arcade version of *Pac-Man* is displayed on a vertical monitor, whereas computer monitors are conventionally horizontal. Rather than trying to force a round peg into a square hole, most Pac-Clone authors opted to simply redesign their mazes to fit the shape of a normal computer monitor. This worked in the favor of computer programmers, who hoped that unique maze designs would keep them from being sued.

That same year (1981) saw the release of *Taxman*, written by Brian Fitzgerald and published by H.A.L. Labs for the Apple II. H.A.L. Labs had hoped to escape Atari's wrath by changing a few minor details in *Taxman*. The ghosts were reborn as

insects and squids and given new names, and the bonus fruits were changed into random objects (a cactus?), but the changes were not enough to ward off the long arm of Atari's lawyers. With a lawsuit looming, H.A.L. Labs withdrew *Taxman* from the market and either sold or surrendered (I've read both versions) the *Taxman* source code to Atari. After making a few minor graphical updates, Atarisoft re-released *Taxman* as *Pac-Man* for the Apple II. H.A.L. Labs went back to the drawing board and released *Super Taxman 2*, which was similar to *Taxman*/*Pac-Man* but used different mazes. Years later, H.A.L. Labs rechristened themselves HAL Laboratory and went on to develop the *Kirby* and *Super Smash Bros.* franchises. *Taxman* programmer Brian Fitzgerald also remained in the game business. You can find his name in the credits of games such as *Dark Seed*, *StarCraft*, *Diablo* and *Diablo II*, *Warcraft II* and *Warcraft III*, and *World of Warcraft*.

Unfortunately for Atari, so many Pac-Clones began popping up that their lawyers did not have the time to pursue them all. By 1982, dozens (if not hundreds) of Pac-Clones had been released, many by small companies that financially weren't worth legally pursuing. One such clone was *Snack Attack*, written by Dan Illowsky and published by Datamost. One look at *Snack Attack* will tell you it is nothing like *Pac-Man* at all. Instead of a hungry yellow Pac-Man, players controlled a hungry white whale. See? Not the same! Instead of the ghosts being red, blue, pink,

and yellow, in *Snack Attack* they are red, blue, green, and purple. That's completely different! And finally, while the dots in *Pac-Man* are yellow, the dots in *Snack Attack* are purple and green. Obviously *Snack Attack* is nothing like *Pac-Man* at all.

One of the biggest problems Atari had in fighting these waves of generic clones was that many of them were considered to be better than the official Atarisoft versions! Acornsoft's 1982 release *Snapper* for the BBC Micro looked nearly identical to the arcade version of *Pac-Man*, down to the mazes and characters. Again, under the threat of legal action, Acornsoft withdrew and re-released the game with altered graphics (the main character magically sprouted legs and found a green cowboy hat). H.A.L. Labs, whom Apple had sued for their release of *Taxman*, obtained the license to release home *Pac-Man* ports in Japan. H.A.L.'s version of *Pac-Man* for the VIC-20 is superior to Atarisoft's official version (and beat Atarisoft's version to market by 2 full years). To avoid marketing confusion between the two versions, Commodore changed the name to *Jelly Monster* for its U.S. release.

Some Pac-Clones attempted to avoid the courtroom by creating similar (but not too similar!) maze games. *Munch Man* for the Texas Instruments TI-99/4A saw a small Pac-shaped character "laying down links" versus eating dots. Another popular maze game, *Lock 'n' Chase*, had players controlling a thief and collecting coins and money bags instead of dots and power pellets. Several other games such as *Lady Bug*, *Amidar*, *Mouse Trap*, and *Make Trax* used similar "maze" concepts, but made enough changes to keep their publishers out of hot water.

Other developers simply ignored Atari's copyright, hoping to fly below the company's legal radar. Here are just a few known Pac-Clones from the First Church of Pac-Man's list of False Idols: *Ack!-Man, Bac-Man, Dac-Man, Hac-Man, SnackMan, Mac-Man, Plaque Man, Wack-Man, Crap-Man, Chomp, Chomper, Chomper-Man,*

Gobble-Man, Mouth-Man, Munch Man, and *TrashMan*, among others. And don't forget *Pac-Bar, PacBoy, Pac-Classic, Pac-Em, Pac-Guy, Packman, PacMac, Pac-Maniac, Pac-Men, Pac-Mon, Pac-PC, PacWar, Pakacuda, Pax, PC-Man, Pucman,* and simply *Pacman*, which, as the site's webmaster noted, is "just a hyphen away from copyright infringement."

And if the market wasn't already flooded with Pac-Clones, it surely was after the release of Data Trek's *Maze Craze Construction Set*. Written by Eric Hammond, *Maze Craze Construction Set* for the Apple II allowed creative Pac-fans to design their own maze games. The program's editing tools allowed everything from maze layouts to the design and attributes of each individual character to be modified. As a kid I made my own Pac-Clone using the program. I made my game as close to *Pac-Man* as I could, with the only difference being that in my version, *Pac-Man* was constantly moving backwards. Its name was *naM-caP*.

One of the most interesting innovations in the world of Pac-Clones was the transition from two dimensions to three. In 1982, Scott Elder released *3-D Man* (also released as *3D Pac-Man*), a first-person Pac-Clone for the Commodore 64 that literally put players down in *Pac-Man*'s trenches! Due to the visual limitations of a first-person maze game, Elder included a radar on the side of the screen to show players the layout of the maze. The same concept was used the following year in *3-Demon* for the IBM PC.

As home computer technology advanced through the years, so did the quality of Pac-Clones. Specifically, with the advent of VGA and SVGA graphics on DOS machines, colorful Pac-Clones continued to appear. One early popular version was *CD-Man*, which had players eating dots (of course) while running away from animated spiders. By the mid-to-late 1990s, emulators were powerful and fast enough to run the original *Pac-Man* arcade code; and yet programmers still continue to crank out Pac-Clones. Due to the proliferation of the World Wide Web, over the past 10 years creators of generic Pac-Clones have migrated to the Internet. There are now hundreds of Pac-Clones online today, written in languages such as Java

and Flash. Due to the portability of these languages, many of these Pac-Clones can be now downloaded and played on your cell phone or iPod.

If the thought of playing a Pac-Clone on a small cell phone screen doesn't sound like much fun, consider *Tiny PacMan*, a flash-based Pac-Clone which is played on a grid of 10 pixels by 10 pixels. On my monitor, the entire maze appears smaller than my thumbnail. There's only one ghost (a green pixel) and the dots are flashing purple which, thank goodness, makes them easier to see on such a small scale. The "ghost" gets faster with each level cleared, which theoretically makes the game harder. The hardest part for me is simply seeing what's going on.

One of the newest additions to the Pac-Clone family takes us full circle, back to one of the oldest forms of computer gaming that predates Pac-Man itself: text adventures. *Pac-Txt* (pac-txt.com) begins by displaying a descriptive paragraph to players: "You awaken in a large complex, slightly disoriented. Glowing dots hover mouth level near you in every direction. Off in the distance you hear the faint howling of what you can only imagine must be some sort of ghost or several ghosts." Like classic text adventures, the game is played solely through issuing text commands, typed into an interpretor; all information about the game is delivered to players via text as well. Typing "LOOK" and hitting [ENTER] reveals, "You are in a long

corridor. You may go forward or backward and there are glowing dots in every direction. There is a glowing dot hovering near you." EAT DOT [ENTER]. "You have eaten the glowing dot."

Through years of legal battles, it has been determined that while specific characters can be trademarked, specific styles or genres of games cannot. And thanks to that ruling, we have more than twenty-five years worth of Pac-Clones available for us to "gobble" up.

EVENT HORIZONS

"AN INSIDER'S REPORT FROM THE LATEST CLASSIC GAMING EVENTS"

At the Penny Arcade Expo, gaming culture is king. This shouldn't be much of a surprise. Since its inception in 2004, the focus of PAX has not been on the Penny Arcade comic or even any particular genre, style, or era of gaming. Everything gets covered: role playing games, retrogames, modern games, board games, handheld games, console games, computer games, etc. Practically everything at the convention is a celebration of these disparate threads and how they intertwine. The only thing missing are arcade games, but a mere jaunt across the street from the Seattle Convention Center to the nearby Gameworks should satiate the most hardcore arcade rat.

It's also the biggest gaming convention in the country and possibly one of the biggest in the world. This year filled the entire convention center was filled, as 50,000 people jammed the building to mingle with industry insiders, game musicians, geeky actors, and of course, fellow gamers. Every single pass to the show was sold over a week before the actual convention started, and it was impossible to go anywhere in downtown Seattle without running into large clumps of PAX-goers.

PAX is part trade show, part giant gaming party, and part standard convention panels (with a gaming focus). The massive exhibition hall, where companies such as Blizzard, Nintendo, and Capcom show off their newest and upcoming wares to the public, is perhaps the most crowded part of the expo. During the years that E3 had practically died, PAX took over as the place for game companies to get press and hype with their consumer base. Unreleased games like *New Super Mario Bros. Wii*, *Tatsunoko vs. Capcom*, *Diablo 3*, and *Mass Effect 2* were on the floor for people

to investigate, while Pink Godzilla and the Northwest Classic Gaming Enthusiasts covered people looking to pick up video games and memorabilia, old and new.

Musical concerts packed the main hall Friday and Saturday night, as 8-bit chiptunes musicians Anamanaguchi, Metroid cover band Metroid Metal, and nerdcore rapper MC Frontalot played for the audience Friday. Saturday night, however, people crowded the stage to see the bigger names in geektacular music: synthpop band Freezepop and geeky comedy musicians Paul & Storm and Jonathon Coulton entertained the throngs of fans and the curious (as well as lightheartedly teased actor and gamer Wil Wheaton!)

Maniac Mansion and *Monkey Island* creator Ron Gilbert was the keynote speaker of 2009's show, giving an in-depth overview of his early programming years up through his time at Lucasarts. This merely scratched the surface of the panels, however, as people from 1up's Jeremy Parish, to *Wired's* Chris Kohler, to *Foxtrot's* Bill Amend had rooms to talk about topics ranging from the newest *Halo* game to gaming history as told through Penny Arcade's archives. And all the while, the PAX Omegathon tournament raged on in games bouncing around eras, like *Mario Kart: Double Dash*, *Connect 4*, *Halo: ODST*, and the final, mystery game; an aging and fickle Skee-ball machine. Some panels were so popular that the lines for them filled up 30 minutes before they even opened, such as Wil Wheaton's panel and Bungie's.

Mere descriptions of what is at PAX, however, do not truly convey the show. It's like trying to describe an arcade as a place that you pay money to play video games.

It is true, in the technical sense. But more to the point, PAX is about the people who have come to pay homage to this shared interest, hobby, and passion. I ran into people who traveled from as far as Britain or Australia just to experience the camaraderie. This is a place of gamers. Even if you don't share the same background or even interests, you are brothers and sisters. PAX is as much a social experience as it is a physical one.

On multiple floors, cushions were laid out on the floor for people to sit back and play handheld games against one another. On the top (sixth floor), the console gaming and LAN gaming rooms were set up so that people who wanted to throw down could rent out a game for their machine of choice and give it a go. People were playing *Steel Battalion* LANs while on the next table over, a NWCGE *Marble Madness* competition had challengers trying to beat the game and the high score. I myself ran into friends and acquaintances there and played some *Mario Kart* and *Boom Blox*, while watching still others compete in games like *Street Fighter* and fight together in *Castle Crashers*.

Due to the growth of the show, Mike Krahulik and Jerry Holkins (aka Gabe and Tycho) have plans to start a second PAX show in Boston this coming March. In a quick conversation with them after this year's show ended, both men told me they were very interested in doing something with the CGE organizers for this show. Could gaming history make an appearance at the biggest gaming show of them all? Stay tuned.

CHRIS CHANDLER

EVENT HORIZONS

"AN INSIDER'S REPORT FROM THE LATEST CLASSIC GAMING EVENTS"

Game Core was held on September 12th, 2009 in Oaks, Pennsylvania. Advertised as mainly a retrogaming convention, Game Core had a wide variety of vendors that dealt in video games as well as *Magic, YuGiOh, Warhammer*, and other types of gaming. Even replica cars from *Back to the Future* and *Knight Rider* showed up. There were many arcade cabs and gaming stations set up, ranging from Atari's dual-joystick *Assault* cabinet to the new *The Beatles: Rock Band*. There were many video game vendors with excellent selections and prices even at the end of the show, proving that it truly was a buyer's market. Game Core's organizer Paul Truitt decided to create

Game Core as an alternative to Too Many Games (which did not have a Fall show). Bringing the convention closer to a major city like Philadelphia was definitely a step in the right direction, however the location still seemed very remote. In fact, it was so remote, my GPS system could not even find the place! Ironically the convention was located not even 5 miles north of the Valley Forge Convention Center, where the old Philly Classic shows used to be held. I think attendance suffered due to the semi-remote location. Game Core is the fifth gaming convention held in Pennsylvania, yet no one has been able to perfect a retrogaming convention like Philly Classic did.

If Game Core moved a few miles south and dropped some of the card games, it could be the best retrogaming convention on the East Coast.

MICKY WRIGHT

CLOSET CLASSICS

"MICKY'S SLEEPER PICKS"

***Castle Hassle* (Atari 8-bit, 1983)**

Castle Hassle is a unique game that combines action and puzzle elements. The focus is on solving puzzles and figuring out how to retrieve items from and safely exit different rooms. There are also enemies that need to be disposed of. Together the two make for a very interesting game that is difficult to put to words. Whoever came up with the title "*Castle Hassle*" is a genius because it suits the game perfectly. I can see this game being very frustrating for some; it's definitely for those who don't give up easily or mind being completely stumped at times. There is a surprising amount of variety present given the age of the game. In fact, there is so much that it makes me wonder how much randomness is involved and how deep the game actually goes before it ends or repeats. The only downside is that the game is quite hard to find. If you planned on getting it to complete your collection, bump it up to the top of your list. Otherwise, fire up your emulator and give it a go.

Mr. Robot and His Robot Factory **(Datamost, Atari 8-bit, 1983)**

Mr. Robot is one of the many platform games to follow in the footsteps of the great *Miner 2049er*. It works just like *Miner 2049er*, but it's arguably a better game. The goal is to walk across the entirety of each platform to clear it, in turn ending the level once completed. Much of the game is figuring out the proper path to take in order to successfully reach all platforms without getting hurt. You can only fall so far before you die, and it's possible to leave a platform early, making suicide the only option. The game is a good mix of thinking and precision with the joystick.

So why do I say it can be argued that it's a better game? The main reason is that it's very colorful and happy looking, making it something people want to play. Another important plus is that it's much more forgiving when you initially pick it up than *Miner 2049er*. The jumping is much less frustrating, and it the difficulty starts lower and ramps-up at a better pace. Make sure to try out the level editor. Altogether I prefer this game to Miner *2049er* because I find it less frustrating, while still a challenge.

***Klax* (Atari, Atari 2600, 1990)**

Klax? On the 2600? Yes, and it's much better than one may imagine. *Klax* was one of the last 2600 games released, and it was only released in PAL territories. However there is an NTSC ROM floating around which can be made into a cartridge for those who want one. If you like *Klax* and the 2600, you will definitely want one of these once you try it.

To put it simply, this is a no-frills version of *Klax*. With no fancy backgrounds and minimal graphics and sound effects, this one is all about the gameplay. The game is true to the original and plays great considering its dated look. The controls are smooth and tight, and except for one issue of similar looking colors, the graphics never interfere with the game. If you have a nice TV and a video-modified 2600, it's not an issue. Even though it's on the weakest hardware of all the *Klax* ports, it is still a great game that should not be overlooked.

8-BIT LIT

A REVIEW OF BILL KUNKEL'S *CONFESSIONS OF THE GAME DOCTOR*

One of the first gaming journalists, Bill Kunkel co-founded the first magazine dedicated to video games, *Electronic Games*, with Arnie Katz and Joyce Worley. His memoirs take the form of "confessions," chronologically-ordered columns about gaming (and other matters, such as comic book writing), some of which were originally published online on Good Deal Games and on Digital Press.

He traces a candid portrait of living through the golden age of video games (and beyond). His anecdotes will bring comparison to Hunter Thompson's shenanigans; these were the days of sex, drugs, and rock and roll, and Kunkel lived that life wholly. Without being so graphic that it would make it an adult book, he does mention several times his own drug use in the 1980s, including during the magazine's production.

Kunkel's writing style is compelling and the confessions-slash-columns format makes it easier to read the book in spurts. However, the online origin of the text leads to some repetitions, such as the mention of Kunkel's earlier professional endeavors. However, despite this minor qualm, the book remains an entertaining read. Even a hardcore Kunkel fan is bound to discover some little-known facts about him (including his past as a comic book writer). A life-long fan of comic books, he actually wrote for the *Richie Rich* series and also had a brief stint at DC Comics and Marvel.

His three experiences as an expert witness in court cases (*K.C. Munchkin* v. Pac-Man, Game Genie v. Nintendo, and *Fighter's History* v. *Street Fighter II*) offer a great insight into the protectionist attitudes offered by the video game giants (in these cases, Atari, Nintendo, and Capcom). It is almost surprising that he wasn't asked to act as an expert witness more often.

The only risk inherent to reading this book is that it could give a potential gaming journalist the impression that Kunkel's experience is typical of today's gaming journalists, which isn't actually the case. In today's world, most of the work is done by receiving press releases and review copies of games, and there are very few direct interactions with game publishers. Nonetheless, *Confessions of the Game Doctor* gives a good idea of what game journalism entailed back in the 1980s and early 1990s.

The book can be found on the publisher's Web site, at *www.rolentapress.com*.

KEVIN BUNCH

CONTROL FREAK

""THE MULTI-CONSOLE CTHULHU: A REVIEW"

For an arcade purist, there is no experience quite like the real thing; the real hardware with sticks, buttons, upright cabinets, and preferably an immense din in the background. Unfortunately arcades are not as prevalent as they used to be, so some of us have had to hunker down with console compilations, PC emulation, and sometimes-inferior ports of the games we enjoy. Hardcore fighting game and shmup players also tend to prefer arcade-style gaming, but many of the newest releases are rarely seen outside of Japan.

If you own enough systems, you'll find yourself with a mound of different sticks of different quality for numerous platforms. Game companies have been releasing console arcade-style sticks for years, and people have been building their own out of hacked-together PCBs and arcade parts. It's not unheard of to drag multiple arcade sticks to gatherings and tournaments just to make sure that you, as the player, are covered without having to bum off of someone else. Enter the Cthulhu.

This nifty little PCB is the brainchild of Toodles, a forum member of *shoryuken*. com (a Web site for *Street Fighter* enthusiasts). The idea behind it was to create a simple, clean PCB used for an arcade stick with a minimum of fuss and soldering. His original release worked only for Playstation 3 and PC, but he has since put out a new version with additional functionality.

This Multi-Console, or MC, Cthulhu has become a hit among stick builders and with good reason. With basic soldering skills and a multimeter, a person can put together a single PCB that sports connectors for PlayStation 1 and 2, GameCube and Wii, the original Xbox, and of course, a USB cable for the PS3 and PC. The directions for the actual soldering work can be found on *Instructables.com*. Beyond that, no soldering is required. Screw terminals line the sides of the PCB for the stick and buttons, with instructions included as to what goes where, and a USB jack is built in for the USB cable. From there it's just a matter of plugging the right cord into the right system

(you do need to get cords first).

The MC Cthulhu also features the abil-

ity to update firmware via USB whenever Toodles puts out a new revision. The current revision, 1.4, includes autoloading for the Xbox, and Toodles has stated that he's looking to add in Sega Saturn support in the future. The PCB also works with many adapters so it can function on systems that the PCB does not currently support. PS1 to Dreamcast or GameCube and USB to original Xbox are both good options for someone who wants to do the minimum amount of soldering to get their stick going.

The board does have some hiccups though. A small number of them have a glitch for their PS2 support, where the system will fail to recognize the board after booting up a PS2 game (or, if it's a compilation, it may lose track of it after booting up a title IN the game). This isn't a deal-breaker for me, but it is annoying. The issue is currently being worked on by the creator, so ideally it isn't a permanent one in the design. Upgrading from a PS3 board to an MC one is an annoying task, involving replacing the chip on the board and adding in a couple diodes, but it's still doable.

Far more bothersome is the lack of support for the Xbox 360. Toodles said that this is because of Microsoft's security system for controllers, so he made the board easy to dual-mod with a proper 360 controller PCB, such as those found in the Mad Catz

Street Fighter IV sticks. He also released a secondary board, known as the Imp, that will allow the PS3 and 360 support using the same USB cable.

Other than the PS2 glitch, I have had absolutely no problems with the board. It's worked perfectly on the Xbox, Wii, and PS2 running PS1 games, as well as (after switching it out) for PS2 games. As one of those purists who needs a stick for fighters (and prefers one for arcade style games), it has breathed new life into my game compilations and certainly cuts down on the number of controllers I find myself bringing to gatherings. Once the PS2 glitch is fixed I'd call this a must have for home arcade gamers.

The Cthulhu is sold via Lizardlick.com and Gamingnow.net, and from Toodles directly on the *shoryuken.com* forums. He also has a Q&A/tech support thread in the Tech forum for any questions. The MC board retails for $34.95.

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
(GameCube, Konami, 2003)

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles should not be just another licensed game sitting on the shelf. It indeed was when the first game arrived in 1989, but by the time *Turtles in Time* and *The Hyperstone Heist* came, Konami had groomed the franchise into something timeless and dependable while their logo became a seal of quality itself. This game, based on the new series, poses as a grand return. It's one of the early cartoon games to make an example out of cel-shading shading that many developers were to follow, but the game play is mostly a junk-food style beat-em-up. Some games draw you in with online interaction, deep compelling stories and characters, or even physical action. A game like *TMNT* is a comfort food. It fills the time void if you're looking for a quick, cheap thrill and want to release some energy by slapping the attack button repeatedly and cracking heads in doing so.

It may sound as though I have just written off the entire genre or possibly anything pre-online era, but some comfort food games are classics in the sense that we appreciate them just as much, if not more, than the first time we discovered them. This genre has plenty of games which fit that description: *Double Dragon*, *Streets of Rage*, *Final Fight* and even*Ninja Turtles: Lost in Time*. They are also grand choices for multiplayer experiences. Instead of competing head-to head, players unite and bust heads together. The first disappointment in *TMNT* is no four-player support. You'd think a company that has been in this neck of the woods would know what the players want and expect,

especially given the new hardware at their control.

Cel-shaded graphics are a perfect fit for this game with colors that are smooth and refreshing to the eyes. A comic book feel is also achieved with action words springing from your attacks. The camera provides enough spatial freedom that we are able to follow our character while viewing the open areas filled with villains. The reason Konami makes presenting a beat-em-up in 3D look so easy is that the player is not given many combos to initiate. This is another example of a game that doesn't require your undivided attention when you are just pounding the same two buttons repeatedly.
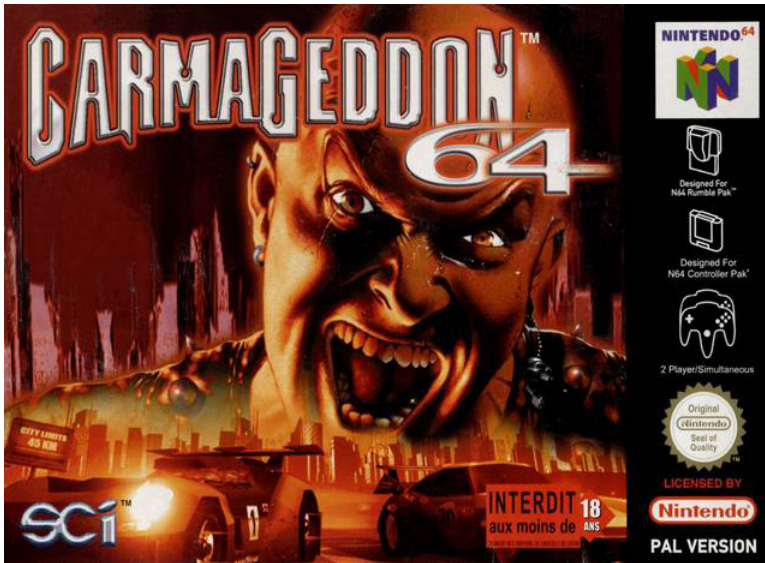
Getting ourselves in the mood for a beat-em-up is similar to preparing for an exercise routine; we want to get pumped up to some good music. Yuzo Koshiro proved himself the master of this in *Streets of Rage* and its sequel. The music in *TMNT* is hard and edgy, the type that grinds through our ears, but doesn't have much lasting flavor. I also doubt any player is fan enough to tolerate Leonardo yelling "take this" every two or three attacks.

TMNT, unfortunately, has to be a piecemeal experience. The chapters span roughly five to eight levels with no save option in-between. I enjoyed the simple prospect of beating up on thugs and foot ninjas for a couple of levels, but then I became indifferent to the graphics and sound and just focused on hacking away at whatever was coming at me. Meanwhile, pressing the attack button became a tiresome chore, like working in a dish room scrubbing plate after plate.

GRAPHICS	6
SOUND	6
GAMEPLAY	5
OVERALL	*6*

Nathan Dunsmore

Carmageddon 64 (Nintendo 64, Titus, 2000)

Carmageddon 64 is the worst N64 racer no one knows about. Though it would be best to keep it that way, this review is written with the purest of intentions in case the publisher logo on the box doesn't already register red flags. This is a game so heinous that one could ask the question "If no one knows about a game, does it exist?" with a measurable amount of dignity.

This game's origins date back to the PC. It was a racer with a cynical plot: The world has become polluted, and you must race for your freedom versus another colony. You could finish a race by clearing the checkpoints, wrecking your opponent's vehicles, or slaughtering all pedestrians. In this 3-years-later version, humanity has lost its guiding light completely and instead of humans, you get to feel less guilty by running over zombies. It's understandable to make some compromises to reach a younger audience. The N64 version of *California Speed* removed its pedestrians found in the arcade version. However, that game had an Everyone (E) rating. *Carmageddon 64* flaunts a Mature (M) rating. While it's arguable that the dismembering of zombies is enough to warrant such a rating, what difference would it have made if the humans were kept in?

That doesn't matter. Unlike the PC version, the chances of having fun with this game are as dead as the zombies. Controls are a wipeout. On some tracks the camera gives up before the race begins as if it knows well in advance that you'll have a tough time catching the other cars and zombies.

The race tracks trick us into thinking they're imaginative when they're really just flat out inconsistent. Think of yourself as trying to assemble a model city but the directions are horrible and some of the pieces are missing. As you slip and slide through particular city tracks, you'll see the same chain of stores. Try to make out where the doors and windows are located. While you're at it, drive into a body of water at the edge of the city and keep sinking until you see the background appear upside down.

The car models are nice. How they can plow over huge hillbilly-looking zombies is one of the many mysteries this game holds...sort of like the wide-screen adjustment option (of all things) in the pause menu.

The sounds in the main menu are noises you'd commonly hear in an auto repair shop. It would've been just as well if the racetracks followed suit. Then again, the sound effects coming from the cars are just as atrocious, so it's a lose-lose situation. There is a surprisingly good announcer, but the screeching zombies steal his thunder.

There may be too much dwelling on the zombies, but that's about the only interesting thing to be said about this game (besides that it's one of N64's worst). There's no strategy or delightful carnage (as can be found in *Battletanx* and *Destruction Derby 64*) involved, but a repelling force that forbids you from finding anything noteworthy. The publisher, Titus, gained infamy after they developed and released *Superman 64*, one of the most critically panned games in history. That game went on to become a bestseller. Someone probably felt lightening would strike twice. It didn't. Amen for that.

GRAPHICS	3
SOUND	0
GAMEPLAY	1
OVERALL	***0***

Nathan Dunsmore

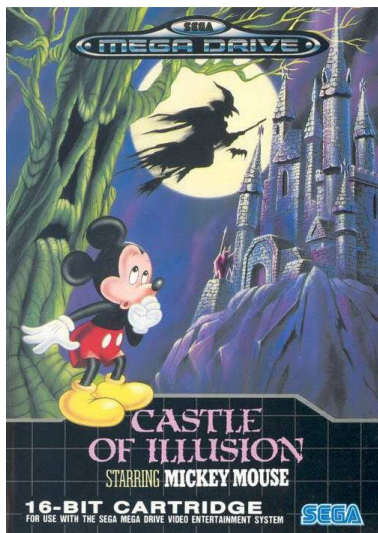### Castle of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse (Sega Master System, Sega, 1990)

The Sega Master System has spurred a few classics of its own regarded to this day as worth having in anyone's collection. One such title is Castle of Illusion, a Sega-exclusive title released on Sega Master System, Genesis, and Game Gear.

The premise of *Castle of Illusion* is simple; Minnie was kidnapped by an evil witch, and it's up to you, Mickey, to rescue her from the witch's castle. This side-scrolling platformer is set in three stages. The first one consists of three levels: Woodland, Toyland, and Candyland. The second stage includes two levels: Schoolland and Gearland. Finally, the last stage leads to the two final bosses. You can choose the order in which you play the levels within a given part of the game; however, once a level is completed, it's impossible to play it again.

Mickey has only two attacks: He can do a butt-jump that's awkwardly controlled by button 1 after jumping (one just wants to press down while Mickey is in the air), and he can also throw certain items (such as an apple or a screw) at enemies. Enemies and bosses are related to the level you're playing...from chocolate chips in Candyland to walking trees in Woodland to giant letters in Schoolland.

Each level is colorfully rendered in a cartoony style, making this title one of the nicest-looking games on the SMS. Toyland and Candyland in particular are memorable; how can one resist a land where you can fight big jack-in-a-boxes or a land where the walls are made of chocolate? In fact, I always liked these two levels best when I was a kid, maybe because they appealed to me a lot more than Woodland did. In fact, Woodland and Gearland seem a lot more clichéd as levels than the others because they've been done before and since in other platformers.

The boss fights are rather simplistic; hit bosses on the head with an item or through butt-jumping (depending on the boss). A few hits are all that's needed to dispose of them. Each completed level gives out a gem. Once the player has completed all levels (and thus has gathered all gems), he/she can access the final level to ultimately confront the evil witch.

The soundtrack varies according to the level being played, from a cute playful ditty in Toyland to a more mechanical-sounding tune in Gearland. It is just varied enough to avoid musical overkill. It succeeds in setting the tone for each level.

Mickey has a life meter of three stars (which can be increased to up to five stars), and one star is deducted every time Mickey takes a hit. When there are no stars left, Mickey dies (falling into pits means instant death). Fortunately, Mickey can restore some life thanks to slices of cake or full cakes hidden into treasure chests. Treasure chests can also contain a pair of Mickey ears (for an extra life) or a coin (for 500 points). Every 10,000 points earns Mickey an extra life.

Unfortunately, the game has only one difficulty level; easy (aka "normal"). At first, the levels take some practice (in Gearland, it can sometimes be frustrating to properly time the jumps on the ghosts to get across shafts), but the 9 continues make it possible to finish the game in one or two sittings. Obviously, Sega didn't expect older gamers to be interested in this game. There is also a simpler practice mode that covers a short version of the first three levels. It's not very useful unless you've never played the game before.

Regardless of the difficulty level, Sega has succeeded in making a fun game that's among the better Disney-licensed games of the era. Once you get used to the butt-attack control, it becomes second nature to control Mickey. It is too bad that the game is one-player only, however; it would have been nice for two players to be able to take turns in their own game after each level or upon losing a life.

This game is great if you want to feel like a kid again. Just don't be hungry when playing Candyland. Is it any wonder I had a craving for a Cherry Blossom chocolate after playing?

GRAPHICS   9

SOUND   8

GAMEPLAY   7

OVERALL   *8*

Sarah Szefer

Gran Turismo (Sony PSP, Sony, 2009)

With the launch of the PlayStation Portable in 2005, Sony released *Wipeout Pure*, the latest iteration of one of its flagship racing titles. The game was an early success for the system and compared favorably graphically to *Wipeout Fusion* on the PlayStation 2. With *Wipeout Pure*, Sony had a significant benchmark under its belt; it proved to gamers that the PSP was on par with, or superior to, the PS2.

Four years later we have finally arrived at the PSP debut of Sony's other flagship racing title, *Gran Turismo*. The last full game to bear the name was *Gran Turismo 4*, released on the PS2 months before the release of the PSP. Although gamers may have been suffering from a little *Gran Turismo* fatigue at that point, there's no denying that game was one of the most polished, expansive, and involving experiences on the system. Admit it, if you hadn't already taken the series for granted, you would have fallen in love.

With stellar PSP versions of darn near all the good first-party titles on the PS2 already out there, the series' spotless track record, and a wait at least 2 years longer than necessary, nothing less than extraordinary should be expected; the PSP version of *Gran Turismo* should be one of the very best games on the system. It's not.

The game does not disappoint in the ways that you would expect it to. It looks and feels exactly as it should. As a miniaturized approximation of the *Gran Turismo* experience, the fundamentals are right on target (including controls; anyone complaining about that hasn't played the original PSX game lately). I suspect that, for the uninitiated, it's a terrific entry point into the series.

The rest of us are going to be confused by the lack of structure. First, they removed the rather strenuous career mode. Although it's nice to not have to grind through 50 races with a dinky $10,000 car to get to the good stuff, the open-ended structure shifts the game's propulsion engine from completion percentage (brilliantly implemented in the second game) to collecting a bunch of cars. Which would be fine if the game would let you

buy them…it doesn't! For some arbitrary, ridiculous, game-ruining reason, you are limited to purchasing a vehicle from four dealerships per "day." I haven't yet determined what constitutes a "day," but it seems like five races or so. Can't find a car you like? Race five more times then select from another random field of four dealers. Whose idea was this?

Even the artificially limited selection of vehicles might be bearable if it weren't for the game's most serious flaw; you race against three other cars. In the original game from 1998 you are in a field of six, as you are in the PS2 versions. What happened? The PSP doesn't have enough horsepower for a six-car race? Wasn't I racing against seven other hovercraft at 900 miles an hour on this thing more than four years ago? So here's what your races look like; you fight for position with three cars for the first half of the first lap, then you drive around on an empty course for two more minutes. I'm 26 days into the game without a second place finish. And I'm *old*.

By the way, no licensed music. Yes, I hear some of you cheering. I happened to like hearing "As Heaven is Wide" 200 times in the first game, so the lack of commercial music is another check in the "what the hell?" column on my score card. There is an unlockable custom soundtrack option but that doesn't do much for those of us who don't keep music on the PSP.

If *Gran Turismo* was a left-field release from an up-and-coming publisher it would be the buzz of the week. While it's true that it couldn't possibly live up to 4 years of inflated expectations, *Gran Turismo*

disappoints for all the wrong reasons. Sony built a beautiful portable racer and then unscrewed the tire caps and let the air out.

GRAPHICS	8
SOUND	7
GAMEPLAY	5
OVERALL	**6**

Jeff Belmonte

DP STAFF

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

"WHAT TO PLAY"

Jeff Belmonte recommends:

The Club (PlayStation 3, Sega, 2008)

Whenever I hear a game criticized for being "too arcadey" and "too short," I'm interested. This game is as mindless as running around shooting people for points can be. Want an engrossing story with fully-developed characters? Move along. Want to obsessively play the same level over and over trying to top your high score? Here's your game. I dare you to play the training level only once.

Dave Giarrusso recommends:

House of the Dead: OVERKILL (Wii, Sega, 2009)

What happens when you drop the *HotD* license into the lap of a capable design team and base it on grisly, grindhouse exploitation movies of decades past? This game is what happens. And that's a good thing. *HotD:O* is the sleaziest, most profane, depraved, light gun, shoot-the-undead-fest to date. Which is to say, it's outstanding. It's far more absurd and despicable than any of the *Grand Theft Auto* games ever were. It openly and unapologetically exudes OVERKILL around every turn. It begins freakishly over-the-top and takes an additional step into hyperbole with each passing second. You'll experience some minor slowdown at times, but that's a small complaint given the rich tapestry of stylized nonsense featured here. Weapons upgrades are handled through purchases based on skill, and you can choose two to bring into battle with the ability to switch on the fly. Nice. And the replay factor is very high. Make no mistakes, this game is BY adults, FOR adults. And it's about emm-effing* time. Yeah, the combo meter maxes out at "goregasm." No kidding. If you're squeamish or easily offended by vulgar language, you'll want to avoid this game like the plague.

*If you've played the game, then you know.

Rob Strangman recommends:

Monster Party (NES, Bandai/Shinsei, 1989)

In what's possibly the most tripped-out NES game ever made, you play Mark, an average kid with a baseball bat, and Bert, a flying gargoyle-monster from beyond the stars, who magically fuse together and must change back and forth to defeat the evil monsters that have taken over Bert's world. It's an above-average platformer with a lot of wacky surprises and a surprising amount of gore and morbid imagery (just check out what happens in stage one if you don't believe me). And this was released in America, but not Japan. Weird. Judging by how strange it is, my bet is that a large amount of LSD was taken during *Monster Party*'s brainstorming sessions, as the wackiness of the game (especially the bosses) would seem to indicate. "HELLO! BABY!"

Paul Z. Cortez recommends:

Gravitar (Atari 2600, Atari, 1983)

If the original arcade version seems too hard to play, that's because it is too hard. The 2600 port has somewhat less-aggressive enemies yet still remains challenging. The combination of the classic game mechanics from both *Asteroids* and *Lunar Lander* makes this a game worth investing the time to master.

Sarah Szefer recommends:

Game and Watch Gallery 4 (Game Boy Advance, Nintendo, 2002)

If you're a fan of the old Game and Watch games, or simply like addictive mini-games, you can't go wrong with *G&W Gallery 4*. Of all the versions released (including the G&W Collections released for Nintendo Club), this is the one containing the most games: 20 titles including unlockables, 11 of which are also playable in a modern remake featuring characters from the Mario universe. The recreation of the G&W originals is spot-on, and the fact that the cartridge can keep high scores and one in-progress save file means that it is possible to interrupt a mad game of *Fire* or *Chef* and resume it later. The classic mode includes two difficulty levels, while the modern version has three. Much cheaper than buying all the original games!

Jared Bottorff recommends:

Arkanoid: Doh It Again (SNES, Nintendo, 1997)

We're all gamers here, so I assume that's everyone's played at least some of incarnation of *Arkanoid* here (even if it was just his great grandpappy *Breakout*). However, I dare you to find one better executed than *Arkanoid: Doh It Again*. The game boasts hundreds of differently designed levels (that keep going even after you beat the final boss). Not enough? Build your own using the built-in level editor. Adjust the sensitivity of the paddle to your liking to achieve maximum control (and if you don't like using the SNES controller, plug in the SNES mouse). Share the wealth with a friend with two-player brick-busting. Well worth whittling away hours of your life for.
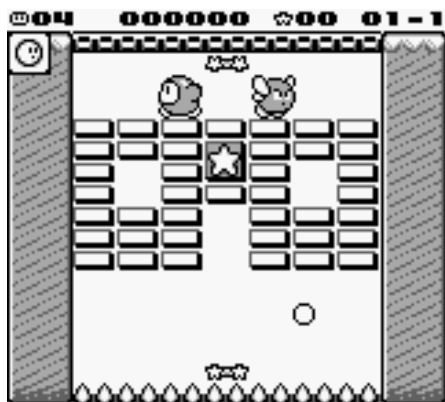
Rob O'Hara recommends:

Elevator Action Old & New (Game Boy Advance, Taito, 2002)

In this two-for-one Japanese-only release, Taito serves up both the NES port of the classic 1983 arcade game *Elevator Action* and a brand new updated version of the game. The original version is identical to the NES release, which in itself is mostly faithful to the original (save for a few minor audio and speed differences). Along with revamped graphics, the new version of the game features multiple player characters to choose from, an assortment of power-ups, and a two-player mode against either the CPU or a second player. As an import-only release *Elevator Action Old & New* isn't cheap, but it's a lot of fun to play if you run across an inexpensive copy.

Chris Chandler recommends:

Kirby's Block Ball (Game Boy, Nintendo, 1996)

Imagine *Breakout*/*Arkanoid* but on all four sides! This game is highly overlooked, and due to the extremely low print run, it seems no one has heard of this title. Sharp graphics, catchy music, and also Super Game Boy compatibility make this title stand out from the crowd. Anyone who remotely likes the block-breaking genre needs to check this game out.

Scott Stilphen recommends:

Computer War (Atari 8-bit, Thorn EMI, 1983)

Based on the movie *WarGames*, the premise is much the same: Prevent nuclear war. Although less complicated than Colecovision's *WarGames*, the action is more first-person as you have to shoot down the incoming missiles on the fly. Plus the music sets the mood perfectly, and the sound effects pick up the graphics' slack.

Tim Snider recommends:

Pro Pinball: Fantastic Journey (PlayStation, PC, Empire Interactive, 1999)

So few games have a steampunk feel to them, which makes this game a treat right out of the box. Imagine a pinball machine designed by H.G. Wells and Jules Verne. Rather than just shooting at targets, you need to first complete five world-spanning adventures and defeat the evil General Yagov. Gather the materials needed to build one of four fantastic vehicles; a subterranean drill, submarine, river paddleboat, or skyblimp. Build up steam in the boilers and explore underground caverns, the ocean depths, or the innermost reaches of the Dark Continent, searching for the crystals that allow you to make your final attack on Yagov's hidden island fortress. As close to a *Space: 1899* video game as you're liable to find!

Kevin Bunch recommends:

Tatsunoko vs. Capcom (Wii, Capcom, import 2008)

While we're still waiting for the souped-up American release, the Japanese version of this fighting game shouldn't be overlooked. Even if you aren't a fan of any of the Tatsunoko characters, or like me, had never even heard of them, the game has all the over-the-top fun of the old *Marvel vs. Capcom* series with a few additions to try and avoid the problems of those older games. Nearly a year later, and this game still sees frequent playtime among my friends and me. Note there's no online, though; make sure you have someone nearby who would want to play.

Micky Wright recommends:

Guru Logic Champ (Game Boy Advance, Compile, 2001)

If you have never heard of this title, I can say without any doubt that this is the best and most original puzzle game you have never played. The goal is somewhat similar to picross, to make a picture. The way you do it resembles *Magical Drop*, pulling and throwing blocks, although here you only do one at a time and you can rotate all the way around the board. The logic you need to use to solve puzzle I would say is most comparable to *Sokoban*. You are constantly adding and removing blocks to construct the picture in the proper order. If my poor description sounds nonsensical, it is because this game is so great it defies words. This import only title is English-friendly and something all puzzle game fans should try.

Digital Press is dedicated to the memory of my best friend
and DP co-creator, Kevin Oleniacz.
Kevin's spirit will be with us through every homing missile fired, knockout punch delivered, UFO destroyed, and finish line crossed.

Play recklessly. Think positively. Live EVERY moment to the fullest.