FUSION

annual 2020

Contents

Retro

Indie

Current Gen

Other

Editor's Note

After over a year producing in excess of eight issues of FUSION magazine and counting, it seemed apt to put together our first FUSION annual, just in time, but not exclusive to, Christmas 2019.

The Annual comes in at a whopping 120 pages of gaming content with contributions from our paper magazine regulars — The Oliver Twins, Dave Perry, Simon Butler to name but a few.

Having annuals as a kid was a big part of Christmas for me — I still have my 1980s annuals of The Beano, Dandy, Whizzer and Chips and many more that I have kept over the years. Even though this annual is only A5 in size, I hope you agree it keeps the annual spirit alive and contains within its pages a smattering of

gaming goodness covering retro all the way to modern with toys and handhelds thrown in for good measure.

At this point I normally say enjoy the issue — this time, enjoy the annual!

Editor

Chris Wilkins

FUSION

Game : Rogue Squadron 2
Year : 2001
System : Gamecube

Most gamers are fans of Star Wars — and there have been great games (here's looking at you X-Wing vs TIE Fighter on the PC) and pretty poor ones (insert your game of choice here as there have been many).

With the launch of the Gamecube, we were promised a new Star Wars game by the guys from Factor 5. These guys had previously released Star Wars: Rogue Squadron and Star Wars Episode 1: Battle for Naboo for the Nintendo 64 so were very aware of the high expectations from Star Wars loving gamers and Star Wars was a brand to treat with respect.

The power of the Gamecube allowed the developers to make this game THE best looking Star Wars game to date and wowed attendees at a trade show called Space World with a game demo created for the machine in just 19 days!

As you fly over the Death Star in your X-Wing or go into battle in your A or Y-Wing, the illusion of fighting for the Alliance against the Dark side is never lost. Flying towards a Star Destroyer and just soaking in the sheer size of the thing against your small rebel craft is a gaming memory I won't forget.

The game follows a story line across a number of levels with the climatic Death Star level seeing the destruction of the second Imperial station. This game for me is up there with X-Wing vs TIE Fighter as one, if not the best, Star Wars titles to date and still holds up well today against the competition some 18 years later.

FUSION

5

RYAN COLEMAN TAKES THIS DELIGHTFUL SWITCH RPG THROUGH ITS PACES

Octopath Traveler was released way back in July 2018, and despite spending more money and time on Square Enix games in my life than I care to remember, it wasn't an immediate purchase. I didn't even own a Nintendo Switch at that point, and I already had a backlog of RPGs to get through, so adding another to the pile seemed more than a little senseless.

When I finally did end up getting it, I instantly wished I had gone out and bought it on day one. Octopath Traveler is a magical experience.

OT isn't a typical modern day RPG. Graphically, it's stunning, a massive throwback to retro 16-bit titles like Final Fantasy and Dragon Quest but with details and glitz that those titles could only dream of. A kind of 'HD-2D'. On numerous occasions I just stopped playing to admire the art style and the graphics, as visually there isn't much quite like it in any other modern game. The sound is just as impressive as the art style, with unique themes for specific characters or regions your party visits, and orchestral masterpieces tinged with rock guitar and folk violin during climactic battles. OT is as rich and vibrant audibly as it is visually.

Unlike RPGs of yesteryear, there is no obvious overarching plot and no obvious big bad boss that you must prevent from bringing ruin to the world. Instead the game is comprised of

Below: A beautiful looking game with huge enemies to defeat as you travel the lands.
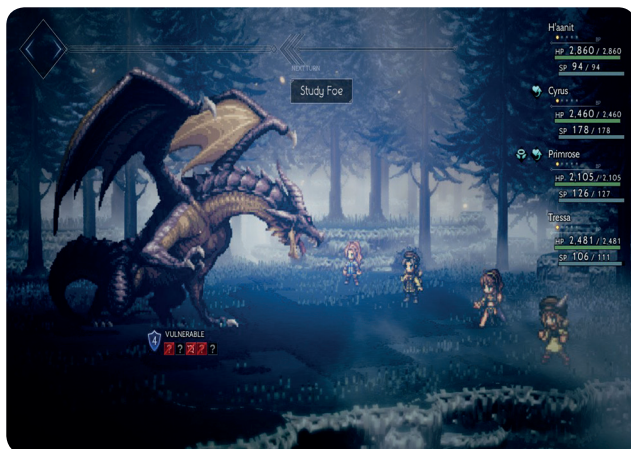
eight individual stories, one for each character in your party. Although not epic in nature, most of the stories feel personal and emotionally driven. It's only after you have beaten every character's story can you find side-quests

which will eventually lead you to a secret (and infuriatingly difficult) final villain who relates to every individual story. The stories themselves feel very much like they were written by someone who had just binged on Game of Thrones. There's a lot more backstabbing, prostitution, scheming and murder than classic RPGs, but these adult themes don't prevent the game from being extremely charming.

The battles are what you would expect from a classic RPG but with a little twist on the turn-based structure. Every enemy has a certain weakness, perhaps a disdain for spears or fire magic, so attacking them with either of those will lower their shield points. When all of the enemy shield points have been depleted, they will be stunned for a time, preventing them from attacking as well as allowing you to deal significantly more damage to them until they recover. Bosses can switch their weaknesses around during a battle, adding an extra element of challenge. Cyrus, the Scholar can use his knowledgeable abilities to identify an enemy weakness, or alternatively you can just hurl a variety of spells or attacks with

in this respect. You do get random interactions very occasionally, but the dialogue is always very trivial and never about plot points. I'm not needing some romance (like Final Fantasy titles tend to feature heavily), but some sense of comradery would have been nice. But when you don't have a main villain to rally against, comradery is inevitably going to take a bit of a backseat.

Despite having a few small issues, OT is a terrific game. Story-wise, it doesn't really live up to the titles it pays homage to, but if you are after an RPG that doesn't come with a ton of baggage but does have plenty of turn-based action with cool mechanics, outstanding art-style and exciting music, Octopath Traveler has you covered, and without a doubt it is one of the best modern RPGs that I have played (and finished!) in recent years.

Bring on a sequel!

different weapons at different enemies to see what works best against certain types. The end result makes the combat system feel almost like an addictive puzzle, and more than once I found myself grinding away at enemies until four in the morning, completely unaware of how much time had passed by since I had started playing the previous evening!

One thing I found a little irksome was that you have to travel to a town in order to switch characters around. You can only have four members in your party, meaning you will always have four 'benched'. When you are exploring a cave and find a treasure chest that only a specific party member can open, it's a little irritating to have to travel back to a town in order to get that character.

The characters in the game are a bit of a mixed bunch, which is kind of typical of a Square Enix title. Some seem cool and genuinely likeable, whilst others seem more than a little douchey, but they all seem to change over the course of their individual story, and learn something from their journey. One thing sadly lacking in the game is a decent amount of interaction between party members. Each individual story plays out as though the other characters aren't even present during cut-scenes. Primrose, the dancer can be alone talking with some villains that she is about to do battle with, then when the battle begins the other party members are just there and helping her. When it's over, they have disappeared and it's just Primose again. I understand that the focus is intended to be solely on a specific character during their story, but party relations and interactions have been a central part of RPGs since the '90s, so the game does feel lacking

FUSION REACTION 8

Sensible

STOO CAMBRIDGE TELLS US A TALE FROM HIS TIME AT SENSIBLE SOFTWARE

I've often been asked 'Oh I bet you could tell a few tales from those Sensible days?'.

Well of course I could and on occasion I have spilled the beans, but as time has passed some of the memories have become a little frayed around the edges. Take for example the time, (not long after we had moved into our nice shiny new Saffron Walden offices), Chris Yates bought a pinball machine for the recreation room down stairs. Yes we had a rec room, it wasn't very big but it had a TV and a couple of games machines and it served us well for the years we were in residence. Now I can't quite recall which one it was, I think it was Bride of Pinbot. Anyway, Chris was a bit of an electronics dabbler, and not a bad one at that — I let him mod my Megadrive with a 50/60Hz Region switch so he knew a fair bit about electronics and how to do it.

So he opens up this pinball machine and decides to find the ROMs that hold the data for all the messages that appear on the LED display. With his trusty EPROM reader/ writer the quest to retrieve this data was on.

Suffice to say it didn't take long for said data to be found. Fast forward a day or so and well, this machine went from factory standard messages for 'Ball X', 'Skill Shot', 'Multiplier' you get the idea...to... well pretty much anything that would fit that was, let's say fit for a more mature audience — totally uncensored!

Well you can imagine the hours of laughter that followed when an unsuspecting member of the team who wasn't privy to this 'upgrade' first witnessed such expletives! GameDev has never been so much fun! Yep the tales I could tell but I'll save those for another day.

CRASH
ZX SPECTRUM

'At the launch of CRASH there were a number of software houses with clout arising from the murk of the "bedroom programmer" boom,' Roger Kean says.

'One such was Australian Melbourne House and thanks to the hard work of Newsfield advertisement sales manager John Edwards (he preferred the term "Client Liaison") a warm relation developed between Ludlow and the UK team for Melbourne House based in Richmond, headed by Paula Byrnes.

And so CRASH got an early insight into both the adventure game Sherlock Holmes (designed by Philip Mitchell who wrote the best-selling Hobbit for Melbourne House) and the 'revolutionary' H.U.R.G., which acronym stood for High Level User-Friendly Real Time Games Designer.

The ensuing article seemed destined to make the cover, which gave Oli Frey something of a headache, As Roger remembers. 'How to portray two entirely different pieces of software in an entertaining manner. Oli and I pondered this for some time. The great detective wasn't so much of a problem in visual terms but H.U.R.G.?'

'Since Roger and I often worked closely on visual concepts for covers back then,' Oli recalls, 'I'm not sure which of us came up with the idea of the magnifying glass hugely distorting Sherlock's right eye as he peers at a scrap of paper. On the paper is written the enigmatic "clue" – H.U.R.G. seen written in reverse of course.'

'I was reminded of Hitchcock's technique for using objects in his films in out-of-proportion perspective in the foreground, like the giant close-up of the telephone in Dial M for Murder. But it was certainly Oli's idea to have the paper in the foreground out of focus, so interest is focused on the reflection in the magnifying glass. He also painted Dr Watson staring with curiosity over Sherlock's shoulder, which adds enormously to the atmosphere.'

So, Sherlock Holmes and a piece of games designing software all neatly combined on one striking image. But that wasn't quite all.

'The really funny thing is that later in the same year, out came the spoof film Top Secret,' Roger says. 'Among others it starred Peter Cushing – a frequent Sherlock Holmes in TV and movies. He is seen examining the page in a book through a large round magnifying glass, his eye hugely distorted by the lens. But when he lowers the glass, his swollen eye socket remains – a great visual gag and we'd already done it on the cover of CRASH issue 3!'

Right: Holmes solves the case once again!

FUSION

Game : Trashman
Year : 1984
System : ZX Spectrum

The bin men around our parts come every other Monday to pick up our non-recyclable waste. They are happy chaps and remarkably fit as they run down the road after the truck – I have always wondered what happens to the less than fit bin men on their first day — do they get suitably disposed of?

So Malcolm Evans and the New Generation team must have been looking out of the window one Monday morning, just like I often do, and one of the team shouts, "I know, let's make a game about collecting rubbish". And in a moment of complete madness, it seemed that everyone in the room thought it a good idea!

Life was simpler in the 80s — no 'green bin for this' and 'blue bin for that'. Those were the times when a bin was just a bin. With boy racers screaming by intent on putting you in casualty, intruder hating dogs (who obviously over slept that morning and missed the postman) biting at your ankles and a bin wagon driver who just wants to finish off the street and go home, the task of rubbish collection within the Trashman game becomes somewhat challenging — and weirdly enjoyable. It was never this much fun tidying and taking out the trash in your room when you were a kid — so why was this game so addictive?

The game cleverly hides what is in fact a very dull, mundane task. It seems that many games of the time were good at this.

THE STORY BEHIND...

CHRIS WILKINS CATCHES UP WITH BOTH PHILIP AND ANDREW OLIVER TO TALK ABOUT THE STORY BEHIND THE DIZZY FRANCHISE

If there is one game, or one gaming character, that is synonymous with The Oliver Twins, it is Dizzy and the many games he appeared in spread across the 8-bit and 16-bit computing genre.

Chris Wilkins talks to both of the Twins to find out what is so wonderful about this charming egg...

Chris Wilkins: I'm sure you're aware you are most famous for creating Dizzy — a really popular game in the late 80s especially in the UK and across Europe. Would you mind telling us the story behind this?

Oliver Twins: Sure, we're very proud of Dizzy.

CW: So when did you write the original Dizzy game?

OT: We started Dizzy in late October 1986 whilst developing Ghost Hunters. We were 19 at the time and were in our gap year from University doing our best to ensure that we earned a good living from making games so that we wouldn't have to go to university to study Electrical Engineering. This was the closest subject we could find at the time to making computer games and in hindsight it was not very close at all, but that was the state of how the educational establishment viewed computer games. It's a very different story now with so many universities and colleges running computer

Below: The completely opened Commodore 64 Dizzy cassette inlay.

game development courses.

CW: Which came first, the character or the world and the idea for the puzzles and story?

OT: Whilst developing Ghost Hunters in November '86, I (Philip) was very frustrated that the head of the main character, Hunk, was so small, that I was only able to use 3x3 pixels with a choice of three colours on Amstrad, one colour on Spectrum. I was drawing the graphics inside Panda Sprites, a sprite package that Andrew and I had written. It was very quick and easy to try out different animations and in my frustration I drew a very large head so that I could define eyes and a mouth with expressions. Since this used most of the space available (24 pixels by 32 pixels) I simply added gloves and boots to try to give him a possibility of becoming a playable cartoon character that was able to traverse a world sensibly — there simply wasn't room for a

Below: Looking over the kingdom — one day this could all be mine!

Above: Look a ZX Spectrum tape with Dizzy on it. Fetch a cassette player!

body or limbs.

CW: Why add a crazy spin jump? Wouldn't it have been so much easier to have him jump like a normal video game character?

OT: The spinning animations were developed first because Panda Sprites have the ability to rotate sprites, a feature added with the idea that people could use it to make games like Asteroids. Having developed the lovely spin animation we wanted to use it in the game and it certainly gave him a

very unique look that would always be remembered by players. Unfortunately it did have the side effect that he would occasionally not land on a surface correctly and do another full roll before he got to his feet and often this was fatal.

CW: He seemed incredibly enthusiastic much like yourselves! How do you achieve it, and did you mean to?

OT: It's lovely that people actually perceived him as so energetic and enthusiastic. I guess this came down to the fact that players were able to see his face which was quite new back then, but also because we gave him idle animations. We decided to make him bob up and down a little just to give him a fun lively personality, but also to help players locate him on the screen since when he moved around the screen it wasn't always obvious to see where he was. This was worse on the Spectrum which had attribute clash and we use the method

of fast sprite printing using the XOR technique, which effectively camouflaged him like a chameleon.

CW: How did the name Dizzy come about?

OT: The game was mostly developed before we actually came up with a name for the main character, we just couldn't think of an appropriate name. All during development the game was called Magic Kingdom. It was our dad who accidentally came up with the name after he said that the character must be dizzy after tumbling so much. Much later, he also came up with the idea that the whole family were called Yolkfolk since he'd already decided in his own mind Dizzy was an egg, as did many other people.

CW: What?! Dizzy wasn't an egg?!

OT: During development, Dizzy was just a large happy face with red gloves and boots. After release, we came around to accepting that people saw him as an egg.

CW: What inspired you to write it?

OT: It was the third in the series of our side view action adventures. We'd featured a castle, we'd had a haunted house, so we were looking for another theme and came up with the idea of a fantasy world — inspired by the likes of Dungeons and Dragons (the Cartoon) and the Smurfs. We loved cartoons and wanted to create our own cartoon character and we already had this funny 'large face' character mentioned earlier.
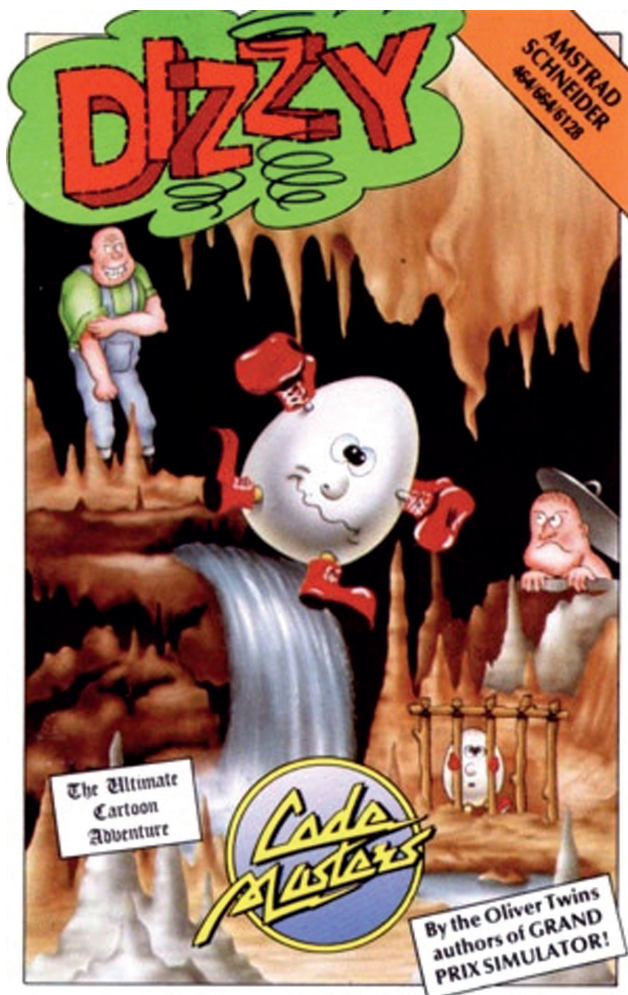
CW: Tell me about the world you created for your character.

OT: We really felt that it was important that all the screens joined together to create the illusion of a small land to explore and we wanted each new screen that opened up to look new, different and interesting.

CW: How did you design the map and plan the puzzles?

OT: We sketched rough ideas for sections working away from from the starting screen trying to think of interesting blockers. We then printed all the screens out, gluing them to wallpaper and then worked out where each 'key' should be positioned to make finding them and returning them to where they
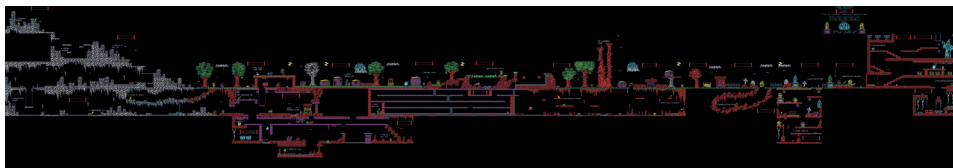
could be used both challenging and interesting. Obviously they didn't look like 'keys' they were things like A Mucky Grease Gun, A Strong Crowbar, A Broken Heart etc. all of which made solving the puzzles a lot more cryptic and interesting.

CW: So how did you tackle development?

OT: We had our original Amstrad CPC 664, and then the other Amstrad CPC 6128 bought with the advance monies Codemasters paid us for Super Robin Hood. These both had disk drives, and we'd purchased 2 Maxam ROM Assemblers that attached to the back of the computers. We linked one of the Amstrads to a Spectrum via our homemade Splink (SPAM) cable. We could simply develop the code on the Amstrad, compile it and send a ROM image to the Spectrum which worked really well.

This was one of the breakthroughs we made in creating games much quicker.

CW: So how long did it take to develop?

OT: All development was initially for the Amstrad version and that took about 8 weeks, we then converted it across to the Spectrum using the code developed for Ghost Hunters which took about another week. So

the Spectrum version is 85% Amstrad game with 10% from Ghost Hunters and another 5% unique code. Of course Dizzy was based on Ghost Hunters code base so it probably contains well over 50% of it's code from Ghost Hunters. We always tried to be as efficient as possible with code reuse.

Top: Dizzy, bless him, trying to work out which computer is best!

CW: It was converted to the C64 where many of your Dizzy fans first saw it. How did that come about and what did you

Below: The primary coloured ZX Spectrum version of Dizzy.

think of that version?

OT: Codemasters, the Darling brothers and Mark Baldock, yes the guy that converted our Amstrad Super Robin Hood to the Spectrum, arranged all the conversions, and they handed our source code and graphics to Ian Gray who did an excellent conversion. He would go on to convert most of the Dizzy games to C64. We've never played them, since we didn't have a C64.

CW: Did you know you had a hit on your hands?

OT: Not at all. In fact quite the opposite, sales were slow, slower than our previous 3 games, Super Robin Hood, Ghost Hunters and Grand Prix Simulator. So we just got on with our next game Pro Ski Simulator. But within a few months Codemasters were receiving a lot of fan mail. Well, we say fan mail, it was mostly, 'I love the Dizzy game but can you please tell me how'. Thankfully sales continued at a reasonable rate and didn't decrease as is usual with most games, to the point that a year later the game had sold pretty well and the letters were still coming in. It's that which convinced us that we should write another Dizzy game. Hopefully the players who bought and liked the first would like another adventure for Dizzy, this time on a deserted Treasure Island.

CW: Why do you think Dizzy eventually became so popular?

OT: Well it wasn't popular as first. Nobody really knew what Dizzy was from the box. We hadn't used our formula

of using a recognised name. We did add the sticker 'The Ultimate Cartoon Adventure' hoping that this would tempt players, as that i what we were attempting to create and felt sure that players would want this. Whilst we were only using fairly crude computers and graphics were very limited we did manage to conjure up the fantasy world in the players minds. They were able to buy-in to the character, the world and story. Obviously later Dizzy games were converted to computers and consoles with better graphics and he started to look much more like a credible cartoon character.

CW: Any plans to bring Dizzy to modern platforms? These games would be great on the Switch.

OT: Creating modern high quality games is a very expensive business, so it would be a huge financial risk. We have fully designed a new Dizzy game called Wonderful Dizzy, and that's currently in development for the Spectrum Next, so let's see how that's received first.

CW: What else would you like to tell us about Dizzy?

OT: After the Let's Go Dizzy Book came out, late 2016, we were contacted by the Director of a Computer Museum in Ukraine. He told us that Dizzy was the most popular video game character across Russia for most of the 90s. We had absolutely no idea! It took almost 20 years later, and the adoption of the internet, to find out. It does explain why there are so many Dizzy Fan games.

CW: How can people play Dizzy games easily today?

OT: The original games, and all the fan games, are all collected and available for free at www.Yolkfolk. com. Some even play in the browser so you don't need an emulator.

CW: You must be very proud of what you created as teenagers?

OT: Yes, we are always pleased to hear how much Dizzy meant to players. People
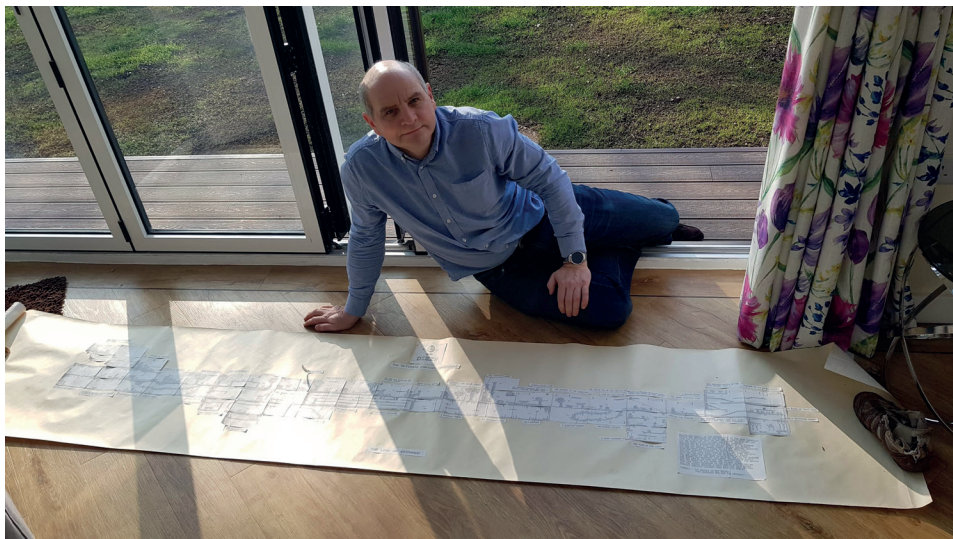
Above: Philip showing off the design of Dizzy — on the back of wallpaper!

often tell us of their fond memories of playing them and many in the games industry have told us it's the Dizzy games that inspired them to learn the skills required to make games and have a career in the games industry.

CW: Wow, nice to know

you made a real difference to people's lives with a game...

OT: Yes. We're pleased that Dizzy was so successful and so fondly remembered, but we don't want it to be our legacy. We've done a lot since and plan on doing a lot more. We're really excited about the future of games and particular British game developers role in

making them.

CW: Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions.

OT: Not at all, hope your readers enjoy the article.

Below: And for completeness — the Amstrad CPC inlay.
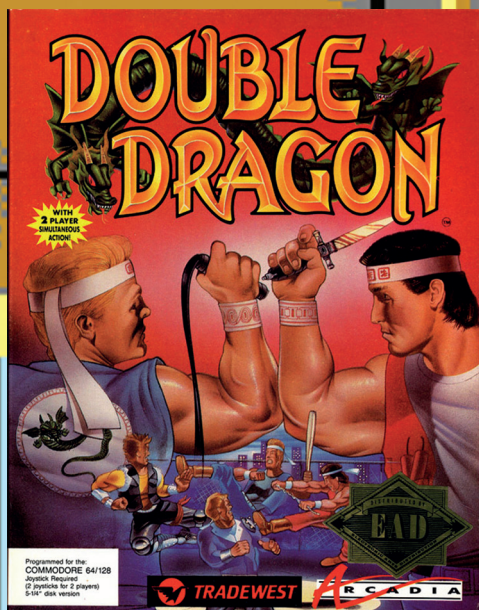
FUSION

Game : **Double Dragon**
Year : **1989**
System : **Commodore 64**

Article by Colin Bell

In 1987 Double Dragon kung-fu kicked its way onto the arcade scene and went on to be one the most successful beat-em ups of all time. The game followed the exploits of martial arts brothers Billy & Jimmy Lee and their fight against the evil Black Warriors gang who as well as terrorising the city have kidnapped Billy's girlfriend, Marion.

The game quickly went on to be a commercial success and it wasn't long before it was ported to almost every home computer and console on the market. Overall the ports were all rather good, staying faithful to the arcade original.

One port however stood out from all the rest and not in a good way. The port I'm taking about is the one from Binary Design for the Commodore 64. A game so bad that it actually contains an apology from the programmers in the accompanying manual!

But hold on a minute, this is the Commodore 64, could it really be that bad? Well, sadly, yes! While the game looked like a port of Double Dragon the graphics were notably poor and featured a glitch that made the game infamous. The glitch, according to the apology within the manual was due to the programmers running out of in-game memory and in a bid to come up with a memory saving solution they implemented a sprite stacking technique that created each character as two separate sprites instead of one large one.

This bit of programming meant each character on the screen was split in two with a noticeable see through gap around their waist. Sizes were all out of proportion as well with characters appearing smaller than their surroundings. It was difficult to distinguish between each of the iconic enemy characters as each one was merely a palette swapped copy of your own. Even the giant hulking mass that we all know and adore as Abobo had been reduced to the same size as the player, outrage! Gameplay is repetitive and boring with most of the moves from the arcade original missing. Gone are the fly kicks, hair grabs and throws leaving you with a basic punch and kick at your disposal. You can complete the game with ease by simply sticking your joystick on auto-fire mode and punching your way to the end.

Another fun aspect of the arcade original that is missing is the interactive scenery. The climbable ladders and fencing, the classic conveyor belt at the end of the second level, all sadly present yet unusable. Weapons too were reduced and while the bat and whip make an appearance, gone are the throwable knives, crates and oil drums. Even poor old Willy, the end of game big boss, appears to have his iconic machine gun, yet it never fires!

Sound wise the game consists of a couple of basic sound effects but the in-game level music, which is such a classic part of the game, is absent. Some credit however should be given to composer Charles Deenen of Maniacs of Noise fame who did manage to produce a faithful reproduction of the arcades title tune.

With its myriad of bugs and glitches, sluggish controls, lack of action and poor graphics, this particular port is considered one of the worst arcade conversions of all time.
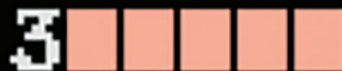
It's always great getting a new console from Nintendo — the Gamecube by the company's standards was not a huge commercial success but the games that appeared on the console are by far some of the best ever made including many new IP. Luigi's Mansion was one such title that was a slight change of format for Nintendo from its normal cartoony run, jump and collect formula and has garnered a cult status over the years since its release, spawning a 3DS incarnation as well as an official sequel and a further one in the works.

The star of the show in this game is not Mario, but his younger brother Luigi — he has been invited to a mansion after receiving a letter to say he had won a contest. He arrives to find out that his brother had also received the same letter and on setting foot in the mansion had not been seen since. The twist in the story at this point is that the mansion is haunted (cue haunting music and sound of bats flying by!).

Character driven games by Nintendo up to this point had heavily featured bouncy characters — that is to say the act of jumping (think Mario!) was an important, even integral part of the gameplay of many games before Luigi. In Luigi's Mansion, Luigi cannot jump, instead he has a flashlight and a ghost-sucking vacuum cleaner called the

Poltergust 3000 (see what they did there!) which he has to use to rid the mansion of all its ghostly inhabits and save Mario in the process.

The ghosts can be grouped into your run of the mill ghouls, portrait ghosts and Nintendo Boos. Some will try and grab you, others will chuck banana skins at you or try and punch you. When you are confronted with a normal ghost, you will need to shine your flashlight at the heart in their ghoulish

Above: This game is genuinely spooky and you never quite know what is around each corner or room!

chests — starting up your vacuum cleaner will create a suction that will start pulling the ghost into the vacuum bag. The ghost will inevitably try and get away — it then becomes a little bit like landing a rather

Below: Luigi in the midst of capturing a ghost using his Poltergust 3000 hooveresque machine.

large fish on to a boat where the vacuum cleaner becomes the rod and the ghost the fish. After pulling the 'rod' back and fighting the ghost to sap it of strength or hit-points in this case, the ghost is safely sucked up and the room made safe.

Portrait ghosts are a little trickier and may involve solving a puzzle or interacting with an object in a room that stuns them — the vacuum sucking can then begin! Pretty much all Nintendo games have things to collect — in Luigi's Mansion it is Boos — there are 50 scattered around the mansion and a blinking light on the display tells you when one is close.

Parts of the mansion are closed off until keys are unlocked that open doors to these areas. Even so, a play through of the game from start to finish will take the average gamer around 6hrs — at the time of its release there was some kick-back to the short number of hours of gameplay the main game story had to offer. Since then there have been many examples of games offering a similar duration of play.

Unbelievably it has been 18 years since the release of Luigi's Mansion on the Gamecube. I feel old. The game though still feels fresh, now played on my HDMI modded Gamecube. It looks brilliant and plays as well as I can remember it ever did — there is still an urge to make Luigi jump though!

Left: More ghost ridden images including the Gameboy Horror providing Luigi with a map, communication to Professor E. Gadd, radar, stats etc.
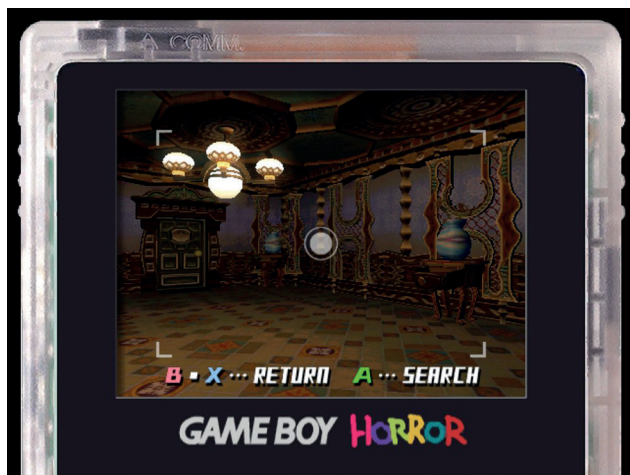
Regardless if you have the original Gameboy or the updated Gameboy Pocket, you don't need us to tell you just how incredible this console was and still is. A quick check shows that there were well over 1000 games released in it's lifetime, starting with the launch titles back in April 1989 all the way up to the last release in 2001. By anyone's standard, a 12-year release window is very impressive.

Even though we do point out the flaws below, for a 30-year-old system the Gameboy has held up remarkably well. By now we all know about the screen issues, but thanks to some clever hardware hackers there are multiple solutions to the problems and they are not that hard to fit. In a few hours you can have a Gameboy that has a perfectly backlit, bi-verted screen that is crystal clear. Sound can also be upgraded to make it much clearer and louder. The best part is that these mods are cheap, if you have the skills to fit them yourself you can have a fully tricked out Gameboy for £50-60 or you can buy a pre-modded one for not much more. Add on an Everdrive and you have something that is still one of the best portable consoles you can buy.

HEAVEN & HELL

There are three things wrong with the original Gameboy — the screen, the screen and the screen. Trust me, I'm not repeating myself as you will see.

So, the first problem is the one that you will know about— the fact that you just cannot see the damn thing unless the ambient light around you is just perfect. I'm sure most of you who owned one tried to use it on long journeys in the car or on a train. You spent more time trying to get the light shining on the screen at the right angle than you did playing. You could buy add-ons to help with this but all of them without exception made your Gameboy look utterly ridiculous.

The second screen issue is one that is more common these days, blank vertical lines displayed when the system is on. This is a symptom of the ribbon cable that joins the circuit board to the screen starting to fail. It can be repaired but the process isn't for the faint hearted. Break it and you end up with the last screen issue.

Unlike the newer LCD based Gameboys Color and Advance, the original Gameboy uses an LCD screen. One which you cannot buy a replacement for if you break it! You only option is to cannibalise another broken unit. Not got a spare? Then you are stuffed.

FUSION's recommendation
Buy a Gameboy with the screen mod and enjoy the huge range of games

GRANDSTAND FIREFOX F-7

Article by Craig Turner

Portable video gaming has long been a business driven feat of technology. With the arcade boom resulting in consumer demand to bring this new pick-up-and-play addiction home, it didn't take long for companies to take those words literally and hope to make more sales by putting it right there in everyone's pocket. The microchip age had brought with it much creativity and entertainment innovation that moved at a blistering pace, yet it still wasn't quite fast enough..

Bringing video gaming home was a task in itself. ICs were getting smaller and rapidly decreasing costs due to the mass production of computer components for business use meant it was less risk or cost, but took some bold executive decisions and enlisting the aid of bright minds to borrow on that industry to create gaming consoles. It was after all a perceived 'toy' to the masses largely because of the generation embracing this new age the most; the kids and youngsters marvelled at growing up in this electronic revolution. Lots of spare time and eventual dependence to get that gaming fix anywhere

was inevitable and the emerging gaming industry knew it. Question was though, how exactly could they do it? CPUs, memory and ROM chip storage could still only be shrunk down so far and putting all the necessary components together for video game experience meant pairing a custom display, custom hardware and maximising portable power efficiency. This was going to take serious investment for bespoke components and with that budget inevitably comes risk. This wasn't going to wash with those writing the cheques and yet there was good reason to try and corner this aspect of

the market, so how could it be done cheap?

The solution lay in an unlikely existing technology that had been around since way before the arcade. Liquid crystal displays used in calculators and digital clocks offered visual clarity and reliability, were getting cheap, had low power demands and were getting smaller for wristwatch and pocket calculators. The spark was seen by many companies almost overnight to create handheld games using more artistic versions of this tech,

Below: Detailed, frantic gameplay on such a small screen!

which was epitomised with systems like Nintendo's own Game and Watch. So what then about a closer arcade experience with as much visual appeal that could see success as a standalone unit worldwide?

company Epoch ran with the idea and thanks to what would turn out to be a great business move, licenced out their own handheld LCD creations to the western market with companies like Grandstand. They saw great success in the U.K. with their initial line of Pong consoles and so, taking

proper arcade game licences they created their own line of handheld LCD games. The real smart move though was taking things to the next level and, borrowing from digital alarm clock tech, began to use vacuum fluorescent displays to make much more colourful and fully backlit games. The power demands inevitably meant that these games couldn't really go handheld, but this was the perfect excuse to give these games a grander appearance more akin to the arcade experience... and thus arrived their table top VFD arcade games.

Leaning on the success of 1981s

TIE Fighter like space duel to trench runs and moonbase attacks, all of which mix up the challenge and are immersed brilliantly in the separate stage music and excellent sounds. Everything Astro Wars did, Firefox doubles in quality and cements it as possibly the finest example of these games to arise from the era.

Sadly it's a genre that didn't last and although new iterations like the Tomytronic 3D games tried to enhance the experience, none really compares to the action in Firefox and the concept died when a certain pocket cartridge based gaming system arrived on the eve of the decade and the tide turned forever against these systems that were never true portables and no match for the real home consoles that had achieved dominance with real raster displays.

Astro Wars unit (a licenced UK version of the 'Super Galaxians'), Grandstand's Firefox F-7 kicked the space shooter genre up a notch in 1983. A bigger, more detailed and colourful 5-column playfield with additional energy and scoring columns brings the display into a more familiar arcade-esque 4:3 aspect, with a refractive lens screen magnifying it all and amplifying the backlit flaring of the VFD effects. A good sized 8-way joystick was an odd choice with just 2-way movement, but the freedom of movement is welcome during frantic gameplay as the up/down movements accelerate or decelerate your . A solid large fire button, level select, start and even independent sound effects and music speakers adorn the rest of the panel in a sensible layout, framed by an awesome silver-grey shell in that 80s vision of futuristic' sculpted angular profile that pulls together into one impressive unit. Where it shines though is the gameplay, which is 6 very visually different stages of space battle inspired largely by Star Wars, from a

DEAD SPACE

10 YEARS ON

Article by Graeme Mason

They say every system has a killer app; whether it's Goldeneye on the Nintendo 64 or Resident Evil on the Sony PlayStation, there's always one game that seems to define a console's early life, and make you personally want to own it more than any other. It can differ from person to person, of course, and for me and the Xbox 360, it was most definitely Dead Space.

It's easy to see the pitch that Visceral Games must have thrown at Electronic Arts for Dead Space: 'It's Resident Evil – in space!' is a pretty succinct — and accurate — way of summing up the 2008 game that made me buy an Xbox 360 console. As a huge fan of Capcom's zombie series, I could clearly see this even in early

previews, and rushed out to buy the game upon release. And I was not disappointed: brilliant graphics, nerve-shredding gameplay and a dark, conflicted hero, mixed in with a mysterious alien artefact and a weird, bonkers cult. This was one excellent recipe that made for a thoroughly enjoyable and meaty meal.

Investigating the cavernous wreck of the USG Ishimura, infested with the horrific transformations of its erstwhile crew, was a delight from start to finish; so much so, I went straight back to the start and completed it again in a second, achievement-hunting playthrough. Spin forward ten years, and we've seen an excellent and a so-so sequel as the series now apparently lies dormant. So with the original available on Xbox One backwards compatibility, it feels like an appropriate time to go back and explore the doomed Ishimura once more.

….and it's clunky. But to be fair, Isaac was always a difficult beast to move around, even back in 2008. Enemies descend on the silent protagonist left, right and centre, and he's still unable to dodge even the most basic of attacks save for a terminal trudge backwards, most likely straight into another slobbering monstrosity. But this complaint aside, I found Dead Space to be just as an effective experience as it was ten years ago. The atmosphere — so key in a game of this type — remains spot on, assisted by some of the best sound design ever heard in a videogame.
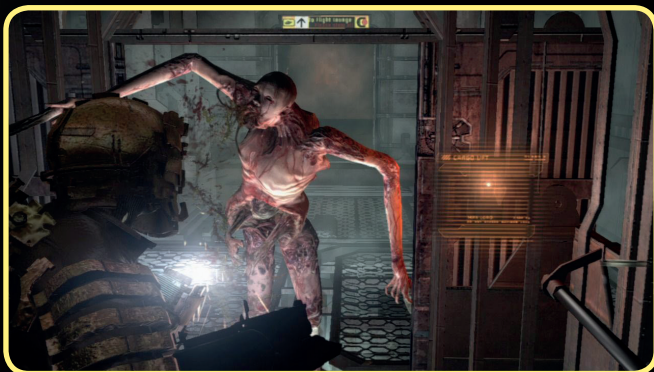
The graphics, admittedly given an Xbox One sheen on this playthrough, are also as futuristically cool as ever, and I'm still entranced by the on-screen 'holographic' floating menus. It's not long before I'm knee deep in Necromorphs, their limbs surgically severed thanks to the frankly tremendous plasma cutter,

Above: A taste of the terrifying, claustrophobic, monstor ridden game!

and zero-G jumping from platform to platform with frantic glee.

That asteroid shooting mini-game is still terrible though.

ALAN HAMMERTON CHANNELS HIS INNER
DR. DOLITTLE AND TALKS TO THE ANIMALS

Let's start with a cliché – how many times have you heard someone say that 'the journey matters more than the destination?' Fe is a game very much in that mould.

Starting in the middle of a dense but beautifully ethereal forest, you play as the titular Fe, a tiny fox-like creature who can howl like a wolf but with feather like fur. It doesn't take long before you are scampering and exploring your new home. Instinctively you wait a few moments for the inevitable tutorial to start, but it never comes. This game is not going to hold your hand, it's down to you to figure out. Well... everything really.

It also doesn't take you long to learn how to climb trees and use your body to glide from place to place. Just like a real forest, it is teaming with life, although not as we would know it. Whilst seemingly familiar creatures dart about the floor and swoop through the sky, upon closer inspection it's possible to find snakes with antlers, flying stingrays and boars with scorpion tails.

The flora and fauna are not just there for decoration or ambiance, they are a key part of learning new skills to progressing your journey as well as piece together the story. Fe can 'sing' to other creatures to first create a bond and then to learn their language. Cleverly, your singing must match the tone of the creature you are trying to bond with. Pulling the trigger button changes the pitch of your voice; hold it just right and both voices turn into a harmonious sound. Fe's new friend will then temporarily help you out, perhaps by leading the way to a new area or opening a path that was blocked. Help the creature out enough times and it will teach you to sing in its language and add their skills to your own. Help the deer-like creature

out allows Fe to use flowers to push him higher into the air and the bird language can make plants drop berries.

As you explore, one of the first drawbacks of the game becomes apparent. The world is jaw-droppingly beautiful but one mystical glowing plant can look very much like another, ledges can be seen but not reached for no apparent reason so it's not uncommon, certainly at the start, to find yourself backtracking a few times looking for the path or clue that has been missed. Sometimes you can lose sight of distant landmarks as they fade out of view rather too quickly.

Making new friends is very appealing but it also turns out to be essential in a few places as you can use your flying friends to transport you to different parts of the map, but it's not always obvious where they will take you. I spent quite some time on one area going around in a circle as I could not see where I had to go. That said, creatures can act as a 'guide' and lead you on a journey to new areas over paths you just would not find yourself. You don't have time to stop and take in the spectacular environments when being guided, you have to keep up with the guide; it sometimes feels you are being rushed through an area that you just want to stop and explore.

That said though, there are some incredible set pieces that are truly epic. I won't spoil them for you but once you learn the deer creature language you can start one of the standout moments of the whole game.

You will notice I am not talking about the story at all, this is deliberate as I don't want to spoil it for you. It's very clear when then game kicks over from exploration to starting to weave its story. The mechanisms used to tell the story are a little cliched in places (plot flashbacks I'm looking at you). By the time you reach the final act, the overall plot does seem a little muddy; trying to be a little too clever

and not quite pulling it off, leaving the player somewhat confused.

So, finally at the end the 'story' is over but much like the cliché we started with we can still enjoy the journey. With many hidden petroglyph to be found throughout the world you can sit back and enjoy what Fe does really well — exploration.
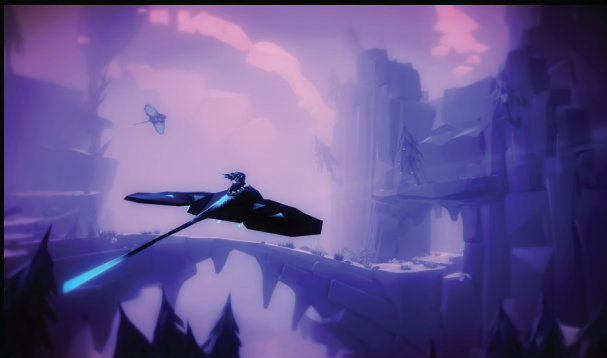
FUSION REACTION 9

Retro Man Cave

NEIL THOMAS AKA MR RETRO MAN CAVE LOOKS AT THE COMBINED BEASTS THAT ARE THE MEGA PC AND THE TERADRIVE

As poorly thought out tech concepts go the idea of combining the gaming power of a Sega Mega Drive, and the utilitarian purpose of an IBM PC, really isn't that crazy. In fact some might call it a sensible compromise.

Timing however, is everything. The Sega Mega Drive blast processed our faces into fixed grins on launch in 1988 in Japan,'89 in North America and our British shores in '90. It was at the forefront of gaming technology in the home and fought shoulder to shoulder with Nintendo's SNES, offering the closest thing to an arcade experience in the home.

What it didn't offer however was the joyous experience of creating a lookup table in a spreadsheet. You know what I'm talking about,

pure number based joy. To satisfy those tendencies there was no substitute for a personal computer and it was becoming increasingly apparent that the IBM-PC compatibles were winning the race for desk space. What was less obvious however was if the beige box offered a good pound for pound gaming experience, especially when taking into consideration the complications of navigating a mire of expansion cards and startup configurations. It would eventually shine through but all wasn't quite so clear in 1990.

Enter then two hybrid systems designed to offer the best of both worlds with

slightly different approaches. In the red Amstrad corner stands the Mega PC and in the Sega blue corner it's the Sega Teradrive, both offering Mega Drive and IBM-PC compatibility in one unit.

First came the Teradrive which was developed by Sega and manufactured by IBM. It was released only in Japan in 1991 and boy did it look sleek. Shunning a boxy beige tower in favour of a black desktop chassis with rounded corners and an eye catching orange power button it really draws the eye. The official Sega logo adjacent to the front-loading cartridge slot sits proudly and means business. Or is that gaming. Is this to gaming what 'smart casual' is to office attire? I think it might be.

Three models differed only in the RAM size, floppy drive count and hard drive size with only the top of the range ¥248,000 (£1850) model ping with a 30MB HDD. This all sounds very attractive, in the same way Lillie was that time

Below: The much sought after Amstrad Mega PC.

she thought it was dress down Friday on a Thursday and wore her ripped jeans to the office. However, a serious fashion faux pas had occurred which couldn't be ignored.

At the heart of this razor sharp 1991 design was 1982 technology, an Intel 286 CPU clocked at 10MHz. The 486 CPU was released in 1989, a chip two generations newer and fast becoming the standard in PC's. While the Mega Drive side of this digital chimera was blast processing, the IBM-PC was, well it was barely processing at all. You'd have been better off buying a standalone Mega Drive, a 386 or 486 PC and pocketing £500 difference. It's such a shame to find then, deep within the architecture of the machine, a truly integrated hybrid which potentially could have launched a thousand careers in the gaming industry, but more on that shortly. The machine predictably flopped.

Enter, Alan Sugar and Amstrad. Two years later in 1993 a familiar device appears on the market, this time it's in the UK and Australia, it's the Amstrad Mega PC. It certainly lacks the style of the Teradrive but carries a certain charm of its own and I must confess to taking a shine to it despite its outrageously cheap build quality.

The Mega PC failed to capture the interest of consumers in exactly the same way as the Teradrive did in Japan. This time the mistake was an Intel 386 CPU was chosen at a time when 486's with maths co-processors were becoming the norm and more advanced 3D gaming

was starting to take hold as a result. It was penny pinching on a system with a premium price tag.

There was a key difference between these two machines however. Despite being the underpowered of the two devices it was the earlier Teradrive that offered something truly unique.

You see, while the Amstrad Mega PC accommodated all Mega Drive functions on an expansion card, separated from the IBM-PC side of the system, the Teradrive was a fully integrated system. It

was possible to use it as a development machine, coding on the PC to run software on the Mega Drive.

Software on the Teradrive could call upon both the PC and Mega Drive hardware at the same time. No doubt we'd have seen some wonderfully inventive uses of the technology if it had been a success in retail. 'Puzzle Construction' is the only title I know of that takes advantage of this feature, a falling block puzzle game which runs on the Mega Drive but has a PC side

editing suite.

Who knows what else we could have seen, from a Sonic level editor to a development environment which could compile for the Mega Drive's 68000 CPU and run your code natively. The possibilities are so tantalising. Quite simply, I want them!

The mistakes of the hybrid games console PC would be repeated a few more times, notably with the 3DO Blaster expansion card, but curiously, nearly three decades later, the modern games consoles are converging. The architecture

of the next generation looks more PC like than ever albeit with added dressing and marketing to disguise the fact.

Who knows, perhaps the smart casual PC is about to have its day.

https://youtube.com/retromancave

@theRetroManCave

Article by Gordon King

■ **When I was asked by my good friend** Scott, the author of Captain MaCaw (the ultimate homage to Dizzy), to compose some music for the game — I immediately said 'Yes!' Then it dawned upon me; I've only ever dabbled in making tunes for myself. This was a different ball game and, ultimately, I would be creating music that would be scrutinised.

If a game was to replicate the 8-bit era, I had to capture that spirit within the music too. I had never worked to that kind of degree before and the task started to feel daunting. What had I done? Why did I agree to such a lofty aspiration? But, never one to shy away from a challenge or trekking into uncharted territory, I decided to give it my full focus.

Research was key to honing my ear to the melodies that were so indicative of the 128K AY and SID of the C64. I listened to hours upon hours of these great tunes. They were my morning and evening commute music for weeks, and my mood was actually lifted. Many of these tunes were upbeat and optimistic.

Take the tunes from the iconic Dizzy series as an example; each and every one of them invoke a feeling of adventure, risk and reward. They subliminally told the player that no matter how much the odds were stacked against them, there was a way forward. This, I took as a metaphor for my challenge to make the right music.

After much looking, I settled upon a few VSTs for my DAW software (synths for my music creating software). They were perfect, they gave me something that was a perfect balance of new, but pseudo retro. I was able to emulate both Spectrum and Commodore warbles to a degree of satisfaction.

Below: Very much a ZX Spectrum looking game but loads instantly on a PC!

The composing followed naturally from this. I had played the alpha of the game in 'silent' mode for so long, that I had a feel for the mood I wanted to create from the music. The first track that I dubbed 'Hopetimism' began with the first melody which is heard on the start of the track. I started with the Spectrum in mind and that is very clear with that introduction. But I didn't want to exclusively stay with the AYesque sound. I dabbled with some SID style bass and melody to go with that. The result really pleased me — I had created the bastard child of SID and AY. From there, I just let my gut instinct choose the notes. It was clear to me that my years of being a fan on the 8-bit chip tune awoke a latent ability in me to naturally create something of this style.
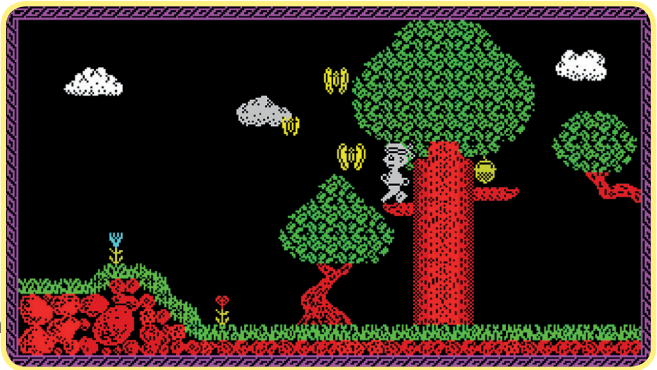
The next tune that followed was called Dry Land Revisited. I wanted to go all out Dizzy with this one, and I even surprised myself. It cheers me right up every time I hear it and it takes me back to the good ol' era of gaming.

The rest of the tunes followed suit rather easily and I truly felt accomplished that I pushed myself out of my comfort zone to achieve something.

Never quit.

You can listen to the tunes at https://soundcloud.com/gordon-king

Article by Chris McAuley

Let's talk about...
Peter Molyneux

I had it! Finally after reading all the rave reviews in PC Zone and PC Gamer, I had strode into the shop with my collected dinner money and exited with one of the most anticipated games on my wish list. Dungeon Keeper! My head was full of the mazes I would build, the creatures I would entice and the sheer hell I would unleash on adventurers and heroes. You see, for years I was a frustrated gamer. I didn't want to be the good looking, altruistic, do-gooding hero. I wanted to be the twisted evil Skeletor, smiting my enemies with all manner of weapons and taking over the world while I did so.

Peter Molyneux understood that. He is a game designer who towers over the industry and is driven, not by the almighty dollar (or pound in Peter's native homeland) but by the vision of building better games. He agonises over unique gameplay styles, choices and the desire to deliver an honest to God experience for the player. In an era which is packed with bland game titles and endless sequels which promise exactly the same experience for yet more money. Peter Molyneux's vision is one to be celebrated and protected.

There's a distinct theme in many of his early games. The genre known as the 'God Sim'.

Below: More dungeon building, in Dungeon Keeper 2.

This is a very distinct genre from most strategy titles which encourage the user to control large armies and decimate foes. This is a genre which places you in control of the world's terrain and not always in direct control of the world's inhabitants. Sure you can encourage them, anticipate their needs and help shape their destinies.

However there was no real guarantee of the outcome of your actions. Populous was one such game, designed from Lego blocks, Molyneux developed the now iconic isometric landscape. He experimented with game strategy and through a fairly intense development cycle of trial and error produced

the successful end game mechanics.

Syndicate was another favourite of mine. Exploding onto our screens, we had, at last, a tangible vision of 'tech noir' — the dark application of technology. Something game designers had been attempting since they had seen The Terminator. With

Syndicate, the future was controlled, not by politics but by corporations. You were tasked with using cybernetic killing machines to achieve tasks for one such corporation. Helping make them top dog as they destroyed their rivals. With gameplay mechanics such as

persuading citizens and using them as human shields. There was such

a dark, delightful imagination bleeding through these

games. But what of now? There has been such a backlash against Molyneux in recent years that I am surprised that this giant of the industry hasn't just packed up and left. We live in an era where many journalists earn a living by attempting to destroy careers. Cynically attempting to destroy heroes of the industry when they don't attempt to churn out another
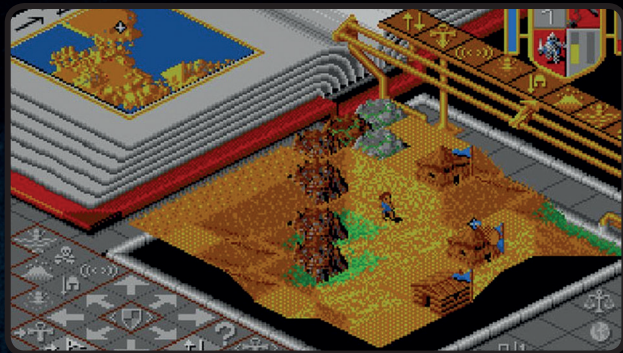
Call of Duty clone or play it safe. Molyneux's concept's of game development break the mould somewhat. He designs by trial, by playing through his ideas, gaining the feedback of his team and recently with Godus the opinions of the public. He wants that perfect experience for the consumer. He's not making revenue, he's making memories, he's attempting to make art. Games

journalists are crucifying this man for that principal.

The fact is I am excited for what will come next from Peter and his game studio 22cans. I recently played Godus and enjoyed it. It brought some new, inventive ideas to the Populous genre. Peter and his team listened to critics when they raised concerns about the lack of combat focus in the original title. They then released Godus Wars , which added more of a combat heavy flavour for those who enjoyed that style of strategy game. He's home grown talent, he's British and he's one of gaming's ultimate success

Above: Populous — the game that put Bullfrog and Peter on the map.

stories. He's proof that with some luck and a lot of hard work we game designers, programmers and lovers of the industry can also make our mark. I believe that concept seems to upset some of the more harsher critics and that's also a reason his recent achievements are torn down. I enjoyed the Fable series, I enjoyed Black and White — I enjoy the work that Peter

inspires from his team.

Hyperbole or enthusiasm? There's no one like Molyneux to inspire excitement about the game titles he is currently working on. High concept ideas flow from his mouth, he speaks the language which gets gamers hearts beating and mouth salivating. He dreams big and presents those visions to us in a manner which brings tremendous expectation.

Fable was one of the most enjoyable narrative driven games I have ever played. I loved the interaction with the environment and with the colourful NPC's. There's a tremendous amount of discussion about this 'famous acorn' — but very little discussion about how groundbreaking the environments and concept was.

This article was written out of a frustration I have had for the last ten years of how we tear down one of the most inventive and productive game designers in the UK.

I celebrate the best games that we have ever experienced, from Magic Carpet to Fable. Peter Molyneux also encourages new talent, inviting young developers into his team, investing in the industry in a positive manner. So here's to you Peter, thanks for still sticking around and for all the memories you helped us make.
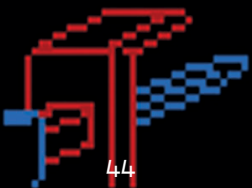
FUSION

Game : Star Wars
Year : 1987
System : Atari ST

The days of the ZX Spectrum being a cutting edge computer were numbered in the run up to the Christmas of 1987 — late that year I sold all things Sinclair to purchase a brand new Atari ST computer. I was convinced by all my research that this computer was the platform on which to play 16-bit games plus it was much cheaper than my preferred choice of the Amiga.

For an 18 year old, ST games were expensive so I therefore had to wait until Christmas day to get my first game for the computer — this was the official release of the Star Wars game by Domark (a massive leap up from playing GEM in the weeks leading up to the big day).

I had played the Star Wars game in the arcades — both the stand up and cockpit variety. It was an amazing experience to take the yoke of an X-Wing and take on the Empire and re-enact the famous trench scene — even to this very day it is still exhilarating to play on one of these arcade cabinets.

The ST version of the Star Wars was remarkably accurate even without the yoke — and being the only game in my collection for a number of weeks, it enjoyed hours and hours of play. To this day, I fondly remember that Christmas due to Domark's Star Wars game and the Atari ST.

And then six months later, I traded the ST and games I had for an Amiga 500!!

Article by Ryan Coleman

It's 1983 and you're having to stay at your Grandmother's house in the middle of nowhere for the weekend. Nintendo's Game Boy is six years away from release, so unless you're wanting to haul your Commodore 64 to Grandma's house, gaming is going to be off the cards this weekend. That is unless you reside in America, then Coleco has you covered!

Coleco was originally founded in 1936 as the Connecticut Leather company, and had entered the toy industry in the '50s with a line of leather-craft kits before moving on to vacuum forming plastic toys. By 1961 they had sold off the leather production side of the company completely and renamed themselves Coleco Industries, committing fully to toy production. It wasn't until 1976 that Coleco entered the video game business with their Telstar system, a clone of Atari's highly successful Pong. By the late '70s, the arcade boom was in full swing with

a generation of kids eagerly cramming their allowance into arcade machines in an attempt to try and top their friends high scores. Naturally, companies saw profitability and wanted to try and capture the excitement and feel of the arcades in various home products. Milton Bradley released board games based on characters like Pac-Man and Donkey Kong, and Coleco secured the licences to publish ports of various arcade games for the Atari 2600, as well as for its own console, the ColecoVision. But for kids who wanted to play their games on-the-go, Coleco also had a product for them — the Coleco mini arcade! A series of tabletop versions of popular arcade titles — Pac-Man, Galaxian, Donkey Kong, Frogger, Ms. Pac-Man, Donkey Kong Junior, and Zaxxon.

But how have these mini arcades held up, and are they still worth a play nearly forty years later? To answer this, I dusted off a Donkey Kong machine to find out! From the appearance

Left: An attractive bartop type casing for the game.

two levels instead of the four found in the arcade version, and although you can pick up a hammer for points, you can't use it to smash oncoming barrels.

Despite the technical limitations, the Donkey Kong mini arcade is an indisputably impressive toy, with gameplay that is fast, fun and addictive. At times, I did find that the joystick would 'stick' a little, resulting in occasions where Mario would run into barrels, or throw himself off ledges. But for a 38 year old gadget, one has to expect a few little quirks like that. And if you're struggling to beat the difficult second level with just three lives, turning the machine on whilst holding 'jump' and 'up' on the joystick will give you an extra six lives (but that would be cheating…).

The Coleco mini arcade wasn't cheap back in 1981, retailing at $60, and due to the nostalgia associated with these toys, time hasn't seen them really devalue at all. Any Coleco mini arcade is going to set you back a few quid these days, and it's definitely worth some consideration purchasing if it's truly worth the cost you will pay, especially when a more accurate arcade experience can

be found far more easily and far more cheaply elsewhere. But if you're a fan of old toys and video games, you could do a lot worse than the Coleco mini arcade line. They're colourful, fun and really do look cool just as a display piece sat on the shelf.

On a final note, if you're a fan of the Gremlins movie, you might have spotted the Donkey Kong mini arcade being played by the villainous Mogwai Stripe. So if ever you have a houseful of creatures wanting to tuck into a snack after midnight which will inevitably result in carnage, it might be worth trying to distract them with one of these if you own one!

alone, it's evident that Coleco really tried their best to replicate the look and feel of the original Donkey Kong machine. The plastic shell is the same sky blue as the original cabinet, and the same artwork featuring Donkey Kong, Pauline and Mario (or Jumpman as he was known back then!) adorns the sides of the machine and frames the screen.

The game itself is very much a bare-bones Donkey Kong experience, but it still works undeniably well. The level and characters are actually different LED's illuminating underneath the screen, which doesn't do a bad job of mimicking the pixelated sprites found in a real DK machine. This does mean that the gameplay is somewhat limited though, and doesn't feel anywhere near as 'smooth' as the original. There are only
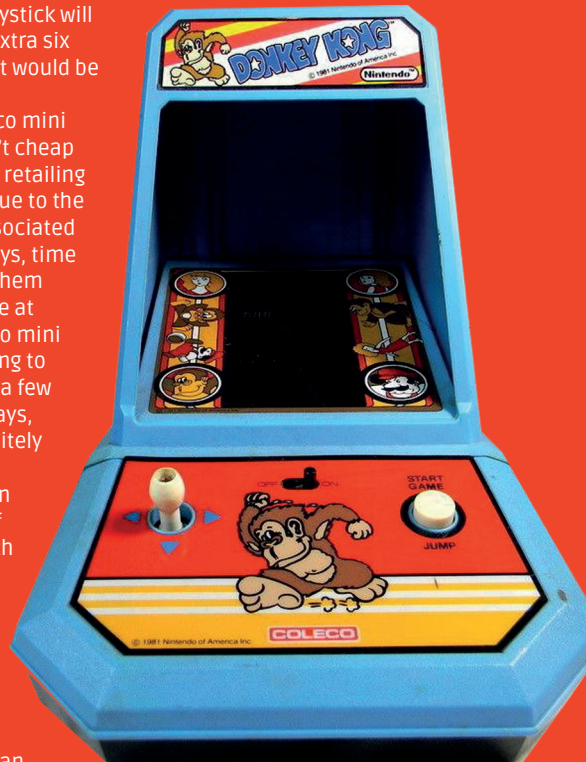
TOPFIVE>>

The Top 5 games to play on the Amstrad GX4000 by Colin Bell

In September 1990, the release of the GX4000 console saw Amstrad take a bold, if not somewhat late, leap into the console market. It looked sleek, stylish and came with controllers similar to that of the Nintendo NES and was bundled with a pretty decent driving game called Burning Rubber. But, despite claims from the systems designer that the GX4000 was 'at least as good' as the Super Nintendo, which it wasn't, the console failed to impress due to the outdated 8-bit technology and lack of support from software houses who were all now moving onto 16-bit technology.
Only 27 games were ever released, most of which were just straight ports from cassette to cartridge. However! It wasn't all bad, the GX4000 had a few gems that showcased what the consoles extra hardware could do. Join us now as we take look back at the consoles Top 5 must play games.

01 // Pang
Released 1990 — by Ocean Software

They say the greatest and most addictive games are often the most simplistic and Pang is no exception. A mixture of single screen shoot em-up, platformer and puzzle game all rolled into one, Pang has it all and will keep you coming back for more. The Story? Large killer balloons are threatening several of earth's major landmarks and it's up to you to take on the role of the Buster Brothers and shoot the balloons, that burst into smaller balloons and so on until the screen is clear and you can move on to the next level. Yes, you heard right, Killer Balloons!

Ocean really did a fine job with this title bringing together a combination of spot on unrelenting gameplay, great sounding music and gorgeous graphics with colourful backdrops that made full use of the GX4000's extensive palette. Plug in a second control pad and you could play with a friend in what is a well-executed and enjoyable 2-player experience. Ultimately what you got is one of the finest, if not best, arcade conversions ever to be produced on an 8-bit system.
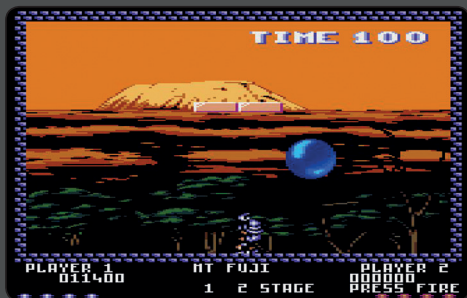
The best game bar none for the GX4000 that has stood the test of time and is an absolute must own for this console, although be prepared to pay in excess of £200+ for a boxed copy in good condition!

02 // Switchblade
Released 1991 – by Gremlin Graphics

Gremlin Graphics only release for the GX4000 was an enhanced version of their already brilliant platform game Switchblade. You take on the role of Hiro, last of the Bladeknights who is on a mission to rid the planet Thraxx of its evil dictator, Havok. How does he plan on doing this? By assembling the sixteen missing parts of the legendary Fireblade and using it to strike Havok down once and for all.

While the game often received criticism for its lack of colour and drab backdrops it more than made up for this with its playability. A plat-former game through and through, the overall landscape was big with lots of exploring required. Making your own map was a good idea as there was more than one route that could be taken and exploring was rewarded with bonuses and hidden screens that would lead to better power-ups and weapons. The enemies were relentless and you quite literally had to punch, kick, hack and shoot every step of the way.

03 // Robocop 2
Released 1990 — by Ocean Software

From the masters of the movie video game tie in, Ocean, comes another rare GX4000 exclusive, Robocop 2. Graphically and musically stunning, making full use of the console's colour palette and with some the best hardware scrolling ever seen on an Amstrad, Robocop 2 set the standard that many failed to achieve.

In true Ocean style the game comprised of three action packed platform levels, two puzzle levels and two shooting gallery levels. The platform levels look stunning and run as smooth as you like with a mixture of gun-toting bad guys, spikes, rolling barrels and lifts to contend with. In the puzzle levels Robo's got his directives all mixed up and it's up to you re-route his circuit boards and collect microchips to help restore him back to fully operational status.

Each of the puzzle levels are well thought out and are once again well presented both graphically and musically.

04 // Tennis Cup 2
Released 1990 — by Loriciel

One of the finest Tennis sims ever to grace an 8-bit system, Tennis Cup 2 by French software house Loriciel has some of the finest graphics and sound to feature on the GX4000 console. Thankfully not just another direct port from cassette the updated cartridge version featured an updated intro, more in game options, two new tournament modes and a much improved colour palette that now showcased a whopping 21 colours compared to that of the measly 4 used in the original.

Selecting a one or two player game opens up the option of being able to play either a singles or doubles match which in turn leads to further options that allow you to alter the match lengths, the in-game speed, the screen view and even the attributes of your own player. A training mode is also available should you wish to hone up on your swing, serve or shot skills. The last two options, Tournament and Davis Cup, allow you to pit your skills against the world's finest.
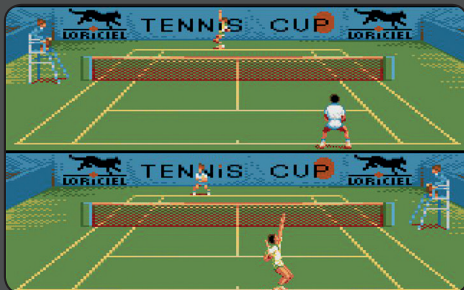
05 // Burning Rubber
Released 1990 — by Ocean Software

Slipping narrowly in from behind into our final top five spot we have the official flag launch title for the GX4000 console, Burning Rubber. Ocean were set the task of creating this launch title and to be fair they have done rather well. The title screen featured some impressive animation along with excellent music and as soon as the game starts you are immediately drawn to the fantastic use of colour and detailed Mode 0 graphics.

From here on this is where the action starts, and somewhat ends. Racing doesn't feel the fastest, laps are long, the controls are slightly sluggish and the in game sound effects basic. On the plus side however, get the qualifying lap out the way and the actual main race is great fun with opponents a plenty to deal with who'll even go out their way to try and block you. The collision detection is spot on too and when there is a crash at high speed we are treated to a lovely animated sequence of the car flipping through the air.

Article by Chris McAuley

STAR WARS

Games

Star Wars all but defines the word 'Epic'. Featuring a vast universe, a massive and immersive mythology and an almost endless number of stories to tell. So far the movies have been limited to the Skywalker saga but the Star Wars video games have enjoyed far more freedom, exploring the far reaches of its far-far-away galaxies through dozens of role playing games, first-person shooters, third-person adventures and an almost unmanageable number of Lego themed releases.

Some games were great, others less so and a few are filled with controversy — most notably, the latest release from EA : Star Wars: Battlefront II which landed its developer in a firestorm of controversy over its micro-transactions.

With the next instalment of the cinematic franchise ready to hit the silver screens again in December and gamers are once again eager for some interactive light sabre duels. Here are some of the best Star Wars games of all time which should satisfy any would be Jedi.

Sar Wars — Arcade
1983

Atari's 1983 Star Wars arcade game is quite possibly one of the greatest licensed arcade games ever produced. With its pin sharp bright 3D vector graphics, movie sampled speech and music, Star Wars arcade was ahead of its time.

The game was released in two cabinet forms, the upright and the sit down, and while you can settle for playing the upright cabinet and be quite happy, we all know that the awesome sit down cabinet is where it's really at. Slipping on down into this darkened cabinet and grabbing hold of the authentic feeling flight yoke controller made you truly feel like you were actually piloting Luke's X-wing Fighter.

Atari did an outstanding job of truly capturing the essence of the Star Wars movie and transferring it to video game form and is still ranked highly in terms of all time favourite Star Wars games today. An arcade experience not to be missed! May the 1983 Star Wars arcade be with us. Always.

Rogue Squadron 2 — Gamecube
2001

'Red 5 Standing By!' Star Wars Rogue Squadron 2 — Rogue Leader is action packed from the word go. A well thought out storyline which ties in nicely with the canon of the original movies combined with outstanding gameplay makes for a truly exciting, entertaining and overall stunning Star Wars experience.

Graphics are highly detailed with every and scenario looking as if it came straight out the movies. All your favourite s are available to unlock, including the legendary Millennium Falcon as are all the iconic battles, Yavin, Hoth and Endor.

Put simply, Star Wars Rogue Squadron 2 — Rogue Leader is one of the finest space combat simulators ever made. A true next generation experience at the time and a fantastic launch title for the console.

Knights of the Old Republic — PC XBOX, MAC
1999

Often considered one of the greatest of all Star Wars games, this was a much needed dose of gravitas at a time where the series standard was the hated character Jar Jar Binks. An RPG set 4,000 years before the prequels, the game encouraged players to search the vastness of the universe. Gamers

faced moral conflicts on their path to Jedi master or Sith Lord. With a story to rival the movies, fully realised characters, as well as throwbacks to the original flicks, there was no better experience for Star Wars fans.

The Force Unleashed — Various
2008

Plenty of games get the feeling of the Star Wars universe right, but you have to be a fairly heavy fan to truly get into most. The Force Unleashed was a game for the wider public, taking the viciousness of Jedi Knight, the epic scale of Battlefront and the involving tale of
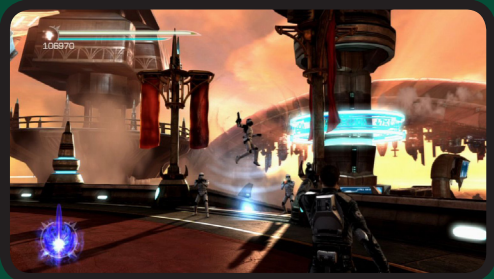
Knights of the Old Republic, for a third-person action adventure any casual fan could enjoy.

As Darth Vader's rogue apprentice, your Ronin-like journey was one of devastating missions and shocking twists, making this more movie like than many on this list.

Super Star Wars Trilogy — SNES
1992 - 1994

These three games are burned into my memory when it comes to games based on the Star Wars films. I know I can be accused of cheating as this is three games not one. Their connected original trilogy storylines, coupled with indistinguishable gameplay makes them one big release to me. These are rock solid side scrollers that allow you to play as Luke, Leia, Han and others from the franchise through 50-plus action heavy levels set across Tatooine, Hoth and other Star Wars landmarks.

This title has become notorious for its difficulty scale, some levels were incredibly easy whereas others virtually impossible. There were also stages which utilises the Super Nintendo's mode 7 display, allowing players to pilot landspeeders across the desert or speeders across Hoth in pseudo 3D.

Dark Forces — PC
1995

Another title which was considered revolutionary, Dark Forces took advantage of the mid-90s, Doom-led First Person Shooter trend. This gave gamers an in-your face rebel adventure that was gleefully heavy on Stormtrooper blasting.

Here was the Star Wars we always wanted to see: down dark Star Destroyer corridors, across abandoned planets and facing off against alien beasts.

Featuring stealth dynamics, alongside a range of weapons made it stand out from the glut of FPS games which had flooded the market.

X-Wing Alliance — PC
1999

The X-Wing/TIE Fighter space-sim games saw LucasArts at the peak of their efforts and it all culminated in X-Wing Alliance, the last game in the series. Boasting a story as strong as its predecessors, dogfights as brutal as ever and the chance to finally fly the coveted Millennium Falcon.
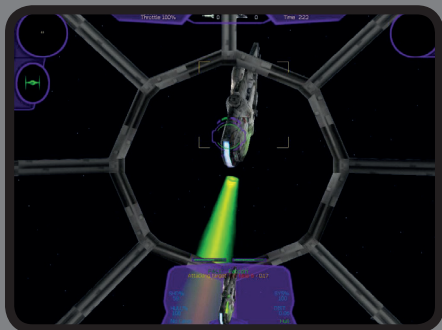
This title's blend of piloting and shooting offered variety that appealed to the masses. The early inclusion of voice work led to the character-driven battles we now see in most Star Wars games.

Bounty Hunter — Gamecube, PS2-4
2002

You won't find Bounty Hunter in most of the best-of lists and I include this here because of its originality. This title was part of the mid 2000s third-person trend, players took control of Jango Fett (father of Boba) as he

blasts his way through different action-heavy missions using a ridiculous number of weapons: from flame throwers and sniper rifles to thermal grenades.

It was a fairly simplistic game but the novelty of taking out targets while blasting around on your jetpack made it the best kind of brainless fun.

FUSION

Game   : Logitech G29/G920
Year   : 2015
System   : Xbox, PS4 & PC

Add-on peripherals have always had a bit of a contentious history. I'm sure you can all count how many times a new 'incredible' piece of hardware was released to expand your enjoyment only to find 6 months down the line it's kicking about in the bargain bin because no developer supported it. The exception to this rule would have to be the gaming wheel which leads us nicely onto one of FUSION's favourite add-on controllers of the current generation, Logitech's G29 and G920 force feedback wheel.

For those who remember the cheap plastic wheels that Madcatz used to churn out, you are in for a huge shock. Yes, it's an expensive purchase but it doesn't take you long to see the potential fun it will give to any sim-racing fan. It's very solidly built; the steering wheel would not be out of place in a real sports car; it's even wrapped in leather. The buttons have a very precise feel to them whilst the paddle shifts hidden behind the wheel give a very satisfying solid click when pulled.

What really impresses us though is just how much it changes how you play. Games are transformed, becoming an experience that just cannot be matched with any other control method. Spending the time to tune the settings for the game you are playing makes it easy to handle a giant American Semi-truck where big lazy turns are the norm or go to the other extreme with full on ultra-precise sim-racing cars. Get it right and you will come away from a gaming session with arms that are aching after wrestling a Group C Porsche 956 around Spa for 40 laps – the true definition of pain and pleasure.

The controller comes in two versions the G29 for the Xbox One/PC and the G920 for the PS4/PC. Both are fantastic but make sure you choose the right one if you are a console racer. PC users can use either, but our recommendation would be to buy the G920 version as it has additional features over the G29 including shift lights and additional adjustable controls.

JOYSTICK MADNESS!

Colin Bell enjoys a good waggle — He's back taking a look at the very unique joystick designs of Cheetah Marketing — they look good but are they functional ?

If like me you were into computers and video games in the 1980s and 1990s you no doubt enjoyed a good waggle of your joystick and there is most definitely a good chance that one the many sticks you owned over the years was a Cheetah, a word that back in the day was synonymous with the word Joystick.

Indeed, during the 1980s we had the Cheetah Annihilator, The Exterminator and the 125+ which were all stalwarts of Joystick world, found connected to and waggled by many a Speccy, C64 and CPC user. As time moved on we saw the introduction of the 'deluxe' models, the Mach 1 and the Star Probe, then came the tiny but rather genius 'Bug' a firm favourite among the Atari ST and Amiga fraternities. Now, all was good and well but as we moved into the 1990s and with an ever-growing competitive joystick market Cheetah needed something new to add to their already extensive line.

Fast forward to 1992 and Cheetah announced just that, a new line of five 'Character Sticks' all of which took inspiration from the world of Movies and Television. The set included two Batman inspired joysticks, one from the latest Tim Burton block buster offering, Batman Returns and the other from the hit Batman animated series that graced our televisions at the time. The third and fourth sticks were both movie tie-ins, a terminator exo-skeleton skull from Terminator 2 — Judgement Day and the most grotesque of the lot, the Alien from sci-fi blockbuster Alien 3. The fifth and final stick was that of rebellious school boy prankster Bart Simpson of The Simpsons TV fame.

Now these weren't just any old TV and movie themed sticks covered in stickers and logos pertaining to the above, oh no! What you got was a beautifully moulded and coloured handle based on the character you had chosen. Combine this with some rather stylish inner and outer box art relating to each character and a clear window on the front of the box for you to drool through and what Cheetah had produced was a gorgeous 'I want one of those now' kind of products.But, as we all know looks can be deceiving. So, sit back, relax and join me now as we take a closer look at each of these beloved characters and their inspired sticks.

BATMAN RETURNS — CHARACTER STICK

The granddaddy of the infamous Spectravideo Quickshot Range. The Quickshot featured the early pressure pad assembly and was one of the first joysticks to feature a contoured grip design handle along with a second contoured grip on the main body which provided the user with, well, extra grip! It had two small red fire buttons, one for your thumb on top of the handle and one situated on the left hand side of the main body. The joystick had four suckers on the base allowing the user to stick the main body down to a flat surface giving improved stability and the option for one handed operation.

While it felt comfortable hand held, the positioning of the main body contoured grip and fire button makes it ideally situated for someone who is right handed so it sadly offers up nothing for the left handed among us, a common issue with many of the earlier joysticks designs.

The plastic moulding feels cheap and very smooth so after a sweaty waggling session you'll not find much grip with this one. Both fire buttons feel light but are still responsive, sadly however the pressure pad assembly feels spongy bringing the overall durability of the stick into question especially over long periods of play. It also creaks, squeaks and cracks loudly when moved. A good entry level stick.

BATMAN – THE ANIMATED SERIES — CHARACTER STICK

Na-na na-na! okay, okay, you get the point! Second in the series of our character sticks sees yet another outing for old bats but this time in the guise of his popular 90s animated series. The most surprising thing about this stick is the mould itself which is not just a repainted replica of the Batman Returns mould. Although very similar it is different, not just as slim and Batman now features slightly broader shoulders and a buffed out chest. A nice job of fully painting the mould has been done and captures the look of the animated series character beautifully.

The box art again is great! With animated Batman standing proud either side of the box and on the inner a rather stylishly drawn backdrop of Gotham City.

Broader shoulders and a buffed out moulded chest may not sound like much but actually it makes all the difference here and combine this with an ever so slightly better feeling trigger fire button located again on the arms and this stick feels a lot nicer to hold than that of our first Bats offering. Holy ever so slightly better design Batman!

BART SIMPSON — CHARACTER STICK

This stick takes inspiration from none other than that cheeky little school boy scamp Bart Simpson. Like the Alien 3 stick this is one of the more detailed moulds in the series and features young Bart in a sitting position with arms folded. Even series creator Matt Groening's signature is stamped into the mould at the base.

The base and majority of the character's body is blue in colour with Bart's head, arms and legs done in that iconic Simpsons yellow that we all know and love.

Artwork wise this box is perhaps the most basic with a white backdrop and a picture of Bart standing on either side. Sadly, the inner box features no artwork at all.

Overall the stick is rather uncomfortable to hold with Bart's eyes, ears and pointy nose all protruding outwards and into your hand. And despite the main thumb trigger fire button being located on top of Bart's head, I found myself pressing the nose all the time as it felt like the natural place for the button to be! Ay caramba!

ALIEN 3 — CHARACTER STICK

In space, no one can here you waggle! Inspired by H.R Giger's horror movie character masterpiece and the Alien film franchise, our fourth character stick is moulded in the shape of one of the iconic Alien warriors. Completely black in colour the mould for this stick is beautifully detailed and actually a delight to hold. It feels comfortable and at home in the hand with a nicely placed trigger button nestled at the top of the Aliens chest.

The artwork for the box features a still image of the Alien from the movie on either side with the inner box artwork featuring a still of the industrial backdrop of 'Fury' 161 where the movie is set.

My personal favourite of the series, best used playing Alien 3 on the Amiga or Sega Megadrive until Game Over Man! (oh, come on!)

Fusion Factoid: The actual mould used for this joystick is of the Alien Warrior from the 1986 movie Aliens and not that of the 'Runner' Alien from Alien 3.

TERMINATOR 2 — JUDGEMENT DAY CHARACTER STICK

Inspired by the James Cameron & Arnold Schwarzenegger blockbuster of 1991, the Terminator 2 character stick has a handle moulded in the shape of the iconic Terminator exo-skeleton skull.

Complete with menacing red eyes and a red fire button on the base the rest of the joystick is completely silver, which if you know what the exo-skeleton looks like should really come as no surprise. There is also a silver trigger fire button that sits nicely on the skulls forehead and actually looks like it is just part of the skulls design.

The box art has still movie images either side both depicting the exo-skeleton in different poses. The inner box art again is a movie still from the actual movie and shows a damaged exo-skeleton lying in the rubble.

The smallest of the character sticks and perhaps the most cumbersome of the series as the skull is rather large and not the easiest to hold, although with a bit of fidgeting a comfortable grip can be achieved. One for the die-hard Terminator fans only. Hasta La Vista Baby!

CONCLUSION:

So, there you have it, a look at all five of Cheetah's character sticks and if I'm honest I think one word sums them all up. Gimmick! And that's what they are, a cheap, cumbersome, uncomfortable and with not a micro switch to be heard, a non-responsive gimmick. I think it fair to say that these sticks are not going to improve your game playing prowess or make you a better player anytime soon.

But! Hold on just a minute! Look at the boxes, look at the awesome artwork and still movie images, let them evoke memories and feelings you have for these iconic characters on the box and then take a peek through the window and drool as you see what could possibly be the coolest joystick you've ever seen!

Gimmick, Yes. Great joysticks, sadly not. Do they stir up feelings and emotions of pure movie and TV nostalgia? Absolutely!

Article by Chris Wilkins

■ **There are some board games that seem to have been around for ever.**

I remember getting Frustration for Christmas way back in the 70s — a time before the internet, a time before the advent of the home computer and a time, at least in West Wales, before gas central heating and double glazing became the norm.

I vividly remember playing Frustration on long winter evenings with my grandparents in front of a roaring coal fire — the rest of the house was normally not heated to conserve heat and costs, so the living room was the place to keep warm, watch

television and pass the time. The winter months were harsh, so when there was nothing good to watch on the TV, board games were played.

For us in the UK, this game has always been known as Frustration, for other parts of the world it is known as Trouble and in Finland Kimble.

The premise of the game is simple enough — four players take turns in getting their four coloured plastic pieces out of their base and around the board where they can ultimately dock. The unique feature of frustration is the 'Pop-O-Matic' die container in the centre of the board — the

Below: Frustration in the form of Disney Pixar's Cars.

player pushes down onto the clear, acrylic dome which then pops a piece of metal resulting in the die being flicked. Once the die settles, that is the number of slots on the board one of your pieces can be moved. If you land on another player's piece, then that piece goes back to that player's base — get your own pieces into the final available slots on the board and they become safe. Get all four pieces into the final four slots on the board and the game is won! To get a piece out of your base, a '6' has to be thrown, or popped on the die. If a '6' is popped during normal gameplay, then the player is given another 'throw'.

The game was originally launched in the USA in 1965. Since then there have been many iterations of the board and more recently themed examples on a number of films including Cars and Star Wars. There is a bi-annual World

Champion event held in the Isle of Wight in the UK to this very day where substantial cash prizes are awarded to winners.

This was a game I played with all the family for many years and it has been introduced recently to another generation of my family — the simplicity of the game, and the unique way the die is thrown has made this board game timeless.

TOMYTRONIC®

TOP SHOT PILOT

Article by Chris Wilkins

As a gamer through the 80s, Tomy was a household name always having a range of brilliant electronic toys in the likes of Kay's catalogue. I wasn't fortunate enough to own any at the time, but with the advent of eBay and groups on Facebook these toys are now more than accessible, and in many cases in very good condition.

And so to this particular example, the Tomy Top Shot Pilot released in 1988. The unit itself is a robust plastic representation of a fighter jet in a fetching blue — once taken out of the box, the wings will need to be clicked into place and the graphical decals, as seen in the pictures, placed on to the relevant points of the plane.

The aim of the game is to fly your plane through a mechanical scrolling landscape by moving the joystick at the front of the unit left and right. Moving the throttle back puts the plane into thrust; pressing the fire button at the appropriate time fires a missile towards an enemy aircraft or building — a precision shot earning a visual effect accompanied by an explosive sound with the counter located on the top right of the cockpit ticking up by one. The scrolling landscape shifts one place to the left and right of your fixed aircraft — your

plane rotates on its fixed axis left or left depending on which way you shift the joystick.

And that is pretty much it. Once the landscape scrolls to the end of its loop you have to push the throttle control into reverse thrust which simulates the plane refuelling — the reality is the landscape is just scrolling back to the start once again.

Checking the counter gives you the number of successful hits made in the run — to start again, press down the reset counter button and put the throttle into thrust mode once again.

Top Shot Pilot is a pretty advanced mechanical toy for the time and is quite fun to play even though by today's standards it is a very simple affair.

The box with this particular example is in good condition - with the value of the purchase at £45 on eBay we at FUSION think this was a good buy.

Below : The mechanical, lit viewing area — your plane can be turned left and right with the joystick and targets shot light up.

Above: The impressive, blue plastic mouled unit with decals fitted. Place this on the table, and everyone who vists will want a go!

FUSION

Game : Minestorm
Year : 1982
System : Vectrex

Visiting the nearby town for the weekly food shop allowed me to go gallivanting whilst my mum and dad carried the mundane task of pushing the trolley down endless food isles. The local Woolworths always had electronic appliances towards the back of the store — and this is where I normally went eyeing up the Sinclair and Commodore machines as well as the more obscure systems. One such system was the Vectrex and this where I first came into contact with Minestorm, a game, I was to find out later, built into the Vextrex and therefore free to anyone who purchased the console.

Minestorm is ultimately an Asteroids clone and with the Vectrex being a vector screen, it proved to the perfect console for replicating its arcade brethren. Asteroids allowed the gamer to shoot large vector asteroids, breaking them into smaller parts that could then be shot further to obliterate them or make them smaller again. Clear the screen of the phosphorous boulders and it was on to the next level. Minestorm follows the same game mechanic completely — allowing you to control your on a 360 degree axis with thrust and warp thrown in for the complete experience as you look to clear the screen of space debris.

With a simple overlay to attach to the outside of the unit to give a grid-like effect, this version of Asteroids was indeed the most accurate that any arcade fan of the original could play in the home.

Storm

ESCAPE ● THRUST ● FIRE ✦

Talking the Mical

MOST PASSIONATE COMMODORE AMIGA FANS WILL RECOGNISE RJ MICAL AS BEING A MAJOR PART OF THE CORE TEAM WHO BROUGHT THE AMIGA 1000 TO LIFE. JOHN MCDERMOTT CHATS TO HIM ABOUT THOSE EARLY PIONEERING DAYS AND BEYOND.

John McDermott: You developed 'Intuition' for the Amiga. What features or concepts of Intuition do you feel modern operating systems could benefit from?

RJ Mical: Times have changed, and mainframe operating systems have evolved too. There's not that much that distinguishes the underlying foundations of systems anymore — they all multitask, they all have UI toolkits and communication abstractions. Our way, and the Unix way, these have stood the test of time, and these days most operating systems are Unix or very much like Unix. Most UI and windowing systems support all the same features these days as well. Intuition menus were more flexible than modern menu systems — for example, we supported color, and graphics, and multiple menu item selections. But, for the most part, the competition has successfully caught up with us after a few decades <he says with a grin>.

JM: Thinking about your time at Commodore, of the many projects that were cancelled at Commodore, which cancellation were you most disappointed with, and why?

RJ: I wasn't with Commodore long enough to see projects get cancelled! I was not invested emotionally with Commodore, so I was shielded from most of their many heartbreaks, except the Amiga. My greatest disappointment while I was still involved came from a project that never got started: I had Commodore's approval to overhaul the filesystem of the

Below: RJ was part of the team who created the iconic Sinistar. Some say it's RJ's voice that screams 'I Hunger!' What do you think?
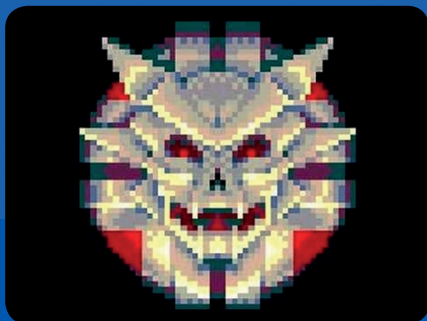
Workbench

Left: The Amiga 1000 — a computer that was probably ahead of its time.

Amiga OS, but I could not talk the key engineering resource into working on the project, so it never happened. Could have changed the world, that one.

JM:Having worked at Williams and being part of the team that did Sinistar and other ground breaking arcade games of the time and then moving on to be key in the development of the Amga, 3DO, Atari Lynx, all of which for me, growing up in the 70s and 80s were massive step changes that changed the gaming and technology landscape. We now have VR and AR which, in my opinion is the biggest (and maybe the only) step change in the last 10 or so years but what do you see as being the next proper step change in technology?

RJ: I continue to have little hope for VR technology, alas. I just watched a VR commercial showing a poolside party, with a rap star sitting inside alone on a couch, wearing goggles, immersed in watching himself VR perform, oblivious to the rest of the party. VR will always suffer this same problem: You have to cover your face and 'leave the room' to enjoy a VR experience, which makes it inherently an anti-social experience (though VR also can create new online social experiences, like virtually attending a performance together though you are physically remote, which is very cool). Furthermore, if you're like a lot of people, like me, you aren't so keen about wearing someone else's stuff on your face, so there's that 'icky' factor to deal with too — I mean, family and friends, OK, but at a party...?

AR has more promise, because it tries to solve both problems. I don't think we will 'share' our AR devices with each other the same way we would pass around our VR tech. But AR will work best for me when I don't have to wear anything on my face. What does this mean? AR information transmitted directly to the receptors in my eye, maybe with contact lenses? Jacking into my nervous system and overlaying AR information directly onto my optic nerve? Yeah, something like that, maybe.

The next big revolutions will erupt from quantum and A.I. Personal compute power will explode when quantum technology can run on our phones at room temperature, but we're still 20 years away from that.

Before then, we will see ever-accelerating A.I. hardware that will empower researchers to invent new algorithms and models, and soon cost-reduced low-power A.I. chips will become as commonplace as graphics chips.

Fifty years from now, everyday quantum A.I. hardware will process information — perhaps even 'think' — as efficiently as the human brain. I hope I live to see it — there's a good chance I will!

JM: As mentioned — for well over 30 years you have invented and been involved in real game changing software and technology developments, but is there anything over that time that you weren't involved in but looked at and thought
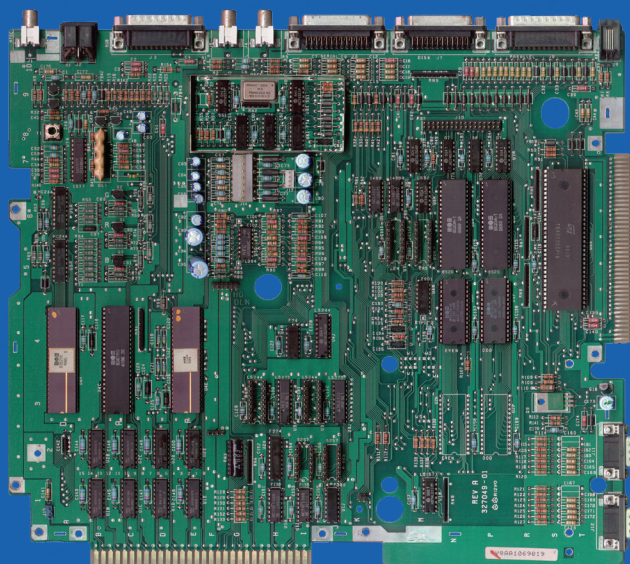
'Oh, I'd love to have been part of that'?

RJ: I wish I had been part of WebTV. Web page and email access for common folk, with low cost and high dependability, running on their TVs. The idea was excellent, and the execution was brilliant.

I wish I had been part of Android. Hoo baby. I wish I had joined Google during the early days.

I joined Sony because I wanted to play with the Cell architecture. Before I actually worked with that system, I romanticized it to be a step toward the next-generation of compute technology. The reality of the architecture implementation (especially CPU and memory design) turned out to be less than satisfying sadly. You never know but I've often wondered if it could have been better. I've often wished that I had gotten involved earlier, back when the hardware was being designed.

Looking forward, I continue to believe we need specialized physics hardware. I've been a proponent of this for decades now. One of the best bits of knowledge I picked up recently in Research is that the brain has an area that specializes in physics, so now I am convinced what we want is hardware to do this for us. Experiences that include physics would flourish.

JM: Your Wikipedia page mentions that you were working on (amongst other things) game, machine learning, and natural language technology for Google. Can you tell us a bit more about that and are you still involved?

RJ:Oh yes, I am having a superb time working with Google to create natural language experiences. Some of our entertainment work is available to the public now, in various forms, but much of what we create are internal experiments, studies, stepping stones, which yield fantastic results. Every day is fun and filled with accomplishment. I get to learn SO MUCH, and I am surrounded by fascinating scientists and engineers who are quick to help me learn. I even host a Puzzling People Club, where we think through hard logic and math puzzles once a month — so enriching!

Workbench

JM: You founded Rjinx as a platform to publish your creations and inventions. Could you talk a bit about some of the things you are most pleased with from that outlet?

RJ: Funny you should ask! The Google gig came up before I finished any of the Rjinx projects. But they're all just about done; I just need someone to work with me to push it that last little bit. You got any free time, John?

JM: What do you do to relax away from all the technical things?

RJ: Well, I've been working forever on this weekly puzzle I publish called the Monday Morning Tickler. Any of your readers can drop me at line (rj@mical.org) and I happily will add you to the distribution list for the puzzle. But this is a hobby with a deadline, and you might call it a 'technical thing' because there's a lot of thinking and some programming involved, so not really relaxing.

To truly get away, I leave all technology behind and take a long walk through some beautiful setting. My favorite is Yosemite, but I also like a long walk around my neighborhood, or down at the ocean. Or your neighborhood, wherever that is.

But the truth is that even then I often can't stop thinking, about puzzles or problems or whatever else weighs on my mind that day. So to increase the peace I fill my head with music instead. It's a form of meditation. Beethoven and Pink Floyd go well with Yosemite.

JM: Thanks for chatting with me RJ — it was an absolute pleasure.

Below : RJ with his good friend Dave Needle and the Atari Lynx they created together.

TOMY ®

Article by Ryan Coleman

■ **Can you imagine an anomalous world where portable handheld games weren't powered by batteries, but instead operated with clockwork mechanics, very similar to the tinplate robots of the 1940s/50s?** A parallel universe perhaps? Some eccentric, steam-punk reality? Surprisingly not!

In the late 70s, renowned toy manufacturer TOMY released their first plastic windup robots, known as 'Rascal Robot', a series of stubby little automatons that resembled both R2D2 from Star Wars and Robby the Robot from Forbidden Planet. With this line of toys, TOMY truly perfected the construction of small and precise plastic gears which meant that they could greatly reduce the size of the gear box, resulting in a much more compact sized toy that still boasted

surprisingly intricate capabilities.

With the arrival of the 1980s, video games were the hot new thing, and every company seemed to be trying to release a product that would capture the excitement and feel of the arcades. Some companies went the route of porting arcade titles to home computers and consoles, but TOMY opted to use their knowledge and experience of windup toys to create a line of 'Pocket Arcade' games — small handheld devices that were obviously inspired by titles in the arcades but with the added bonus of being totally portable, with absolutely no need for batteries!

Over the course of the 1980s and early 1990s, a few different games were

Below: Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles — let's wind these guys up!

released under the Pocket Arcade name (or Technoboy in Japan). Most of the games were very similar, with many just featuring different artwork on the plastic shells to make each game thematically different. For example the release of Pac-Man (Puckman) is identical to another game called Cat Dodger, but whereas Pac-Man has to avoid ghosts and retrieve a cherry, the mouse in Cat Dodger must avoid the nasty moggies on his way to get at a block of cheese.

Kids today might laugh at how archaic the Pocket Arcade line is, but I also hope that they would also be able to see how technically impressive the games were for the time. In Astro Raid, after winding up the game, you have about thirty seconds to shoot and destroy three Space-Invader-esque enemies at the top of the 'screen'. A turret moves from side to side, and you have to try and make it align with one of the

enemies before pulling the 'fire' button. The fire button causes a clear belt to rotate with a missile printed on it, so it appears as though you're actually launching a missile upwards at an alien! If you align the turret/belt correctly, the enemy will 'explode', and you have to quickly take out the others before the windup mechanism runs down.

Most of the games are based on accumulating points, like the aforementioned Pac-Man/Cat Dodger. Every time that you manage to get your character past the ghosts/cats and make contact with your target, the point dial at the bottom left of the device will go up by one. If you get touched by an enemy in the process, you can no longer move left towards your goal and will have to move back to the right to 'reset' your movement, costing you precious time!

In some ways, TOMY's Pocket Arcade series certainly does capture the feel of machines found in a real-life arcade, with

simplistic gameplay based around frantically trying to score points. Being a series of windup games instead of battery powered handhelds, the price point was significantly less than that of an electronic game when originally sold in stores in the early 80s. The good thing is that they are still relatively cheap and aren't particularly

Above/Below: Above, Desert Race with its little plastic steering wheel and below Astro Raid.

scarce, although the UK exclusive Teenage Mutant Hero (Ninja) Turtles games can be a little trickier to find. Due to the clear plastic covering the 'screen', many Pocket Arcade games can be scratched or cracked, so if you're a stickler for condition, finding pristine examples might also be a challenge.

Whilst the TOMY Pocket Arcade line may not be as iconic as the infamous TIGER LCD handheld, if you do happen to come across one at a car boot sale and it's cheap, pick it up. The simple gameplay can be a fun way to kill five minutes and the fact TOMY managed to manufacture something that even slightly resembles gameplay found in an arcade cabinet, using gears and windup mechanics is undeniably impressive, and undoubtedly worth a play for that reason alone!

日本 で 安く
(Cheaper in Japan)

Article by Alan Hammerton

You don't have to be much of a games enthusiast to be aware of the sharp increase in the prices of retro games over the past few years. Titles that once may have cost in the low £20s in the UK have risen to be well over £100 (and in some cases a lot more). As much as we say we won't pay these inflated prices, the reality for a lot of is that we will never play these games unless we literally pay the price the sellers demand.

Here's the thing though — what if I were to tell you that you could have some of these expensive titles for a fraction of the price, all completely legal and above board .

It's not exactly a secret that a trip East can result in returning with a treasure trove of Japanese versions of the games that would cost an arm and a leg in the West. But what if you don't have the money to travel there yourself? In this case eBay is your friend; you will pay a premium for the same titles over their in-store prices in Japan, but you will still end up with some cracking games for a lot less that you would normally pay for their UK counterparts.

To show you just what we mean, FUSION has looked at ten games that can be purchased much cheaper in Japan. For each of these games we are comparing the prices when bought from a store in Japan, the same Japanese version of the game bought on UK eBay and the price of a normal PAL UK release of the same game.

Castlevania Symphony of the Night (Playstation)


ebay.co.uk £200-£400

ebay.co.uk £25-£60

BOOK·OFF £10

This was the find that really brought home to me just how much can be saved buying a Japanese release. Symphony of the Night is consistently one of the most expensive games to buy for the UK PS1, anywhere from £200 to £400 depending on condition is not uncommon. The Japanese release of the game (known as 'Akumaj Dracula X: Gekka no Yas kyoku') on eBay can be yours for £25-60. I found my personal copy in a Book Off store near Yokohama for less than £10. That is what I call a bargain!

Metal Gear Solid: Twin Snakes (Nintendo Gamecube)

ebay.co.uk £50-£70
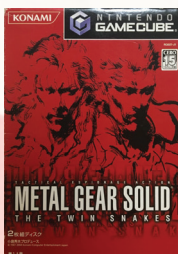
ebay.co.uk £25-£35

BOOK·OFF £14

Another of the GameCube heavy hitters; the Western release of MGS Twin Snakes is a £50-70 game all day long. Head over to eBay and you can find the Japanese release for £25-£35, already close to half the price you pay in the West. My copy from Book Off, £14 complete — almost half the price again.

Mario Party 1 to 7 (Nintendo N64 & GameCube)

| ebay.co.uk £70 | ebay.co.uk £30 | HARD·OFF £4 |

OK, so we are being a bit generous here and including the first seven games in the Mario Party series but it's for a good reason. Prices for this series have been skyrocketing recently, especially the first three games on the N64. Many of the Western versions of the games have sold on eBay for over £100 but look for the Japanese versions and you could have mint, boxed and complete versions of Mario Party 1,2 & 3 for just over £30 delivered. Were you to buy them in Japan, I would expect to pay no more than £5 each. Expect to see the same price difference on the GameCube. I picked up immaculate boxed copies of the fourth and sixth games in the series from a Hard Off store in Hachioji for less than £4 each – try doing that in the UK.

Ribbit King (Nintendo GameCube)

| ebay.co.uk £80 | ebay.co.uk £30 | BOOK·OFF £4.30 |

OK, so we are being a bit generous here and including the first seven games in the Mario Party series but it's for a good reason. Prices for this series have been skyrocketing recently, especially the first three games on the N64. Many of the Western versions of the games have sold on eBay for over £100 but look for the Japanese versions and you could have mint, boxed and complete versions of Mario Party 1,2 & 3 for just over £30 delivered.

Night Trap (Sega Mega-CD/Sega CD)

ebay.co.uk £50

ebay.co.uk £20

レトロ ショップ £7

Among the more infamous games to have been released on any system, Night Trap needs little introduction from us. We also don't need to tell you that, whilst it's not particularly expensive in the West prices are starting to rise, especially after the re-release last year by Limited Run Games. A good PAL copy for the Mega CD will set you back up to £50. On eBay a Japanese copy can be found for around £20 but walk into a local Retro Gaming shop in Hachioji and you can buy a copy for just under £7.

Klonoa : Door to Phantomile (Playstation)

ebay.co.uk £80-100

ebay.co.uk £20

£10

Another of the big hitters when it comes to prices is 'Klonoa: Door to Phantomile', released as 'Kaze no Kuronoa' in Japan. Seemingly was not that popular upon release but it's reputation as fantastic platform 2.5D platformer has seen it become highly demanded by collectors. Expect to pay upwards of £80-100 for a good complete PAL copy of the game. The Japanese version can be found on eBay for about a quarter of the price, at around £20 shipped. Incredibly, in Tokyo's famous (and expensive) Super Potato retro games store!

Chibi-Robo (Nintendo Gamecube)

ebay.co.uk £100	ebay.co.uk £20	駿河屋 £10

Kenichi Nishi's 2005 platform game is widely praised by both critics and players as a fantastic game but being released comparatively late in the GameCube's life means high prices for a PAL copy. Don't be surprised to pay £100 or more for a good copy. Thankfully, eBay can save you a ton of money, typically selling for around £20. Head to Akihabara like I did and pay just £10 in the Suraguya Specialty Store.

Rockman/Megaman 8 (Playstation)

|		
ebay.co.uk £125	ebay.co.uk £15	HARD·OFF £6

The first of the Megaman (or Rockman to give it it's Japanese name) series to be released on the original PlayStation 1 was the eighth instalment of the series, Megaman 8. If you wish to add a copy to your collection today, then you are going to have to reach deep into your pockets. Expect to be paying the wrong side of £125 for a good complete copy. On eBay you can find Rockman 8 for around £15 delivered. Head into the Hard Off store in Nakagami and pay just £6.

Crash Bandicoot (Playstation)
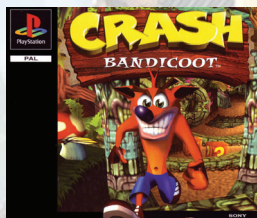
ebay.co.uk £15-20	ebay.co.uk £10	HARD·OFF £0.66

A question to ponder: Crash Bandicoot sold in huge numbers, nearly 7 million units according to Gamasutra, so why is it not cheap as chips to buy? £15-20 is not uncommon for a good quality PAL version of the game. A Japanese copy on eBay is better value at around £10 but the best deal is to walk to the junk bins in any Hard Off and find a pristine copy for 66p

The Misadventures of Tron Bonne (Playstation)

ebay.co.uk £140	ebay.co.uk £25	HARD·OFF £9

A more obscure game but one that is for fans of the Rockman/Megaman franchise, as not only is it a great standalone game but it is also a prequel to the Legends games that were to follow. This is another expensive PAL UK game, expect to pay around £140 for a good quality copy. The Japanese version of the game, 'Tron ni Kobun Tron Bonne', on eBay is unsurprisingly a lot cheaper at around £25. Head to Kichijoji, where there is an excellent Hard Off and find it complete for just £9.

DISCLAIMER - All prices quoted were correct as of going to press. Prices for items picked up in Japan were what I paid for them, you may find they might be cheaper or more expensive depending on location and condition.

FUSION

Game : XENON
Year : 1988
System : ATARI ST

Many titles on the Commodore 64 sold well when the game itself was known not to be that good. Titles such as these were rescued by the composer of the title music of the game, be it Rob Hubbard, Martin Galway or Tim Follin. The Atari ST with its AY sound chip is not synonymous with music, not as much as the Commodore Amiga at least, but some of my favourite chiptune music tracks are on games for this computer. One of these games is Xenon, with the tune created by another prolific musician of the time, David Whittaker.

The game itself is a vertical shooter, with a little twist — you can land your onto the terrain below to take out ground enemies as well as fly and take out higher raised ground target like turrets and advancing airborne hostiles. The David Whittaker soundtrack plays throughout — though being an 3-channel tune utilising a 3-channel AY sound chip, the primary channel is also used for the shooting sound effect and explosions thus the main tune is interrupted each time one occurs during playing.
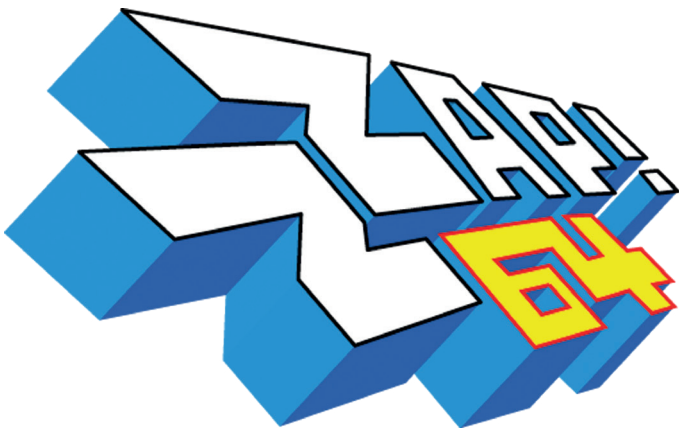
Xenon 2 is fondly remembered more so by fans of the Bitmap Brothers — for me the original in this, is the best.

700

3 : 1

A

XENON
THE BITMAP BROS

F

R | P

WL3HA
BXX00

ZZAP!64 was nothing more than 'a fluffy lollipop magazine'.

'It was a godsend,' Roger laughs. 'Recalling what we did with Sherlock Holmes, I suggested a gorgeous Lolita-style blonde, in her ZZAP! cap of course, sporting vast designer shades sucking seductively on a lollipop. In her sunglasses you can see a golfer teeing off reflected in each lens.'

'I had to give her a background of golf-adoring teenage fans,' Oli joins in with a wry grin.

Both Gary and Julian approved the design but did have concerns that US Gold might feel that their game was being belittled by the image. On publication there was no complaint from the software house, but when working on the Story of US Gold for Fusion Retro Books, Roger had the opportunity to bring up the cover to US Gold owner Geoff Brown, who it transpired had taken it in good part and laughed along with the reader.

Anthony Jacobson's reaction to ZZAP! Issue 15 is not on record.

For this issue, Gary Penn and Julian Rignall were sure that the only game to feature on the cover had to be US Gold's Leader Board. Just about everyone in ZZAP! Towers heard Oli's groan. 'It's not that he hated the noble game of potting white balls on green swards — at least, not that much,' recalls Roger Kean, "But what the hell do you do with a golfer striking a ball off the tee, or worse still, putting it?" Oli was heard to cry in despair.'

Inspiration wasn't far away, however, thanks in large part to a certain Anthony Jacobson.

With ZZAP! Newsfield had really got up the noses of some of the 'elite' in Commodore computing circles, among them Mr Jacobson, managing editor and publisher of the magazine Commodore Computing International. In this serious and worthy organ of C64-ness, Jacobson had described in an editorial that

ZZAP! 64 Issue 15 – Lollipop!

Article by Simon Butler

TOP 10 PC INDIE GAMES

I would never be so foolish as to try and rank the indie titles I have played over the last few years, but I have been asked by the Editor so here we go an attempt to put in order some of the superb titles I have stumbled across in my search for gaming outside the mainstream market. These are the true retro titles, leaning heavily on their forebears for inspiration while bringing more than a generous portion of their own magic to the entertainment buffet.

They have entertained me, taxed my patience, strained my gaming abilities and caused me more than a little frustration. Yet for all of this, they have shown me that the path I chose to follow, close on four decades ago, was most certainly the wisest route. There were always treasures to be found, gems filled with creativity and excitement, but I will go out on a limb and say never more so than now. The Indie Scene is growing every day, with teams of every age and size, working in offices together or spread across the globe and creating remotely.

This is the side of the industry I look to for encouragement for the future, but mostly for my 'fix', my gaming sustenance and I am seldom disappointed.

I have spent, invested or some may say wasted inordinate amounts of what should have been creative or productive hours on these titles and more, but have always come away feeling I have learned something.

The Indie Gaming Scene has shown me that the pixel is in safer and more talented hands than mine ever were, but that a game doesn't need to be some lumbering AAA goliath. It can be some tiny thing, born from the sheer joy of creation or from the need to tell a story in visual form.

There are diamonds out there just waiting to be found. These few shone brightly for me.

10 – Sword and Sworcery EP Developer: Capybara Games & Superbrothers

Enter the beautiful world of the Scythian, as she travels across the Caucasus mountains to Mingi Taw to battle the Gogolithic Mass. If you're not on-board by now, you should be.

This is a groundbreaking title, stunningly atmospheric in its simplicity in every aspect. The graphics are wonderfully stylised and a true visual treat, the animation is minimalist but superb, the lack of dialogue a masterstroke.

Combine these elements with the truly stupendous soundtrack and you have a game that is more of an experience than a form of entertainment. It's a world you wish to dive into and experience even after completing this beautifully realised game. The pixel art is angular and alien; the locations eerily lonely yet pull you onwards to always go further.

The story is not original, but the manner of its presentation and flow is wonderfully realised.This is a title I have revisited many times, a title I cannot recommend too strongly. If you only buy the soundtrack, you will be justly rewarded.

9 – Risk of Rain Developer: Hopoo Games

A sometimes frustratingly difficult game at first, that eventually rewards your patience with a top notch roguelike platform shooter.

Playing the sole survivor of a crashed spacecraft, you must battle your way across various levels of increasingly hostile terrain to your ultimate destiny. Unlocking playable characters and collecting a host of power-ups, this title has dragged me back innumerable times and has never failed to entertain.

With each character having their own distinct martial characteristics, no two games will ever be alike and you will find your skills severely tested. Once again, an excellent soundtrack adds another level of quality to a game that is class from the get-go.

Another fine example that shows the humble pixel can bring more than enough clout to the gaming table.

8 – Super Meat Boy Developer: Team Meat

The platform game to end all platform games. A product created for people with endless patience, skills beyond compare and a swear-box the size of a bus.

This game will test you like no other. It is the lord of b*stards, but regardless of the annoyance it will almost definitely bring to your days, I can guarantee you will always return. It truly is one of the hardest games I have ever played, but you will find yourself returning time and time again in an attempt to regain some shred of dignity and when you pass the level that defied you for so long, the exhilaration is euphoric.

Enjoy it while you can, it is guaranteed that the subsequent level will crush your spirits in a heartbeat with yet another in a long line of amazing inventive and stunningly devious screens designed to test your reactions, your gameplay and your perseverance. This is a game aimed truly at the best of the best, which probably explains my pitiful performance and the lack of progression therein. Nevertheless, it shan't stop me returning. Come and have a go if you think you've got what it takes. Trust me, you haven't.

7 – Inside Developer: Playdead

From the talented folk who brought you Limbo, we have a puzzle platformer filled to the very gunnels with dark menace and devious traps. You play as an unnamed boy, pursued by men with evil intent. But is he running away from something or toward it? Only by entering this solemn and sinister monochromatic world can you discover the truth behind the child and trust me, it is well worth the effort.

Once again this amazingly talented team bring their A game to the fore and deliver something fresh and compelling that is both engrossing and confusing in equal and enjoyable amounts. The sombre environments, which are almost totally silent, save for the occasional musical cue, take you firmly into a threatening and inhospitable world that is the stuff of nightmares. The child is beautifully animated and compellingly vulnerable as you guide him deeper into increasingly perilous realms.

With two endings, this title is always worth a replay, regardless of knowing the outcome. It is a work of love, with care and attention shining through every puzzle and every location..
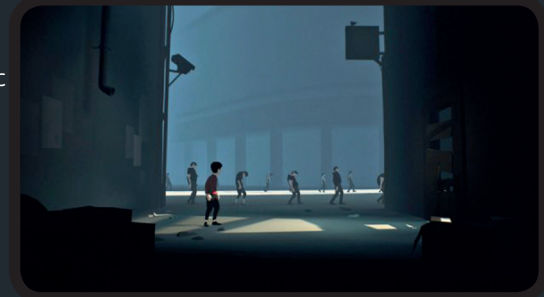
6 – Celeste Developer: Matt Makes Games

Another contender for the most challenging platformer currently available. Celeste has got it all; devious level design, an abundance of hidden secrets to discover for the completists in the audience, a fascinating narrative and exceptionally precise game mechanics that are not for the faint of heart. Madelaine must climb the titular Celeste Mountain and in doing so discover more than she originally sought to find. With a wide variety of moves and abilities to obtain, this beautifully presented game pushed my meagre skills to their very limit with the pixel perfect jumps required and the timing of said manoeuvres, but throughout, the satisfaction from progression more than compensated for the shredding of my aging nerves. There truly is so much to do in this game, from changing the physics, to unlocking variants on levels or even altering the ending of the game via strawberry collection. Madelaine is superbly animated, with her body squashing and stretching in crouches and jumps, something obviously done through code rather than simple pixel tricks. Widely praised on its release, Celeste has been duly described as an 'essential' title that is as close to perfection as one would like to claim.

5 – Not A Hero Developer: Roll7

Mad as a box of frogs, this high paced, stealth-dodge-run & gun is chaos personified and about as fun as it gets where wholesale disembowelment and bloodshed is concerned. You'll struggle to find another title out there where painting the floors, walls and ceilings a subtle shade of brain is so pulse-poundingly entertaining. In the employ of the time-travelling BunnyLord, you will play as a variety of gun-toting, hammer-wielding, katana-swinging psychopaths out to cleanse the city of violence through unutterably violent means, in an amazing pixel-art cover-base title with surprising depth.

With each level bringing a different challenge you will try and try to get the highest score, the fastest time or the most kills as you slay, slay and slay again in a multitude of ways that will have you grinning like a loon with the sheer giddy gore-splattered madness of it all.

The chunky, colourful pixels are a joy to behold as you leap from cover to ventilate a host of enemies, or slide wildly out of windows to burst in on your victims below.

The bright, bold and exceptionally effective environments are a throwback to Little Computer People.

4 – Journey Developer: Thatgamecompany

Is it a game? It's certainly something, something definitely worth experiencing at least once, because you will never forget it once you do. A dreamlike world of sand and snow, giant stone ruins and deep lonely canyons; this silent world pulls you onward to the distant peak that is your mysterious goal. You are a robed figure, with a rune covered scarf, lost in a seemingly endless waste with only the far mountain as a lodestone, calling you ever onward.

The environments are simplistic but realised and disturbingly otherworldly as you do little else but move ever onwards. You can encounter one other player but there is no dialogue or communication other than song and your companion's name is only revealed upon completion. With only the simplest of leaps and balletic jumps you traverse a world that is entrancing and magical.

It is not a title that will appeal to everyone; it is more like interactive art than a game that fits a genre or an easy definition, yet it still comes highly recommended. I enjoyed every second of my Journey and returned many times for the sheer joy of the task, which was never burdensome or taxing, but always fulfilling. It is beautiful, serene and quite wonderful.

3 – This War of Mine Developer: 11 bit Studios & War Child

A fascinating twist on the survival strategy genre with the protagonists being civilians attempting to eke a living in the ruins of the fictional city of Pogoren, Graznavia. Your goal is purely to survive the war by scavenging tools, materials and food until the arrival of a ceasefire.

Daylight brings snipers intent on your demise, so these are the hours needed to craft, trade and upgrade your meagre supplies. Nighttime allows you to explore the nearby surroundings for assets or other survivors whom you may wish to trade with, assist or even rob.

With 12 playable characters, the gameplay is always varied and exceptionally challenging, as you constantly struggle against hunger, disease and the ever present threats for the enemy.

Disease is rife and your tiny group are always under threat of falling ill, so medicines are vital, as is the tending to those injured or unwell.It is a dark and compelling title, inspired by the 1992-96 Siege of Sarajevo, but throughout there is a constant thread of hope, which is the central foundation of this incredible game. Seldom , if ever, have small tasks like cooking a meal or crafting a radio to listen to weather forecasts been so engaging or rewarding.

## 2 – Hyper Light Drifter Developer: Heart Machine

One of the gaming highlights in a period that included all of the above and many more gems. Hyper Light Drifter hooked me from the first advance screenshot and was always on my radar until day of release and it did not fail to deliver everything I was expecting. It is a 2D action RPG in a beautifully crafted world that has inspired and created a new genre of HLD-style clones, that all emulate this style of pixel art.

The protagonist's quest and internal struggles are inspired by the team leader's own daily battles with congenital heart disease. Seeing Hyper Light Drifter as a way to play out a narrative that he can relate to while also connect with a larger audience, Alex Preston and the Heart Machine team have crafted a true classic. It is a world that feels fresh in an industry filled with clones where you seldom see anything new.

The creatures, the environments, the bosses all feel new yet strangely familiar. They owe a lot to Studio Ghibli's Laputa and Nausicaa, but are still very much their own creations. The weapon system is intuitive and exact, powering up with each successful sword strike while dodging frantically against a host of increasingly difficult foes.

Exploration of the vast areas you must traverse is a joy with you checking every nook and cranny for secrets.Visually it is magically, musically phenomenal and the challenging, thrilling gameplay only completes what is an amazing package that truly should be on everyone's gaming list.

Hyper Light Drifter will be a game held as a shining example of competence, craft and devotion to detail for many years to come.
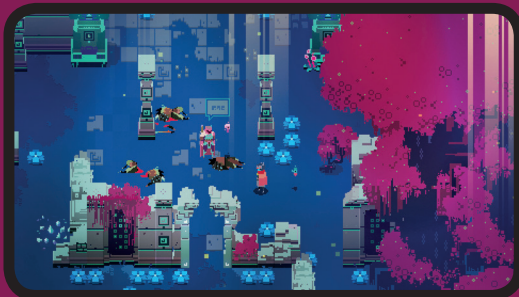
1 — Dead Cells Developer: Motion Twin

Although I said I would not attempt to rate this selection of titles I cannot help but claim that Dead Cells is the most fun, frustration and excitement I have had in a game for a long time. Initially it taxed me desperately to the point where I could not understand the adulation it garnered, but once I realised what the game required of me and how to approach this daunting title I was almost incapable of not playing it several times every day.

I have played hundreds of times and sadly the successful attempts number only in single figures. The only reason I stopped was due to my controller finally giving up the ghost,

otherwise this article almost certainly would remain unwritten due to continued attempts to improve my gaming performance.

The main character is the body of a headless warrior, controlled by a mass of dead cells, who must battle legions of horrendous enemies with a wide variety of weapons, some good, some not, through an enormous and twisting maze of dungeons, across towering ramparts and through impressive castle hallways.

There is a huge array of primary and secondary weapons all beautifully realised, in all shapes and sizes, but sometimes size isn't everything with some of the smallest being the one that will truly bring you glory. The combinations of primary and secondary are something you must experiment with until you find your perfect combination.

It is this mix and match, trial and error flavour that is the main attraction to me, you find a weapon that looks impressive yet find it weak against the army of terrors ahead, but still you struggle onward. Invariably to a swift and bloody demise.

The power-ups, the unlockable abilities simply add even greater depth to this wonderful game, but sometimes it doesn't pay to unlock everything.

Sometimes, less is more.

To truly understand that, you would need to play it.

This is one of the reasons I have gone back time and time again. It has great depth, much more than you would expect from what, at first seems to be just a very pretty addition to the hack & slash genre.

First impressions are incredibly deceiving and as I stated above, I dismissed Dead Cells after one or two attempts, but upon my return several months later suddenly approached the game with less abandon and a little more thought and it paid dividends.

From a gamer's perspective it delivered in spades.

As pixel pusher it was the stuff of dreams.

The animations are wonderful with the pixel art having a flavour all its own, due to it being created in lo-poly and then converted into 2D. The environments are superbly rendered and lit to create an atmosphere of dread and dark terror.

The music is perfect and the action frenetic.

My only complaint is that I want the world to be ten times as big. Regardless of the fact that I can now reach the end or reasonably close before getting severely humiliated time without number, I still wish there was more to explore. It is that enjoyable finding another door or attaining a power-up that will then enable me to reach a previous visible but unreachable area.

I cannot truly explain why this title connected so deeply, but it really is a star among many fine products that can be found these days.It truly deserves the accolades the industry has thrown its way and my only disappointment is hearing there will not be a sequel. But based upon this truly phenomenal title I most certainly will keep Motion Twin on my radar for their next release.They are truly a gaming force of nature. Genius!

PlayStation.2

NTSC U/C

POWERED BY QUAKE III

STAR TREK
VOYAGER
ELITE FORCE

SET PHASERS TO FRAG

TEEN

191
193

FUSION

FUSION

FAIL

Article by Arron Davies

Game   : Star Trek Elite Force
Year   : 2001
System : Playstation 2

Captains log......, and what a massive, brown, smelly toilet log it is. Welcome to Star Trek: Voyager — Elite Force.

We're not talking about the PC original here, which I'm reliably informed by members of the PC master race is good — this is the PS2 version, ported by Pipe Dreams Interactive (the toilet analogies are writing themselves now).

You are Ensign Alex Munro, a member of a small, specially trained 'Hazard Team', equipped and able to deal with particularly dangerous away missions.

The intro is a static image of the main crew looking like it's been thrown together on MS Paint by someone who has never seen the show — with the contrast nobs all turned up to 11 might I add. Rolling text explains the beleaguered situation where the crew are stranded 70,000 light years from home — all ably narrated by Kate Mulgrew (Captain Janeway). This is one of the game's only redeeming features — that is the voice acting by the original cast.

Sadly that's where the likeness to the Voyager crew begins and ends — the graphics are so naff that none of the characters resemble who they are supposed to be, with the exception of maybe Tuvok, and B'elanna Torres. Seven of Nine, on the other hand, one of the finest looking women in all sci-fi has the face of a middle aged Brigitte Nielsen after a Botox acident!

The sound quality is just as rubbish with music cutting in and out and restarting between every line of dialogue. Ah, but graphics, and sound do not a good game make I hear you cry — so what about the gameplay? Well, it is not that good either!

Your first mission is set on a Borg Cube where you're tasked with rescuing your comrades. The Borg are the Federation's greatest threat and one of the most menacing villains in all sci-fi with the Borg Cube being the most grim, oppressive and deadly places a Star Fleet officer could ever find themselves. The Borg are so far advanced technologically, and so numerous, that the only way they can be met in battle is by a meticulously planned guerilla attack i.e. in and out before they adapt to your energy weapons and become all but invulnerable. You're probably thinking all this would make for claustrophobic, strategic and tense gameplay — well think again!

The Borg were obviously expecting guests as around every corner are handy health and weapon recharge points and tea making facilities. The Borg themselves jitter around, partly due to the game's ridiculously poor frame rate and the horrendous AI. A slight push of the analogue stick sees you shuffle forward, bobbing about like Charlie Chaplin, and anything more than a slight nudge sends you hurtling to warp 9.

I've read in reviews that the game will see you fight other races in other settings — but I'm done, I'm a Borg nano machines ball away from throwing the controller at the TV which may in fact see an actual improvement in the control of the character during platforming sections. Yes there's floating platforms and bottomless pits as well!

To paraphrase the wise Spock of Vulcan, as far as I'm concerned this game can live short and fail.

130

ALAN HAMMERTON TRIES TO JUSTIFY WHY HE WAS CAUGHT PLAYING WITH BUNNY GIRLS.

'So what are you playing now?', I am asked. Should I say that I am wading through the latest of the Call of Modern Warfare XII franchise, set in the infamous War of the Golden Stool (look it up) or should I say I'm playing a game where you play as a not entirely appropriately attired bunny girl (literally) who is trying to get home?

Unsurprisingly, I am playing the latter (mainly as the other is under NDA from EA..so.. shhhh) and to be honest I'm not embarrassed in the slightest as it turns out to be a damn fine game. Playing as Erina the rabbit, you awaken to find yourself in a strange world and even scarier you are no longer a rabbit but have turned into a girl who happens to have bunny ears and a fluffy tail. Realising your master is missing, you set out on a quest to find them. After narrowly avoiding being captured you join forces with Ribbon the pink-haired fairy who ably assists you on your quest.

Now I will admit the story is a little strange and not the strong point of this game, but it's competent enough to make it enjoyable but that is not the reason to play this game. The real reason to play Rabi Ribi is that it is a fantastic Metroidvania platformer meets bullet hell shooter. Don't let the cutesy graphics fool you, this game can be hardcore and utterly merciless.

At the beginning of the game you only have a simple melee weapon but it doesn't take long before your arsenal of weapons includes beam weapons, guns that spews bullets and devastating missiles. These powerful weapons are not something you can use with impunity, every attack eats away at your SP stat; tactical play is essential here as you swap between different attacks. With over forty boss battles to challenge you, it will take a serious amount of skill to beat them all — especially when you play on the harder difficulties. Get it right and you will be a bunny eared bringer of death; the bringer of fire and destruction (with the cutest cotton tail ever)

Graphically, this is another game that follows the retro pixel art aesthetic. It's pretty but generally quite basic but it's effective. Cut scenes have some excellent high-quality anime style drawings; which may lead to some awkward explaining should anyone walk in at the wrong moment. Nothing explicit of course, it's a family friendly game, but I would guess the world of Rabi Ribi must be quite warm

Speaking of the world, it is rather extensive with lots to do and many secrets to find and explore. Some areas are not accessible

right away but as the game progresses skill upgrades become available to make you jump higher or double jump which will open up these areas. Backtracking can be a problem, but you do learn a teleport skill later in the game which does make getting around a much easier prospect.

The controls on the PS4 version that I played felt excellent, very responsive and tight. When mistakes were made I knew it was my lack of skill and not the joypad that was to blame. Complete the game and you can then play some of the unlocked modes that allow a dialogue free speed run mode, hardcore difficulty modes and a boss rush option. Longevity is really built into this game.

Overall, Rabi Ribi is a true hidden gem of game that seamlessly combines two game genres together to make a highly enjoyable experience that is well worth your time. Just have your excuses ready for anyone who might see you playing it.
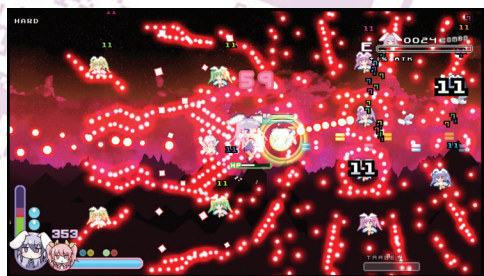
**Above:** I think we made it angry...VERY angry

FUSION REACTION 9

MARVEL

Marvel's Cinematic Universe has dominated the box office for over the last 10 years and with the Avengers storyline concluding in an almighty climax earlier this year with the film 'Avengers – Endgame' ,Colin Bell felt it was a good time to take a look back at where it all started. Well, in terms of video games that is.

Spider-Man
Parker Bros. - 1982
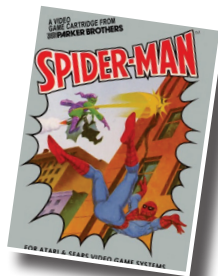
Spider-Man, Spider-Man, does whatever a spider can. Okay, so he may have arrived a little late to the party in the Marvel Cinematic Universe but the first Avenger to make the leap from the comic pages into the video game scene was old web head himself, Spider-Man. Released in 1982 by Parker Brothers for the Atari 2600 home console, the self-titled 'Spider-Man' was Marvel Comics first outing into the newly emerging video game market.

The game itself is essentially a vertical scrolling action game in which you take on the role of Spider-Man who must scale the skyscrapers of New York in a bid to locate and disarm bombs that have been left by Spidey's arch nemesis the Green Goblin. To scale the skyscrapers you had to use your trusty web shooters which can either be shot vertically or diagonally but you had to go easy on your web fluid with a limited supply and if you ran out poor old Spidey would plummet to the ground and lose a life. If that wasn't enough to contend with you also had to deal with the Goblin's henchmen who would randomly appear at windows and cut your webs when they came into contact with them, again sending you plummeting towards certain death, although you still had a chance to save yourself by shooting another web and swinging to safety.

Once past the henchmen and higher on up the skyscraper it was time to defuse the bombs which were attached to a series of girders. Bombs about to explode changed from black to red and more points were awarded for defusing the bombs when in the red state. If you survived the bombs it was on up to the top of the skyscraper and onto the final showdown with the Green Goblin who had a 'super bomb'! Simply defeat old Goby, defuse the 'super bomb' and you were onto the next level which was essentially the same but got a little faster, taller, harder and would sometimes change colour! Overall the game was and still is great fun, it plays well and our hero has never looked so good in all his 8-bit pixelated glory.
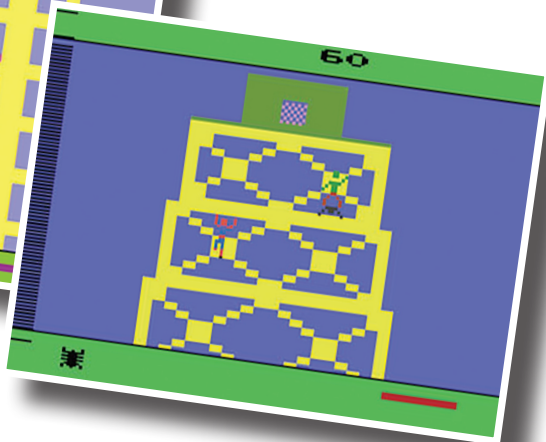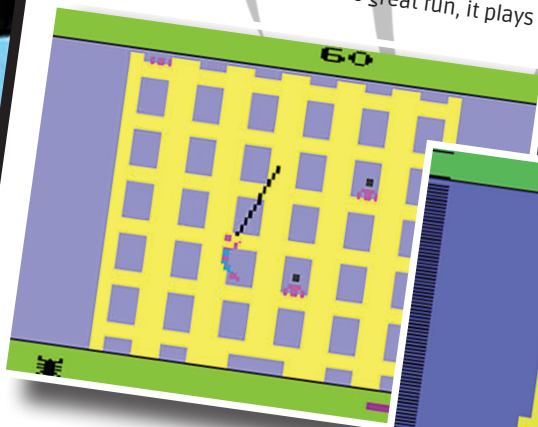
QuestProbe Feat. The Hulk
Adventure International - 1984

Released for DOS, Apple II, Atari 800, ZX Spectrum, C64 and Acorn Electron, the 'Questprobe' series was a trilogy of graphic text adventures developed and designed by Scott Adams and published by Adventure International. The series featured several of Marvel's comic book heroes and had originally been commissioned for a total of twelve adventure games however the bankruptcy of Adventure International in 1985 meant only three were ever released.

Questprobe featuring the Hulk was the first game in the trilogy and was released in 1984. The game follows the adventures of Dr.Bruce Banner and his big mean green alter ego the Hulk. With Banner's brains and Hulk's brawn it was up to you to find the mysterious 'Biogem' and put it in the correct place. Exploring the world around you, you had to overcome puzzles of varying difficulty and interact with fellow Avengers Ant-Man and Dr.Strange in a bid to complete your quest.

The view screen consisted of a nicely detailed picture which depicted the scenario or location you were in with text underneath that described things in more detail. Actions were controlled by entering simple one or two word text commands, such as 'EXAMINE', 'LOOK', 'GET GEM' for example. Directional movements were achieved by the classic text adventure commands 'N', 'S', 'E' & 'W'.

Overall this was a very promising start to what could and should have been an excellent ongoing series of Marvel adventures. If you're a fan of old school adventure games, the big green guy and love a challenge then this game is well worth checking out!

The Doom Tube of Dr.Megalomann
Mikrogen - 1987

The latter half of the 80s saw the 'First Avenger', Captain America take to our video game screens in Captain America in: The Doom Tube of Dr.Megalomann. The game was released by U.S Gold under their 'Go!' software label for the Amstrad CPC & Commodore 64 and was based on a Marvel comic book series of the same name.

The evil Dr.Megalomann has a diabolical scheme to launch rockets containing a deadly virus and it is up to you as Cap to infiltrate his secret lair below the Mojave Desert, stop the launch and save the world! Simple enough were it not be for the fact that the secret lair is one long tube, set inside another tube splitting off in to various chambers around a central core, which can only be accessed by defeating various enemies and solving puzzles in order to recover parts of a password that is required to stop the launch! To aid him in his task Cap has his trusty vibranium shield to hand and can use to help take down his enemies but the number of uses is limited, for some reason. Arms get tired perhaps? The game is tough to beat made even more challenging by the fact that it is played in real time giving the player only one hour to complete the game.

Overall reviews of the game were mixed, with magazine reviews mainly criticising the repetitive gameplay, basic graphics and poor audio. Others however, including this writer, found the game to be rather addictive and enjoyed the level of challenge the game brought. An uneasy start for our 'First Avenger' but it wouldn't be long before he came back more.

Fusion Factoid: The B-side of the game cassette contained a single called 'Who's Crying Now' by the band Resister.

FUSION
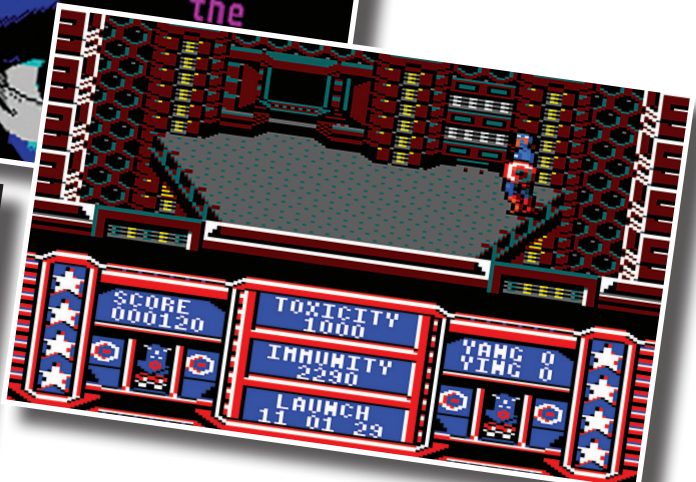
# Spider-Man vs. The Kingpin
Parker Bros. - 1991

As we swing on into the 1990s, our 'Friendly Neighbourhood' Spider-Man is back, this time taking on Spidey super villain favourite, The Kingpin, in the aptly titled Spider-Man Vs. The Kingpin. Released in 1991 by Sega and published by Acclaim Entertainment for the Megadrive/Genesis the game is an action packed side scrolling platformer which was latterly ported to the Sega Master System and Sega Game Gear.

Once again you get to take on the role of Spider-Man and do battle with Spidey super villain bosses such as Sandman, The Lizard, Mysterio, Electro & Doctor Octopus all in a bid to obtain several keys that are required to defuse a nuclear bomb that Kingpin has set and framed Spider-Man for. If all that wasn't enough Spider-Man's wife, Mary Jane Watson has been kidnapped by the extremely difficult to deal with, Venom.

Graphics and sound were excellent, some of the best found on the 16-bit systems to date with further praise given to the game's artists for faithfully replicating the characters from the comic book. Players were also given the opportunity to make use of Peter Parker's photographic talents and were able to take pictures of the bosses and enemies during the game which in turn could be sold at the Daily Bugle for cash to buy more web fluid which you have a limited supply of.

The game was a commercial success and heavily praised by the comic book community which in turn lead to Marvel renewing their licensing deal with Sega. In 1993 the game received an update for the Sega Mega-CD which featured extra levels, refined graphics, comic book style cut scenes and a CD audio soundtrack with voice actors providing voices support the characters. An absolute must for Spider-Man and all retro Sega fans out there.
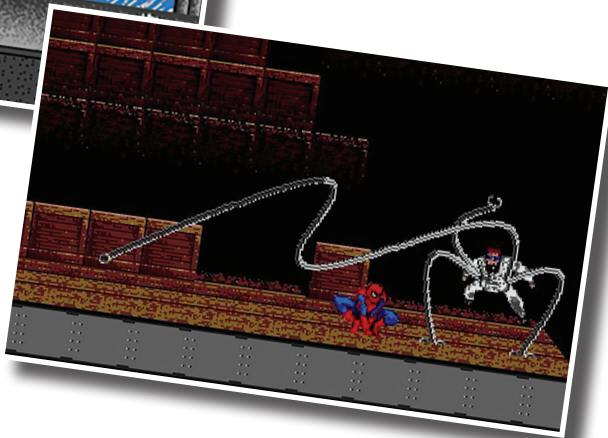
Captain America & The Avengers
Data East & Mindscape - 1991

Throughout the late 80s and early 90s Data East were the kings of the arcade side scrolling beat-em up / shoot em-up and in 1991 they gave us Captain America and The Avengers. The evil Red Skull has unleashed a diabolical plot to take over the world and in doing so has also recruited some of Marvel's super villain big hitters to help him. But not if Earth's mighty heroes, The Avengers, have anything to say about it first. Okay, so the game doesn't quite feature the full line up from the modern cinematic universe but up to four players were able to choose and play as either Captain America, Iron Man, Hawkeye or Vision.

As with all typical arcade beat-em up side scrollers of the time the aim of the game was simple. Brawl from left to right through various levels dispatching hordes of minor enemies and then defeating the super villain end of level Boss baddies. Boss Baddie's that include comic book favourites such as Klaw, Sentinels, Ultron, Mandarin, The Mighty Juggernaut and ultimately the Red Skull himself. To help break up the monotony of the side scrolling ground sequences there are welcome sections of the game that take to the skies for a bit of side scrolling shooting action. Graphics and sound were good with all characters nicely animated and once again faithfully represented and looking as they would in the comics.

A direct and faithful conversion of the arcade game soon found its way into our homes on the new 16-bit Genesis / Megadrive with software house Mindscape releasing its own home ports later for the SNES, Gameboy & Game Gear. A NES port was also released by Data East and in true Nintendo port style, the game was completely different in every way and bore no resemblance to the arcade original.

The game won't keep you entertained forever and sadly it suffers from overly repetitive gameplay but overall, it's not a bad first foray into the video game universe for Cap and his chums. Avengers Assemble!

The Incredible Hulk
Probe/US Gold - 1994

After 10 years since his last outing as part of the Questprobe series, Hulk was finally back on our screens and ready to Smash! in 'The Incredible Hulk', a side scrolling action beat-em up developed by Probe software and published by U.S Gold for the Genesis / Megadrive, SNES, Master System and Game Gear.

From the word go the loading sequence of the game features Hulk smashing the U.S Gold and Probe logos with his fists which sets up the tone for the rest of the game rather nicely. As the player you take control of the loveable big green giant as he quite literally punches and smashes his way through seven different stages all the while searching for his arch nemesis The Leader, who in true super villain style is out to take over the world! and has recruited fan favourite Hulk villains such as The Abomination, Rhino, and Tyrannus to aid him.

Music and sound effects are good and the whole game is gorgeously animated especially the characters. The Hulk himself does feel a little on the small side when on screen. However what he lacks in size he makes up for in detail and movement which is well drawn and animated. Another nice feature of the game is your ability to transform back into Hulks' human alter ego Dr.Bruce Banner who you must use to access areas of the game that Hulk cannot. But be warned! Taking a hit from an enemy as Banner makes him angry – and you won't like him when he's angry Unusually the game features three different cutscene endings, which one you get depends on what difficulty you complete the game on.

Overall the game was well received by fans of the Hulk and although it is criticised for being overly easy you just can't help being drawn in by the simplicity of this bare bones brawler and the mindless destruction and violence it delivers.
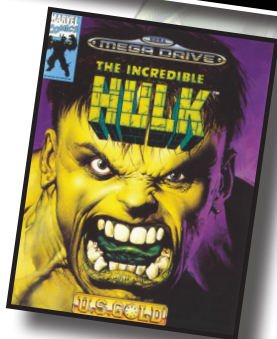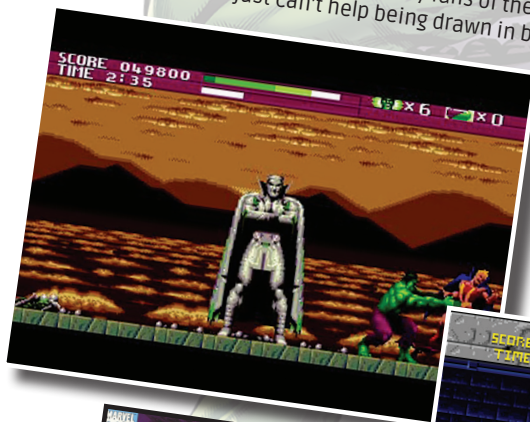
Iron Man - Sega - 2008

Fast forward into the noughties and the first video game tie in relation to the Marvel Cinematic Universe as we know it today. Iron Man, released by Sega, is a third person action shooter that is based on the movie of the same name and follows the story of Tony Stark, aka Iron Man, as he battles the Ten Rings terrorist group. The game doesn't follow the exact movie storyline and also incorporates various other super villains and storylines from the original Iron Man comic book series.

Unlike the fantastic movie the game is let down considerably with over complicated controls, woeful enemy AI and repetitive gameplay. From the word go it can be a real struggle to get to grips with the basics of flying and hovering and then there's close combat, evasive manoeuvres and three different weapons systems to get to grips with. Serval hours later, if you have lasted that long, even the most experienced of players still find this game overly frustrating.

It's not all doom and gloom however, Robert Downey Jr. and Terrance Howard reprise their movie roles as Iron Man and James Rhodes, lending their voices to the in game cutscenes. The graphics are polished and some of the larger open battlefields in later on levels are great fun to fly around. You'll soon be fed up of the repetitive animations of Iron Man destroying tanks, missile launchers and helicopters with his bare hands but the level of destruction does leave you feeling a little somewhat satisfied.

Despite being awarded 'Worst Game Everyone Played' by GameSpot in their 2008 video game awards the game is technically competent and its fast paced action and destructive elements have their moments. Not a fantastic by Sega and the new era of next gen Marvel games, but things could only get better, couldn't they?

Thor - God of Thunder
Sega - 2011

With two Marvel Cinematic Universe games now under their belt, Iron Man & The Incredible Hulk, Sega set out create and deliver a third movie tie in video game with Thor: God of Thunder. The game is your traditional hack and slash affair and marks the first standalone appearance of Thor in a video game.

The storyline doesn't exactly flow like the movie and Thor doesn't even make it to Earth. Instead you must battle your way through the numerous comic book worlds of Norse Mythology and defeat monstrous bosses all in a bid to save your home world of Asgard. As Thor you get to wield the mighty hammer Mjolnir, enemies are plentiful and the battles at times epic and along with your trusty hammer you can of course call upon the powers of thunder and lightning to aid you.

The game also attempts to capture the look and feel of the epic titan boss battles that feature in the God of War Series but fails to live up to expectations with overly long and complex trial and error attack patterns.

Remember after Iron Man I said things could only get better? Well, sadly they didn't. Overall The God of Thunder suffers from poor out dated graphics, frustrating controls, repetitive battle gameplay and a rather uninteresting plot. The music isn't bad however and the voice talents of Chis Hemsworth (Thor) and Tom Hiddleston (Loki) add a nice touch to proceedings but it is not enough to save what should have been a much better game.

# Guardians of the Galaxy Telltale Games - 2017

After the success of the big screen cinematic movie, Marvel's intergalactic band of merry misfits make their debut on the small screen in Guardians of the Galaxy: The Telltale Series. The game is a downloadable five part episodic point and click style graphic adventure game in which you strap on your Walkman and step into the boots of Peter Quill, aka Star-Lord. The game doesn't relate directly to the movie but instead blends the best elements from the Guardians comic book series and movie with a completely new and original storyline.

The storyline centres around a mysterious object known as the Eternity Forge and the Guardians task of guarding the galaxy once more. It is up to you as the player to decide on the Guardians next moves, deal with character favourites such as the Collector, the Nova Corps, Thanos and a new unknown force, driven by revenge with its sights set firmly on the power of the Eternity Forge.

Like other Telltale adventures games Guardians of the Galaxy follows the same formula, explore weird and wonderful environments, talk to other characters, interact with objects and solve puzzles, which all lead up to exciting action sequences made up of quick time events. Pivotal choices made during the course of the storyline in turn affect both immediate and future events, some of which play out in the current episode while others later on in future episodes. As well as playing as Star-Lord, at times you get the chance, although brief, to take on the roles of another Guardian members, usually during the event driven action sequences. And while everything feels instantly familiar there are still plenty of surprises around the corner and nice story twists that keep you interested and coming back for more. Stunning visuals and exceptional voice acting bring a satisfying realism and emotion to the game with flashback scenes between Peter and his mother some of the most heart wrenching moments you'll ever experience within a video game. Music, as you would expect from a Guardians franchise is truly awesome and the five episodes themselves are all named after and feature well known musical rock tracks.

Whether you're a fan of the Guardians comic book series, the movie or are just after a light hearted humorous sci-fi romp through space then this offering from Telltale is for you.
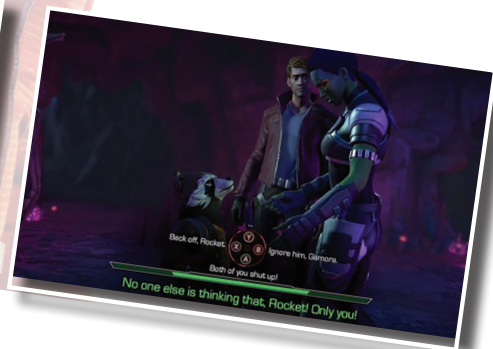
Marvel's Spider Man
Sony - 2018

It has been over 35 years now since Marvel's first outing into the video game market with 'Spider-Man' back in 1982 and it seems very apt that fast forward to 2018 and latest Marvel offering is once again 'Spider-Man' or 'Marvel's Spider-Man' to be precise.

Now don't get confused, this game is not another Marvel movie tie in and has nothing to do with the recent Spider-Man Home Coming, oh no, this is a third person action adventure game that sets the standard for what a great super hero game should be. The main storyline centres around Spidey super villain Mr. Negative who is threatening to release a deadly virus upon the city and it falls to you as Spider-Man to thwart this dastardly scheme, all the while dealing with the personal problems of your civilian alter ego Peter Parker. Now this is where the game could have stumbled somewhat however game developer Insomniac does a fantastic job of balancing Peter's story arc with that of Spider-Man's, and you generally find that what happens with Peter is setting up the stage for Spider-Man's action packed sequences.

Not too unlike 2004's Spider-Man 2 on the PS2 there's still huge focus on web swinging, which again Insomniac completely nails and as well as the main storyline there are plenty of side missions spread around the massive Manhattan cityscape to keep you interested. It's not long either until your going toe-to-toe with a variety of Spider-Man super villain favourites such as Kingpin, Electro, Rhino, Scorpion and Vulture to name but a few.

Graphics are stunning and the game really showcases what next gen consoles are capable of and characters are brought to life with some truly exceptional voice acting. The only one gripe about the game is that it suffers a little from repetitive game play after a while, in terms of the generic crime fighting and you soon find yourself looking forward to getting back to the more action packed Spidey segments.
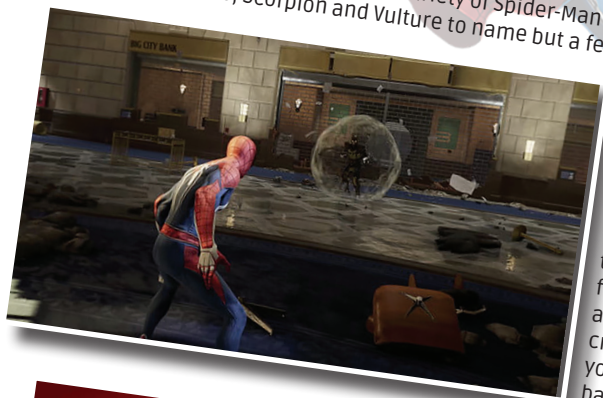
YOUTUBE SENSATION OCTAV1US GOES A LITTLE BERSERK ON US!

■ **The plot offered by Berzerk is more complex than you might expect from a classic arcade game.**

Marooned on a hostile planet, robots butcher your team and you find yourself in an electrified maze. Now, your only hope is to dodge the murderous androids that stalks its halls — and just hope that the enormous grinning face of Evil Otto doesn't appear to finish you off.

That's certainly a development from 'there's aliens trying to camp out on Earth. Shoot them'.

First popping up in 1980, Berzerk was the brainchild of Alan McNeil of Stern Electronics. The concept — rather romantically — came to him in a dream.

This would be the first mainstream cabinet to use revolutionary technology to speak to the player — a delightfully crunchy tone delivered by a TSI speech-integrated circuit.

Even now, the game certainly holds up — both as an arcade game and in its numerous console ports. But what cements it into a special part of folklore is the persistent rumour that it killed people. Not by falling on victims or lumbering after them with a kitchen knife — but with the game itself.

In around April 1982, 19-year-old Peter Burkowski wandered into Friar Tuck's Game Room in Illinois, heading straight for Berzerk.

According to the story, after typing his name into the high scores twice, Burkowski dropped a quarter into another nearby machine and promptly dropped dead. A coroner's report described a heart attack. This was the first reported death connected with Berzerk — but still, the machine thirsted for blood.

Jeff Dailey, playing Berzerk just a few months earlier in the same location, was playing the game when he also copped it — again, from a heart attack. The game displayed his score before he died — 16660. Blazing from the screen was the number of the beast.

Now for the part where I say that these persistent rumours are mostly persistent b**llocks.

First off, Jeff Dailey is often cited in retellings of the story. But any information you may find of him is purely anecdotal. There are no records of a Jeff Dailey dying of a heart attack in that location in that year.

Also, unless you're — frankly — a bit of a nut, you're not going to believe that the high score just happened to include 666 bang in the middle.

However, Peter Burkowski did indeed exist — and he did indeed die on that day in Friar Tuck's after playing arcade games.

The Chicago Tribune did actually report his death in April 1982. Although it doesn't point the finger at Berzerk itself, we do know that this was what Burkowski was playing from interviews with the arcade's owner.

So there is truth in the legend. Berzerk may have given one player that final push to the next life. Or maybe not.

But the next time you see Stern's beautiful, murderous robot-packed game set up in the arcade — do you really want to take that risk?

Below: Ocatv!us has gone berzerk I tell ya!

MICRONAUTS

TOY POLLOI TAKES A LOOK BACK AT THIS POPULAR 70S TOY.

Think back on some of your favourite toys you owned as a child. It may surpirse you to know that many of them have a hidden past; especially when it comes to their origins.Micronauts are a great example of this hidden history.

My first Micronaut figure arrived in the early '80s as a Christmas present. At the time I had no idea what he was, or of any story behind him. I just thought he looked amazing. My brother and I were both given one figure and a vehicle, he got a yellow Time Traveller and the Star Searcher, and I got the

Photon Sled with the orange Time Traveler and I can remember him clearly, bright orange clear plastic body with a chrome silver head, white boots and gloves, and a golden chest piece. These were the only Micronauts we ever got, but they started off my love for these tiny little robot explorers.

Micronaut toys were released by Mego (Airfix in the UK) and ran from 1976 to 1980. But before that they had a rather strange start. In the early '70s, Takara was producing a toy called Combat Joe, based on Hasbro's G.I.Joe 12 inch figures that were popular in the US, and became Action Man in the UK. The 12-inch dolls didn't prove that popular so Takara had the bright idea of re-using

the moulds to create a clear plastic figure with chrome inner cybernetic implants and atomic engine inside its chest, he was called Henshin Cyborg.

Henshin Cyborgs ran for a couple of years and spawned a few enemies, outfits and accessories including Shonen Cyborg, a shorter 8-inch boy, a Cyborg Jaguar, the enemy King Waldar, and their ally Android 'A'. The smaller 8-inch Shonen Cyborg was reworked a few years later and released in the UK by Denys Fishers as 'Cyborgs'. To help expand their toy range Takara took the larger Cyborg figures and decided to shrink them down to 3 ¾ inches allowing them to sell toys at a cheaper price point, and so Microman was born. Microman figures were marketed as being the actual size of cyborg beings called 'Micros' that originated from the planet Micro Earth, disguising themselves as action figures while on planet Earth. Ingenious!

The first wave of Microman called Microman Zone included four figures and several kit form vehicles that needed to be assembled. As the popularity of the line increased new figures and vehicles were added and it veered away its initial Henshin Cyborg influences. During the heyday of the Microman line in 1976, the US toy company Mego licensed Microman and distributed them worldwide as the Micronauts, which is how I came to know them. The Micronauts released worldwide was a cut down version of the Microman line, with a smaller selection of figures and vehicles being produced, but with some other added toys that had not come out in Japan.

Like much of my current toy collection it starts with that one memory from childhood, and the orange 'Time Traveller' stuck with me to this day. So he was obviously going to be the first one I tracked down along with the Photon Sled that I had spent so many hours playing with as a child. The Time Travellers

are such a classic 70s toy for me, clear plastic with chrome parts looks so futuristic, and for the time the figures were very well articulated and pose-able. Once I had my childhood toys I moved onto the Star Searcher, which although was my brother's toy, was one I played with loads. I spoke to him about it recently, and even showed him the boxed version I now own, and he doesn't remember it at all. He was much more into computers and obviously didn't get the same connection that I had got from the toys we played with.

It's funny how your memories play tricks on you as well. As a child, I had remembered the Star Searcher as being this huge bus like toy that fires missiles, had a working crane, and loads of other cool features. When the package arrived at my house and I opened it up, the Star Searcher was   so small. The features were there, but I couldn't believe how tiny it was. But even though it wasn't quite what I had remembered it was so great to have one again, and I've had hours of fun taking it apart and playing with all the gimmicks and

features the toy has.

Another toy I remember playing with as a child at a play centre was a 6-inch tall black robot with magnetic arms, legs and head. I had never associated this with the Micronauts toys, but it turns out he was their enemy. His name is Baron Karza, and he was one of a few toys that Mego had added to the Micronauts line taken from other franchises. Baron Karza was based on the robotic character from a 1976 cartoon called Kotetsu Jeeg. With a change of colour and a new head, Kotetsu Jeeg was now Baron Karza (and also Force Commander with another colour change and head swap), and he is really cool. The arms and legs have ball bearings at the joints which attach to a magnet stored inside the body of the figure, so you can remove them and swap them around, and his missiles are fists, what more could you want.

This toy family tree is what makes collecting vintage toys so fun. The history of a toy line may not be what you think and can link back via a series of other toys to something unexpected. People are often amazed when I say that Micronauts started life as G.I.Joes (Action Man), but that really is how they started.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

When the Micronauts Time Travelers were released in the West they all came on the same style card with no information about them. All you knew about them was that there were four different colours to collect, clear, yellow, blue and orange. It was only recently I found out that they have names, or at least they did when they were originally released in Japan. In the Microman world they are called George (clear), Jack (yellow), Jesse (blue), and John (orange). Now you know!

Sensible TALES

STOO CAMBRIDGE
TELLS US ANOTHER
TALE FROM HIS TIME AT
SENSIBLE SOFTWARE

■ It's funny how some memories pop back into your head when you're least expecting it.

Take eating the humble British chip which I'm sure is the staple for many a late night game development. These days I'll eat one and nothing out the ordinary occurs, but on occasion I'll be dorning a wry smile as I'm taken back to the late 1990s and those Sensible offices in good ol' Saffron Walden. You see one day a simple chip in a waste paper bin was the cause of much turmoil and a few chuckles too — let me explain.

We had an office manager who took care of all the day to day stuff, the comings and goings, answering the phones, managing supplies and such like. So this chap who I'll call 'Mr.X' was nice enough, and was certainly into his Amiga like most of us, but one thing he really was not keen on was food in the workplace; well more specifically hot food being anywhere near his office — which was on the 2nd floor next to Jon and Chris' office. We all worked on the 1st floor with the ground floor housing the recreation room and kitchen to give you an idea of layout.

So one day when he was out to lunch somebody, who shall remain anonymous, decided to not only eat a few chips in the office of Mr.X but also leave a few in his waste paper bin just to make sure the point was noted. Well you can imagine the uproar when Mr.X returned to his clean, tidy and not so fresh smelly chip shop odour laden desk area. You'd have though someone had formatted his hard drive! Suffice to say 'Chip Gate' spawned many a chuckle on the days, weeks and months thereafter. Eating chips has never been so much fun!

Below: No! Not those kind of chips!

Article by Dave Perry
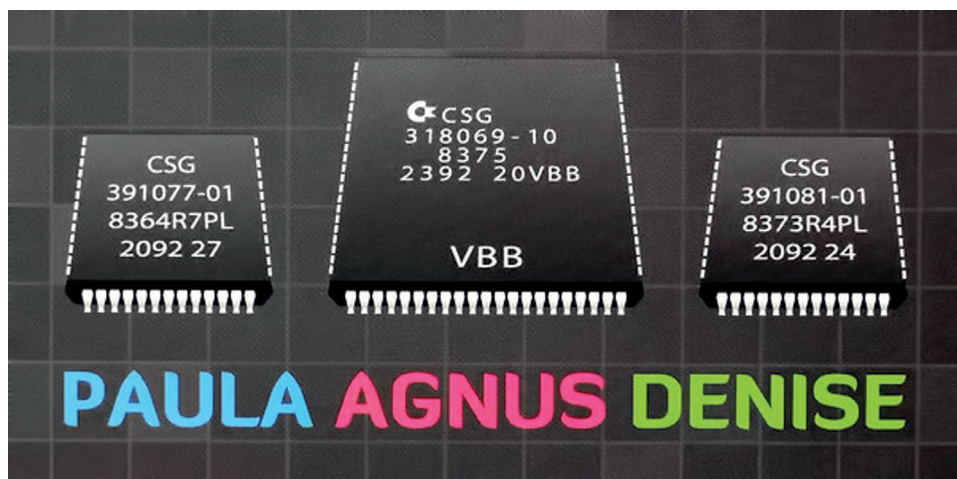
I AM GAMES ANIMAL

■ **My name is Dave and I am a retro gamer.** Perhaps the most famous retro gamer in the country. But I have a confession to make...

I have just bought a PS4 and therefore have joined the new generation of consoles.

Don't judge me. You see, I did it for the zombies. I fucking love zombies.

Having reached a ripe old age in gaming, over three decades as a professional gamer and journalist by my reckoning, I reserve the right, as I do with my music, to be something of a stick in the mud when it comes to adopting new trends and formats. In fact, no, that's not the right term. It is not that I am stubborn, or as closed off to new experiences, as the term 'stick in the mud' might suggest, it is just that I am very, very fussy about how I

choose to spend the precious few leisure hours I have these days. And, up until now, not much post 360 has excited me in gaming. Nothing that is until I saw the previews of the Resident Evil 2 reboot. It stirred something deep inside. Something, long dead was suddenly brought back to life.

And, like the zombie culture it helped to proliferate, my love of Resident Evil rose from its gaming grave. I bloody loved those games. And now, here was a second chance. The second of the original series, reimagined, re-rendered in stunning new 21st Century high definition glory and there was no question... I had to play it. I had to buy a new console to play it on. And if that meant selling my soul to Sony... then so be it. It wouldn't be the first time would it?

Note: I chose PlayStation 4 over Xbox One for the simple reason that PlayStation was the format upon which I first played the series when it was originally released back in 1996. That, and the fact the console seemed to offer way more interesting games than

Below: Watch out behind you Dave! Incoming!

its Microsoft rival.

Credited with spawning the survival horror gaming genre, Resident Evil was actually conceived by producer Tokuro Fujiwara as a remake of his earlier horror game Sweet Home (1989), and its development was eventually led by Shinji Mikami for Capcom. The first game follows the fortunes of Chris Redfield and Jill Valentine, members of an elite task force as they become trapped in a mansion infested with zombies and other monsters while searching for lost colleagues. My personal memories of playing this game in the nineties are of absolute enthralment and sheer excitement at moving further and further into a gory nightmare world, packed with the kind of edge-of-the-seat tension and horrific scenarios, the likes of which I had never

seen on a home console before. Playing with a memory card was essential, as puzzles could take hours of playing to unravel, and progress needed to be constantly saved manually throughout at various 'typewriter' locations. Trouble is, when I recently bought an original version and played it again via an old

PlayStation I was shocked to find out how unplayable it was by modern standards. A common problem with retro gaming and those tricky rose tinted glasses we all tend to wear. Authenticity, while noble and 'real' often results in disappointing when

dragged into the modern world I'm afraid. And this was no exception.

It was no good... as much as I loved playing the old games, and there were so many in the Resident Evil franchise... including off shoots like Dino Crisis, I simply could not resist the pull of a more playable, more graphically impressive incarnation. Especially as it was to be based upon perhaps the best game of the original series... the stunning Resident Evil 2.

Set two months after the events of the original Resident Evil, in its second outing players got to choose to control either police officer Leon S. Kennedy or college student Claire Redfield, who is looking for her brother Chris.... who was in the first game. Both ultimately need to escape Raccoon City after its citizens are transformed in Zombies by the Umbrella Corporation's biological weapon, and of course there are also plenty of other mutated nasties to navigate or destroy along the way like the horrific Tyrant and G. The biggest gameplay difference between this sequel and the original game though, was that this time around there were branching paths and depending upon which character you chose to play with, you would encounter unique storylines and obstacles. For a 90s game fan.... this equalled 'mind blown'.

So many aspects of the early Resident Evil games were to have a big affect on the games world

that immediately followed. The Importance of in-game inventory management, the use of 3D models over rendered backgrounds, all would become key components in many titles in the not too distant future. And, of course, beyond video games, Resident Evil is in my opinion quite rightly credited with re-popularising zombies in mainstream popular culture from the late 1990s onwards,

including having its own horror/action movie franchise starring Milla Jovovich. Indeed it would be hard to imagine a TV series' like The Walking Dead or blockbusters like World War Z coming to global audiences if the path hadn't first been cleared by this groundbreaking franchise.

So anyway, back to my

Below: Thoughtful. Should I play the original or the PS4 version of Resident Evil?

new 1GB PS4 and Capcom's reimagined version (or should that be vision?) of Resident Evil 2. Back from the dead, just as it deserves, it is superb. It is everything I hoped that a 21st reawakening of this great gaming dynasty would be, and as a result I am enjoying the Resi experience all over again, without having to worry about just how old things look or how difficult it is to control. None of the magic or atmosphere are lost in translation, trust me, and like its original incarnation I can only hope that once again Resident Evil will spark yet another revolution and we will get to see a number of the 90s finest and most loved games exhumed and nudged lovingly and positively into this century for a whole new audience to enjoy, while their original audience gets to happily reminisce about the 'first time'. Reanimation... that's the way forward. Death is not the end. 'It lives... it lives!'
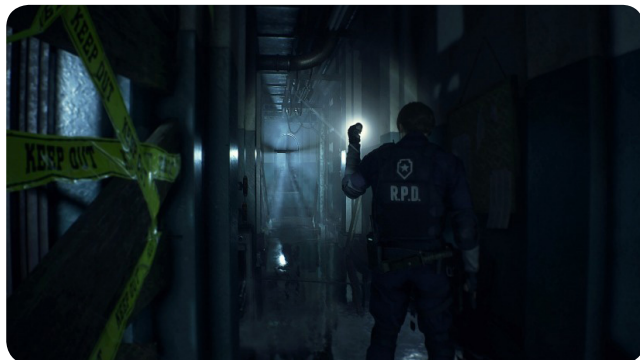
Zombie Babes:
Dominique Berner and Charlotte Courts
Photography:
Marcella McKeown
Make-up:
Jade Wilson

Left: The 'new' Resident Evil game on the Playstation 4.

START YOUR ENGINES

MARK PAYNE SHOWS US HOW TO MAKE YOUR PC ENGINE MUCH MORE POWERFUL.

Back in 1990, I didn't know much about the PC Engine, or Turbo-Grafx as it was known in the US. In all honesty I still don't. Which is why I was so intrigued to receive a Core Grafx system a couple of years back along with a Turbo EverDrive and an RGB booster that improved on the picture on modern TVs.

Immediately I was struck by the depth and quality of the games library, albeit that I was limited to the cartridge titles only on my flashcard. Playing CD games would require another retro hardware purchase and then games on top. With that in mind, when I was offered the chance to review the Super SD System 3 by Terraonion I leapt at the chance.

The Super SD System 3 is an add-on device compatible with PC Engine, Core Grafx, Core Grafx 2 and Super Grafx systems, that replaces the Turbo EverDrive and AV booster in one fell swoop. The smoked grey moulded casing looks very professional and simply slides onto the back of the Core Grafx, creating a secure friction fit. In addition to Hu-Card game cartridge emulation and improved AV output, the unit also emulates the CD ROM unit, meaning image files can be played from the SD card. This opened a whole raft of new titles previously unavailable to me with the EverDrive alone.

For the review, I ordered a 128Gb Kingston MicroSD card. The manual states that the card must be formatted in either FAT32 or ExFAT which the card was already formatted with on arrival. All that was left was moving across some files. First, the manual stated that you must have a BIOS folder with the appropriate CD ROM system BIOS dumps in the root of the SD card. A

short google and the required files were found. The manual also states that you can have up to ten BIOS files in the folder. I'm not entirely sure what the different files do, other than regions, but a quick forum search told me that in 99.9% of cases you only need one of the files anyway. This certainly appeared to be the case as I continued.

My first problem reared its ugly head when I moved some CD images over to the SD card. I like my images to be in subfolders, but when selecting my 'A' folder for titles beginning with A, the console would simply boot the first game that it found in the folder. I eventually worked around this by dumping all the CD images in the root of the card. With Hu-Card images I can navigate the folders and select the individual games independently, so this struck me as odd, but on re-examination of the instructions it does explain that folders are seen as a CD to launch, and not to be navigated. My bad.

The first time you select a CD game the Super SD System 3 will prompt you to pick a CD system BIOS file. I simply went with the V3.0 mainly because I didn't know any better, but this can be changed later through the options screen.

In the options screen, there are a few tweaks that can be made. These include an option to boot the last game run upon power-up, the ability to enable an 'in-game trigger' to allow soft return to the menu, and various options for the management of save files. It also has an option to emulate the Arcade Card, which is basically a 2mb RAM expansion supported by certain titles only.

In use, the Super CD System 3 performs admirably. It is worth noting that there is a small amount of noise in the image on the screen, something that has been much discussed on the internet, but I must admit I needed to look to notice it. I have the latest revision of the hardware on which the previous AV issues have been mostly addressed, and my Core Grafx has not been recapped and is running over a very cheap unshielded Mega Drive 2 cable. With that in mind the small amount of visual noise I saw was not in any way distracting from my gameplay. The sound seemed perfect, with a slight hum when bright scenes like the Konami logo is displayed. I have the same on my Mega CD, so I think this might be a TV issue. However, any slight niggle in no way outweighs the fantastic capabilities of the add-on.

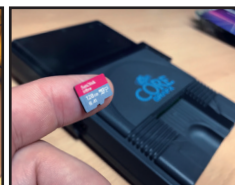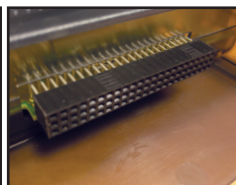My opinion? If you can, you should get one. It opens a new world of possibilities for your PC Engine!