

# Welcome to FIFE FE FE CLASSSICS

Back in the Seventies and early Eighties the arcade was king. While videogames were progressing at an astonishing rate in homes throughout the world, it was the arcade in the West and East where most of the biggest technical leaps and bounds were being made. Companies like Atari, Sega and even Nintendo were pushing specific hardware boards to create unique gaming experiences, many of which had never been experienced before. It was an exciting time, with all sorts of innovations appearing. While many of these classic games would appear on home systems, they were often pale shadows of the arcade originals, ensuring gamers in their thousands continued to flock to the many arcades that were found all around the world. The following pages celebrate that golden period by collecting some of the greatest content from the last decade of Retro Gamer. From the origins of Space War to the creation of OutRun and Pac-Man, this book will give you fascinating insight in to one of the gaming's most significant periods.





# ARCADE CLASSICS

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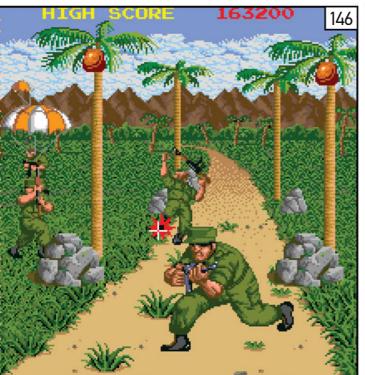
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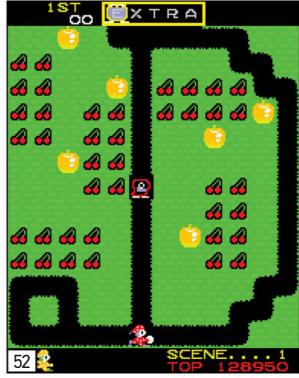


bookazine series



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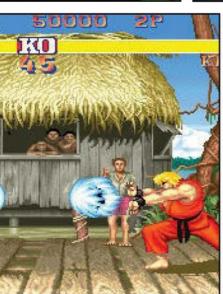
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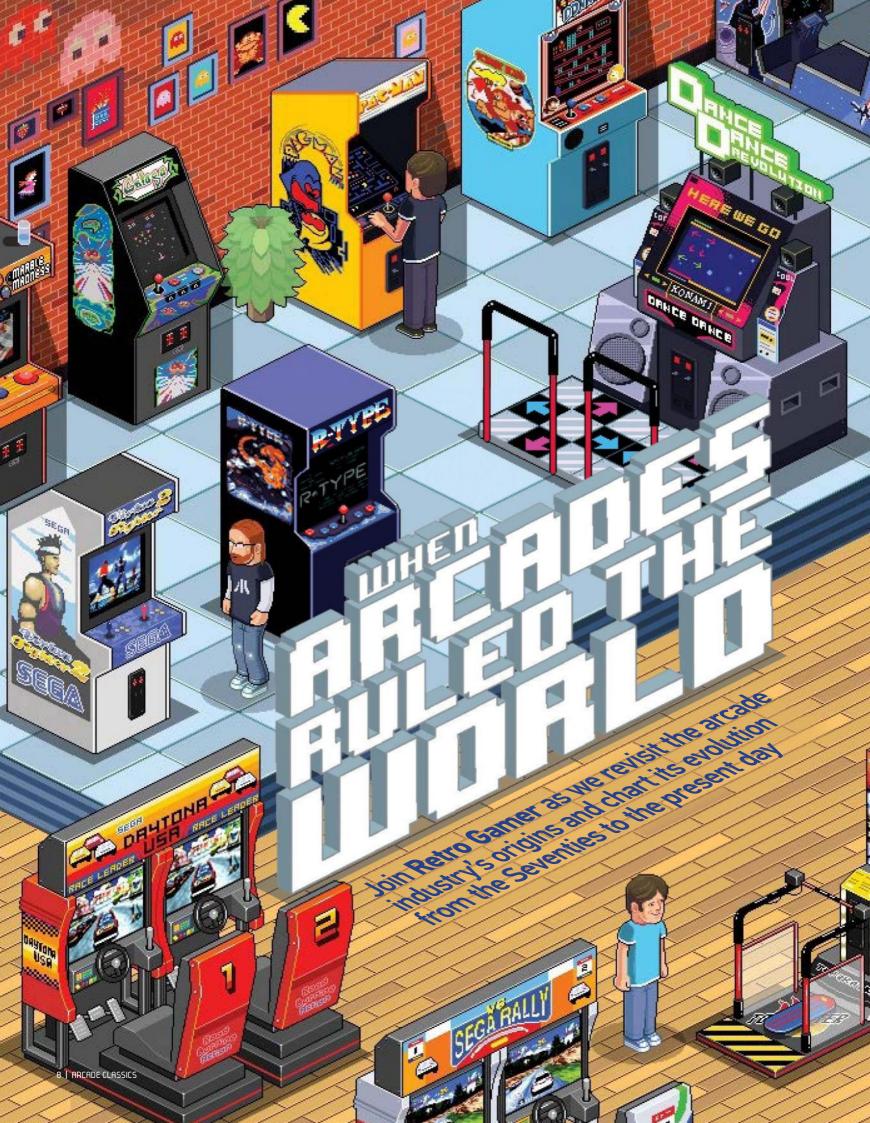
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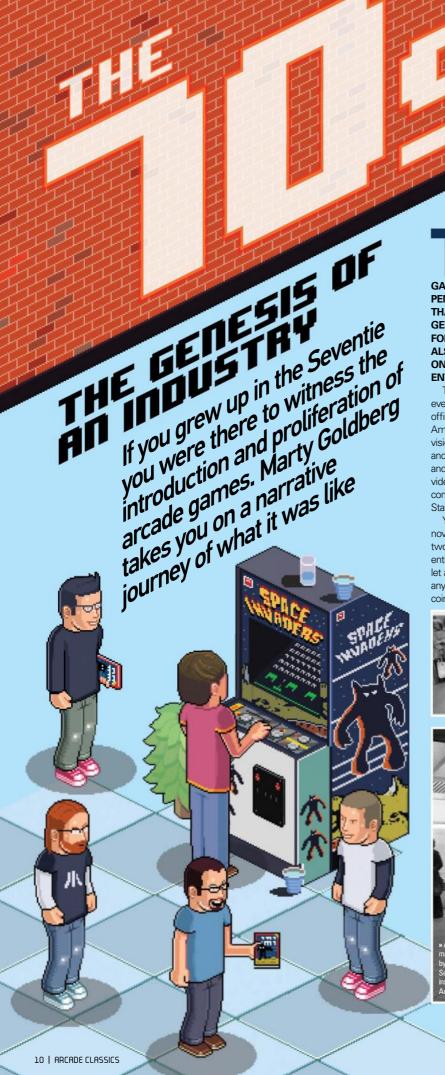
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HE SEVENTIES ACTUALLY
REPRESENTS AN
INTERESTING PERIOD IN
TIME FOR VIDEO ARCADE
GAMES. ONE OF GROWTH AND
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FOR THE NEW MEDIUM WHILE
ALSO WREAKING TOTAL HAVOK
ON THE LONG ESTABLISHED COIN
ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY.

The seed for this world influencing event had begun in 1969 when two office mates and friends at audio giant Ampex decided to pursue the one's vision of marrying computer technology and arcade gaming. Nolan Bushnell and Ted Dabney started to create a video arcade game based on an earlier computer game the two witnessed at Stanford called *Spacewarl*.

You have to understand what a novel if not naive concept this was, that two guys could come in and create an entirely new entertainment medium let alone to hope that it would gain any traction in the already established coin industry. First, they were out in



California. This was a location about as far away from Chicago, the established mecca of the coin industry, as you could possibly be. Second, they'd have to convince an established coin company to take a chance on it. The industry at that time was dominated by companies that had already been around for decades like Williams, Gottlieb, Bally and Chicago Coin.

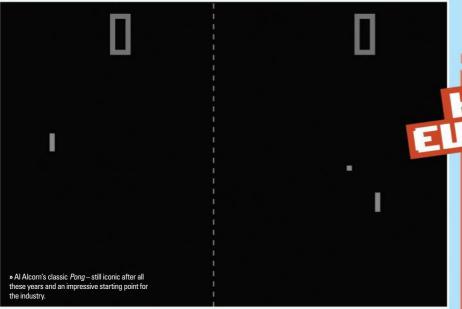
» Seen here is the paper tape for storage of code typically used by video arcade game authors in the mid Seventies

such as those at Atari

The games they were pumping out had been mainly pinball and gun based, though over the Sixties more specialised electro-mechanical (EM) games had gained popularity. Games based on simulations whose subjects would become popular as videogames almost a decade later. Ed Logg, creator of such videogame classics as Asteroids, Centipede and Gauntlet remembers his first exposure to these games: "The first time I played a coin-operated game was at the Berkeley Student Union. It was a game where you tried to shoot down bombers which appeared over the horizon. It wasn't a videogame because the planes appeared to be on a rotating piece of screen. There was a pattern so I could play the game for as long as I wanted.'

There was also the uphill battle of the stigma arcades had in a lot of communities as a hotbed for raucous teenagers or in some cases organised





## **66** My earliest memories of arcades were of shadowy places where naughty things might happen ""

Al Alcorn

crime and gambling. As Pong creator Al Alcorn relates, "My earliest memories of arcades were of shadowy places where naughty things might happen. Besides the usual pinball machines and 'love' testers there were movie machines that showed graphic movies. At Playland at the beach there was the Fascination arcade, which was grey area gambling. These places were not for family entertainment."

Bushnell and Dabney's initial goal was to start a videogame engineering firm, researching and creating games to license to the big coin companies to produce. If you're asking why they were 'engineering firms', it's because the early arcade videogames were not coded - they didn't have a microprocessor. Rather they were what's called 'state machines', a grouping of electronic circuits that carried out various functions.

» The exterior of a prototype *Pong* cabinet from the Seventies. This angular design was fairly common.

game's controls. You'd have one circuit to put an object on the screen, another to move them, another to detect a hit, and so on

They lucked out however, and found the one coin-op company based in California; Nutting Associates. Something of an upstart itself, Nutting had been formed by Bill Nutting after creating an EM-based quiz game called Computer Quiz with his brother Dave Nutting. Their initial partnership had quickly fizzled and Bill started Nutting Associates in California to sell the game while Dave started Nutting Industries in Milwaukee, Wisconsin to sell his version. Releasing a string of similar games and recently firing most of his engineering staff, Bill was looking for a new game to keep the momentum going. He got the new game in

based on the input - in this case the

» Usually a stripped down television, single game board, and a power supply were all that resided inside machines



California.

formed in July of this year and work begins on what becomes their first video arcade game, *Pong*. By mid August it's being play tested at Andy Capp's Tayern

■ Atari/Kee released Indy 800, the first arcade game in April. A massive game supporting 8 players at once. They also release video game in a full cockpit style cabinet, Hi-Way.

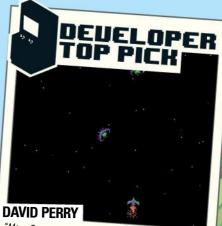
Gun Fight, the first driven video arcade

a film of the same name, the driving over of figures that look like people creates the first

Bushnell and Dabney's proposal plus a new engineer out of the deal as well as Bushnell left Ampex to join Nutting (followed by Ted close to a year later). Bushnell and Ted's deal was for Nutting to license the game for manufacturing, but they'd do all development on their own time (working after hours at Nutting and at Ted's house).

WHEN ARCADES RULED THE WORLD

By August of 1971 they were testing their prototype at a local college bar called the Dutch Goose to great results. The following month, as Bill Pitts was installing his Galaxy Game (which uses an actual full DEC minicomputer running Spacewar! code) at the Stanford Student Union they found the results at their subsequent test locations far less promising. It turned out the students at Dutch Goose were mainly students pursuing degrees in engineering, physics, and computers. Stepping out of that comfort zone of technical professionalism meant that the patrons at other locations



"Moon Cresta. In it you can stack up your firepower, so you go from weak to strong to weak. I used this idea in games for many years. You'll see it in games like Earthworm Jim (weak worm in a strong suit), Messiah (weak baby possessing a giant's body) etc. I personally like that gameplay style where you're kicking butt one minute, then very defensive the next."



» Early arcade games did

not use microprocessors or software. Rather they

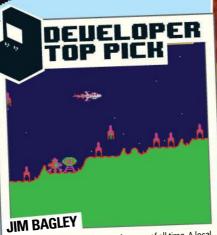
used logic chips, such as





were entirely confused by the gameplay, controls and overall presentation. In fact this was when the duo learned that presentation across the board was just as important to its success, something the big boys of the coin industry already knew. Bushnell countered with a slick new futuristic design and a somewhat clearer control scheme. A package that actually caught the attention of everyone when they showed it off in Nutting's booth at the main trade show of the era, the Music Operators of America in Chicago. The automated music industry - jukeboxes - was actually the dominant force in coin-operated entertainment at the time, with arcade games being a subset. By the mid Seventies the show would change it's name to the Amusement and Music Operators of America thanks in no small part to the rising dominance of the coin amusement industry thanks to arcade videogames.

Don't expect the type of astonished hoopla that the Apple II generated during its debut at the West Coast Computer Faire six years later though. The common questions Bushnell and Dabney got were "Isn't this just a novelty?" or "Isn't it expensive to broadcast?" (yes, some thought that because there was a television inside that the picture of the game was being broadcast). Regardless, contrary to



"Scramble is my favourite arcade game of all time. A local Spar shop got a sit-down cocktail cabinet of it and ran a competition of who could be the first to complete all the levels. I have many great memories playing Scramble, even to this day, and now my girls enjoy playing it too!."

some modern retellings of the story, their game (named *Computer Space* by Bill Nutting) went on to sell what is considered a decent average run for an arcade game at the time – enough that the medium was considered viable.

Bushnell and Dabney famously left Nutting the following year to formally start their engineering firm Syzygy Company, only to have it grow into the future industry juggernaut Atari Inc thanks to a game developed by their first



With simple gameplay and controls,

the cabinet developed by Dabney

also featured a philosophy he and Nolan had learned during their *Computer Space* days. "Nolan was careful to have *Pong* look very understated so as not to offend women or families. We wanted to stay away from the girly (side art) that were on many pinball machines," states Alcorn. *Pong* is what drove the industry to take notice of the new medium, and a quick expansion as new companies sprung up everywhere with their own versions of the game. Once the big boys jumped on board as well and demand

at established coin distributors grew across the globe, arcade space gradually became a fight of old technology and new as owners stocked both and the major companies continued to produce both. In fact for much of the Seventies pinball machines and video arcade machines were neck and neck in popularity and earnings.

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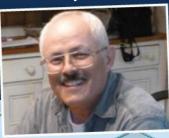
race that was understandable, as video arcade games were still in such a primordial state. Every new game was some new feat, especially since they were still being created purely through engineering. Colour came early on, thanks to Atari's Cyan research lab in Grass Valley that developed an alternate full color version of Gotcha that Atari released in October 1973. Animated characters were introduced by Ramtek's Baseball in 1974 as the industry moved to make more detailed and interesting games beyond simple ball and paddle driven games. 1975 saw the intro of giant

# It wasn't a videogame because the planes appeared to be on a rotating piece of screen ""

Ed Log

# ARCADE INITIATION

Though largely unknown to many, Jeff Bell is uniquely experienced to comment on the video arcade game industry. Starting in February 1973 at Atari Inc, he remained in the industry until 2003 when Midway Games shut down what was left of Atari's coin operations after exiting the coin industry in 2001



When did you first experience videogames and how did you get involved with Atari and video arcade games so early on?

In late 1972 I had just applied for a job at Toys 'R Us and was just about to go into the hospital for health issues when my friend Keith Lafever came over to my house and excitedly said 'You've gotta see this! You've gotta come!'. So I jumped on the back of his motorcycle and ran up to Sunnyvale Bowl where there was a Computer Space. I put the only five dollars I had to my name in that machine, it was my first coin-op videogame, and I said "I

want to do this (create games)." It was the coolest thing I had ever seen. When I got out of the hospital in November one of my friends, Derek Becker, was working at this place called Syzygy collecting coins out of pinball and videogame machines for them. He told me all about Syzygy and their game Pong that was coming up. When I got out of the hospital it turned out all my friends were working there at Syzygy. I went in and met Nolan Bushnell, who gave me a job, but I couldn't start until February when my doctor cleared me. Because I couldn't lift anything I became the third Pona inspector.

What jumps out about video arcade games in the Seventies era for you compared to the later decades?

In 1972-74, we had to explain to people what a videogame was. By 1976 that had changed to explaining what a 'coin-op' video game was. By the Eighties we needed to explain what the 'Real Atari' was.

## Can you elaborate on the last two statements?

Sure. By the mid Seventies, the first impression many people had of videogames came from home game consoles. Whenever somebody discovered that I worked at Atari, they would



say something like 'Oh yes! I have one...', and I would feel the need to explain that I worked in 'Coin-Op', that a quarter was required to play. By the Eighties, perhaps as an outgrowth of the Consumer Division's success, we began to refer to ourselves in conversations and on T-shirts as 'Coin-Op - The REAL Atari'. This wasn't well received by the other divisions. I heard that we had been asked to not use the phrase. Today I still respond as I did in the Eighties, 'I worked at Coin-Op, the REAL Atari'.

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multiplayer games like Indy 800 and the continuation of the expansion of gaming ideas, including a variety of driving and war games. However, it was one technological advancement in video arcade games that made the biggest splash that year: the addition of microprocessors.

All the major arcade companies had already begun exploring adding microprocessors to pinball machines during 1974, and by early 1975 that had extended into video arcade games: Lead by Cyan at Atari and Dave Nutting Associates (ves. that Dave Nutting) that was now affiliated with Bally/Midway. Dave Nutting's project - transferring the Taito-licensed Western Gun into a microprocessor driven game - was first in November 1975. That was (almost ironically) followed by Atari/Kee's Quiz Show quiz game in April 1976 at the same time they were debuting one of the last of their big non-microprocessor games, Breakout.

Even with all this advancement of

arcade games were still just more of a curiosity in the public consciousness. It really wasn't until this mid-Seventies period and the arrival of the inexpensive TV-tennis home game systems like Atari's Home Pong and Magnavox's Odyssey 100 and 200 that public awareness really began to take off. Certainly video arcade games had been making appearances in film and television since the early Seventies (the first well-known one being Computer Space's appearance in 1973's Soylent Green). But now with the buzz generated by home games, the appearances in those entertainment mediums became more frequent.

The real growth of video arcade games though, both as the dominant force in the coin industry and as a popular form of entertainment in general, started in the latter part of the Seventies. A result of what was really a perfect storm of reasons, driven by the uniquely timed appearance of a very popular movie combined with a cornucopia of microprocessor driven devices along

#### WHEN ARCADES BULED THE WORLD

» Electromechanical games predated video games in the arcade, informing the cabinet design of the latter.



with some very popular video arcade games being released. From a pop culture perspective the late Seventies was an explosion of high-tech interest by the public, arguably fuelled by the 1977 release of the film Star Wars. Demand for electronic driven consumer devices, gadgets and entertainment seemed to skyrocket and in the arcades videogames were poised to fulfill a kid's demand to live their own space battledriven fantasy.

The game which lead the charge to feed that hunger, and became a phenomenon of its own during the process, was Space Invaders. Created by the same person behind Taito's Western Gun. Tomohiro Nishikado, in 1978 it took Japan by storm and soon after the rest of the world. Games like Exidy's Star Fire brought the literal Star Wars experience to the arcade, but it was the further extreme popularity of 1979 space shooter games like Namco/Midway's Galaxian and Atari's Asteroids and their everincreasing game technology that gave a taste of what was in store for the Eighties while providing a thirst for more.

It took eight years for the beginning of the dominance of videogames in the





coin industry to come about, however 1979 was really when the demand for the engaging medium skyrocketed. Many non-traditional locations (family restaurants, doctors offices, gas stations, etc) suddenly started operating the computer-driven machines there, and for a kid it seemed everywhere you'd go there was an opportunity for you to ask your parents for a quarter (or a ten pence piece in the UK) to play a game. It would also set up a time when dominant hits were first released as coin-op machines and later ported to home versions, something that would last until the mid Eighties.







» Gottlieb's

Q\*bert (1982)

was one of the

US-developed

arcade games

character-based

most successful

CLONE LURRS Jeff Minter discusses Eighties arcade tributes

WHED A

physics in titles such as Asteroids, Space Wars and Defender. The increased emphasis on algorithmic AI, physics and randomness favoured a more improvisational and tactical playing style, due to the lack of scripted events. It was a big challenge to be innovative in the face of such revolutionary competition. All Western developers were strongly inspired by the master designs coming from Japan. For example, American games such as Centipede, Q\*Bert and Robotron 2084 were strongly influenced by Japanese character animation styles."

While the Japanese had the edge with character-based titles like Pac-Man, Dig Dug and Mr Do! American designers led the way with engaging and novel action games and shoot-'em-ups such as Joust, Tempest and Defender. "Character and shooter games were the two genres that defined the era," states Eugene. "On the character side, Pac-Man, Donkey Kong, Q\*bert, Frogger and Mario Bros set the pace; and in the shooters the defining titles were Missile Command, Defender, Berzerk, Robotron, Galaga, Centipede, Tempest and Zaxxon, among others."

Williams Electronics was, alongside Atari, arguably the most pioneering of the early Eighties US coin-op publishers. It was one of a number of American companies, including Bally, Stern and Gottlieb, which made the transition from producing mechanical amusements and pinball games to video arcade games. Eugene had started



"Gauntlet is my favorite arcade game; in fact I bought my parents an upright Gauntlet that they had in their basement for many years. I can still hear the game –

'Welcome, Elf!'

# What's your earliest memory of an arcade? I'm so ancient my memories

of arcades actually go back to before the dawn of time when there were no videogames When I was five years old our family started what was to be a succession of annual Welsh holidays near Snowdonia. Central to these outings were frequent visits to The Golden Sands on the seafront at Tywyn, a combined chip shop and arcade. No videogames, but I remember playing on the grabber machines, penny slot machines, pushers, mechanical horse racing thingies and those driving games that had a rolling film with the track on it and your car was on a stick. The first arcades I used to hang out in with any kind of regularity were the old Piccadilly Arcade up in London, and the Crystal Rooms off Leicester Square. The old Piccadilly Arcade no longer exists as it was underneath where the Trocadero is these days. I can still remember exactly where the Star Fire machine was (that I put some tasty high scores on).

# Why do you think so many developers started off making clones?

Cloning an arcade game was a good way to learn the basic necessary skills of game design and programming.

Arcade games are existing designs that you know work, so programming them when you're learning teaches you a lot. You learn the basic skills of moving stuff around, reading joystick inputs, making noises and implementing game logic

using an established template and you know when it's working right. When it's working but doesn't feel like it should then you learn about tuning stuff as you adjust things to make it correct. You learn

about hardware limitations and you start maybe learning ways to program around them if you're trying to clone an arcade game that came from hardware more powerful than you are using. And at the end of the day if you weren't too cheeky about it after all that good learning you ended up with a product you could sell.

# You've cloned many popular shoot-'em-ups. What do you love about the genre?

I've just always loved shooters, I enjoy the headspace they put you into, the so-called 'zone' state that is always the place I aim to take you to in my games. I particularly enjoyed the look of some of the earlier shooters, again the phrase "abstract beauty" springs to mind. In most games the graphical limitations of old systems just make the games look like shit when viewed through modern eves. but when you look at stuff like the pure glowing vectors of Asteroids and Tempest. Galaxian with its insectoid primary-coloured aliens like little bright jewels against the star-studded black: Defender where you really could visibly blow things into their component bits like some kind of mathematical deconstruction

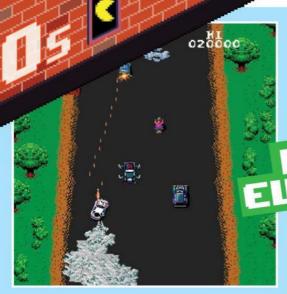
firework display; the absolutely perfect balance of beauty and brutality that is Robotron. Those things are still beautiful now, but back then, when only a few years previously the whole idea of 'game' involved cards or boards or sports you were rubbish at because you didn't have 3D vision, the opportunity to step into and dance within these exquisite glowing other-dimensional worlds was something extraordinary and wonderful It's that feeling that I want to try to convey to people today. with the kind of stuff I make.

RCADES RULED THE WOR.

# Your own games improve on the arcade originals, why do you do this?

I think it's just a natural progression; when I started the first things I did were stuff like Centipede and Space Invaders on the ZX81 and *Defenda* on the VIC-20, and then Atari started getting less tolerant of people doing clones and I wanted to do a Centipede-style game on the VIC anyway, so I perforce had to make it not so obviously Centipede-ish, and ended up making something that I actually liked more than vanilla Centipede. Learning that it's okay to colour outside the lines is an important part of anything really. Scrolling shooter suddenly didn't have to mean Defender or Scramble - why not camels or sheep? These days of course it's kind of inverted from what

> it used to be back then, where the arcade games were way more powerful than the hardware you were trying to port them to. Doing a simple remake is pretty easy, but a modern update of a game is tricky to do well



out programming sound and gameplay features in pinball games for Atari and Williams, and this early industry experience was to become a huge influence in the creation of his arcade titles. Defender and Robotron 2084.

"Pinball was a great training ground," he tells us. "Audio was especially important in pins because there is so much dead time where the ball is rolling around the playfield, not hitting any targets. Background sounds were used to generate increased tension and excitement as a game approached a climactic event. My pinball sound work lead to the creation of many of the amazing synthesised sounds for Defender, Robotron and other games in the classic era at Williams." The format

» Bally/Midway gave players the chance to live out their 007 fantasies in

Sny Hunter (1983).



» Diq Duq (1982), a tunnelling action manufacturer Namco.

of the traditional pinball table was also a source of inspiration for other game manufacturers. "Games such as Breakout and Space Invaders adopted the basic human versus machine pinball game style - three balls (or lives) per game, and the ability to win an extra ball (life) with a high scoring achievement," Eugene explains. "So it was a natural transition to move from pinball to video."

Defender's dazzling, pyrotechnic visuals and blistering sound effect took arcades by storm, and its free-flowing, multi-directional gameplay represented a huge step up from Konami's Scramble released a year earlier. The aural delights of Williams arcade games became a signature of Eighties arcades, along with Pac-Man's distinctive wakka-wakka. Berzerk's robotic speech and the jingles and digitised movie quotes from Atari's Star Wars cabinet. Williams also had one of the first two-player cooperative arcade titles with surreal physics-based flap-'em-up Joust. "This was one of the first ideas I had on the game," says designer John Newcomer. "If it could be designed for two players to compete or cooperate simultaneously, it meant two coins would go in the machine at the same time.

"Coin-op games at the time were all single-player, except Wizard Of Wor and Space Wars, which was a dead game by this point. My hope was that Joust would be a step towards making two-player take off in subsequent games. Unfortunately, people did not go for the two-player feature. It helped the cash box a bit, but the vast majority of plays were still single-player." But while Joust was the exception to the norm in 1982, it paved the way for later Eighties

multiplayer coin-ops like Gauntlet, Bubble Bobble, Salamander and Double Dragon.

» R-Type (1987) is one of

esigner of Q\*bert Warren Davis remembers, "I probably played games in bars more than in arcades, and you would know what games the bar had. So when you went back and they had a new game, it was a big deal, You'd check it out, maybe watch other people play and then decide if you wanted to risk one of your own quarters on it.

"Williams seemed to have the most intense game experiences. I wasn't particularly a fan, but I admired the skill a person had to have to master their games. My favorite Williams game was probably Joust. Who knew I would later get to program Joust 2? I liked Dia Dua and the Star Wars vector game from Atari, Berzerk from Stern, Pac-Man and *Tron* from Bally/Midway. I always thought Williams pushed the envelope

# DEVELOPER TOP PICK

"My favourite arcade game was the excellent Williams Defender, written by Eugene Jarvis in 6502 machine code. I loved the challenge of the game, and for me was the first game I saw in the arcades that wasn't a Space Invaders derivative, and was in colour (ie not stick-on strips on the TV screen like Space Invaders)."



» I, Robot (1983), the first polygon arcade title, from Missile nand and Tempest designer Dave Theurer



arcade game to

eclipse Space

and Williams'

98

familiar King

Kong-inspired

Super Mario.

Q\*bert and

arcades, while

983

released.

driving games Taito releases its popular game Rubble Robble

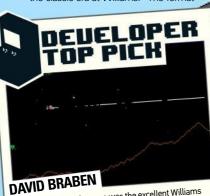
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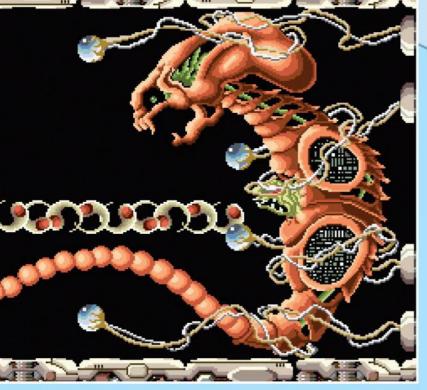
■ Atari's *STUN* Drivin' take racing and Golden Axe represent the peak

## **661** always thought Williams pushed the envelope in terms of graphics with Joust and Sinistar 77









in terms of graphics with games like Joust and Sinistar, while Nintendo had the best use of cartoony characters in their games."

"Personally, I enjoyed games from most of our competitors," admits Ed Rotberg, creator of Atari's Battlezone, the first coin-op title to allow players full freedom of movement in a 3D landscape. "Certainly Williams was at the top of the list with Eugene's games like Stargate, Defender and Robotron. Tim Skelly, whether at Cinematronics or Gottlieb (Rip Off, Star Castle, Reactor) was constantly

earning my respect. Of course, the Japanese manufacturers had some great products as well. Pac-Man and Galaga took up a lot of my time and money." Atari continued to break new ground through the Eighties, improving its vector graphic hardware to include colour for titles like Star Wars, Tempest and Black Widow, and becoming one of the first companies to produce true 3D arcade games, starting with 1984's enigmatic I, Robot. "Certainly the Vector Generator (followed by the colour VG) allowed for such games as Asteroids. Battlezone

and Tempest," says Ed. "There is a case to be made that the Vector Generator hardware allowed for decent 3D for the first time. I also think that, at the other end of the Eighties, the polygon hardware that was first used in Hard Drivin' and STUN Runner also helped keep Atari as a player in the arcade game business."

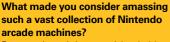
'The mix of people was key to the way it all developed," says ex-Atari designer Peter Lipson, producer of the Indiana Jones And The Temple of Doom coin-op. "So many people had excellent design skills, and the way we were mixed at work led to a lot of innovation but even more importantly, to a lot of refinement of ideas. Your co-workers had no trouble telling you when something sucked. But when you saw them flocking to your game in the lab during their break times, you knew you had something.

"Another thing people have forgotten is that arcades used to be somewhere you could go with your date just to see what new game might have shown up. I think the era of the fighting games made the arcades far less female-friendly. Not that women haven't always been players. but the casual audience seemed to be put off by the change in aura. After that it seemed games couldn't succeed just by being quirky and fresh. We were entering the equivalent of Hollywood's blockbuster era "



## MARIO I

#### Alex Crowlev talks to Retro Gamer about his Nintendo collection



Preservation - it is essential to hold on to this social history of arcade machines because it is quickly being forgotten about. Also, because arcade machines are so big most collectors only choose the best games for their collection. But I took it on my self to concentrate on Nintendo and that meant taking on and restoring some of the less well-known titles, which I am really proud off as its turns out to be quite a unique and rare collection.

#### How did you go about it initially?

My first arcade machine was Space Invaders Part II, and that was bought on eBay. From there I joined the arcade forums UKVAC & Jamma+ - it has opened the doors to a community of fellow collectors where I have imported machines from the US and found rarities amongst UK collectors and made some very good friends.



#### In your opinion, what are the highlights of your collection?

The highlights in my collection are Donkey Kong 3 and Space Launcher. Donkey Kong 3 was a kit that I managed to find in its original box complete for just \$160. I then converted a versus upright cab which I bought from Missile Command champion Tony Temple and turned it into the underrated game I love to play today. It turned out to be my favourite game in my collection. Space Launcher, apart from being a great game, is a highlight because its the only known example to exist in the world amongst the community.

#### What do you think that the arcade market lost following Nintendo's departure to home consoles?

Well to be honest until Donkey Kong came along they were copying a lot of other more successful arcade developers. But I think once Donkey Kong dominated the world it changed Nintendo forever. By 1984 arcades were dying out anyway, so it was natural for Nintendo and other manufacturers to pursue the home market. Arcades were never the same after the Eighties kids grew up, but the arcade games didn't.

#### Mario Kart Arcade GP DX was released recently in arcades. What are your thoughts on other companies taking Nintendo's property to market?

I think it's a great idea, and anyway, Sega made games and distributed them for Nintendo back in the late Seventies. I think Nintendo has to let go of some of its top titles to third parties

to help out with their huge and fantastic back catalogue of games.

possibility space of game design."

arcade games before Pac-Man were all black-and-white

alien-killing games. Pac-Man emerged with a completely unique premise: run away from cute monsters while eating dots. No violence, no guns, and a window into the

#### How do you think arcades have changed since the early days?

They have changed in the sense that kids no longer go there to see the latest games and ultimate new graphics. The technology was new and exciting when we were kids, the machines always had new experiences and innovative ways to play a new game. With synthesized speech, trackballs and extra buttons these were magical light boxes and it was an amazing time to be a kid







» No matter what game you were playing in the Nineties, there was a good chance that you'd see this screen appear...

Punta

### "WINNERS DON'T USE DRUGS"

William S. Sessions, Director, FBI

# DEUELOPER TOP PICH ANDREW BRAYBROOK STORES 1

"We were lucky to be growing up just as arcade games started appearing, so they had a big influence on us. Today my favourite might be *Space Harrier* as it was the first game I played with a moving platform. The music was dynamic and I loved the dragon-riding bonus sections."

Fighter II's key appeal was in standing next to your opponent as you bested them, a factor which paved the way for both the game and the wider genre to become popular in tournament play. Later in 1991 SNK released Fatal Fury, a one-on-one fighting game directed by Takashi Nishiyama, a former Capcom employee who had served as the director of the original Street Fighter. As the two companies became increasingly prolific in the genre, a rivalry developed which would last for the remainder of the decade.

As well as providing a business boost, the beat-'em-up sensation produced controversy. While the likes of *Street Fighter II* and *Fatal Fury* had been violent, they were never gory. *Mortal Kombat* quickly changed that. Though

# **L**I joined Williams with the purpose of reviving the dual-stick control **77**

Mark Turmell

it wasn't the first game to feature sprites digitised from human actors – they were introduced in the early Eighties and popularised by *Pit Fighter* in 1990 – the combination of the graphical approach with a high level of violence and gore caused a major moral panic in the way that the

cartoonish likes of Time Killers never could. Mortal Kombat would go on to be one of the key titles in the 1993 US Senate hearings on videogame violence, though largely due to its appearance on home consoles. However, the Amusement and Music Operator's Association was represented at the hearings and, along with the American Amusement Machine Association. created a parental advisory system the following year. This didn't stop the release of Mortal Kombat II, nor other gory fighters that appeared in 1994 such as Bloodstorm and Killer Instinct, but applied a colour-coded rating to the cabinet for all to see

Around this time, the demise of an old technology became apparent.

Laserdisc

# FIGHT CLUB

Mark Starkey, owner of London's The Heart Of Gaming arcade, talks to us about the competitive fighting game scene



When did it feel like developers started to take notice of the fighting game community's needs in creating games?

RULED TH

1994 saw the culmination of the Street Fighter II franchise in Super Street Fighter II Turbo and also the

release of SNK's *King Of Fighters* series. After the overwhelming popularity of these games sunk in, tournaments were held in arcades and at some point around that time, programmers started adding 'event mode' in the operator menus to help in running them.

#### How did more advanced strategies spread in the days before YouTube and mass access to community websites?

The most obvious way was to go to the arcade. Watch, play, learn. Get beaten, get better. It was that simple. After all, every match was technically a 'money match', with pocket money or part time wages at stake in front of crowds.

Some people had links in the east, as the Asian community in London was huge, as was the high street market for grey imports. Some people were lucky enough to have multi system VHS players and imported tapes to help study. People with plenty of money invested in Superguns, homemade consoles capable of running arcade boards, or the Neo Geo AES This allowed people to practice at home by dropping a huge lump sum rather than 50p coins.

# With so much competition in the fighting game market of the Nineties, do you feel that any hidden gems were edged out of the scene?

Absolutely. Only recently a bunch of us were discussing how much of a shame it was that games such as *Ninja Masters* and *Breakers Revenge* lost out because they were overshadowed by games such as the *Last Blade* series. Even the *Street Fighter III* series lost out to the unstoppable popularity of the *King Of Fighters* series, and was only able to blossom after the turn of the millennium.





» Namco's Starblade provides a key example of how rapidly polygon technology developed – it's only two years older than Ridge Racer.

11150



pames, which had set new graphical standards when introduced in the Eighties, still seemed to be strong in the early Nineties. American Laser Games released Mad Dog McCree in 1990, and in 1991 Sega brought Time Traveler to market in an innovative cabinet which used a mirror to create the illusion of holographic projection. But by 1994, the final Laserdisc games had left the production lines, including Atari Games's Cops and American Laser Games's Fast Draw Showdown

But while old technologies fell by the wayside, others rose to prominence. Polygonal 3D games began to hit their stride in the early Nineties - while they had existed since the Eighties, the arrival of Sega's Virtua Racing in 1992 would kick off a technological arms race. The game's high polygon count was achieved with the Model 1 arcade board. a joint development with General Electric Aerospace. The board would only host another five games, including Star Wars Arcade and the original Virtua Fighter, as Sega had its sights set on the next big advance - but crucially, so did Namco. The company introduced the System 22 board in 1993 with Ridge Racer, the first ever 3D racing game to employ texture mapping, which enabled a greatly enhanced sense of realism over the flat coloured polygons that had gone before. Sega shot back with Davtona USA on Model 2 just months later. But while



### **LEI** kept turning on more and more objects on the screen, and was mesmerised by the power ""

Mark Turmell

3D games were becoming increasingly popular, they were very expensive for developers as well as operators, ensuring that 3D games didn't become the dominant force in the industry for some time. Indeed, huge film properties like Jurassic Park were still being given sprite-based treatments. But by 1996 both Sega and Namco had transitioned to releasing 3D games, having learned to exploit their boards to the fullest. The rivalry between the two companies produced some of the biggest hits of the decade - Namco's System Super 22 was the technology behind Time Crisis, Prop Cycle and Alpine Racer, while Sega's Model 2 series ran Virtua Cop, Sega Rally and The House Of The Dead.

such a bad thing as there they had a Battlezone machine." hile this was going on, home consoles were rapidly catching up to arcade technology. Namco's PlayStation conversion of Ridge Racer wasn't arcade perfect, but it was close enough not to matter greatly - a fact which opened the arcades up to boards based on home console hardware as a budget option. The lower power didn't necessarily equate to a lower profile, though. Namco's PlayStation-based System 12 board hosted the likes of Tekken, while Sega's Saturn-based ST-V gave us Die Hard Arcade. Atari Games even got in on the act by licensing the Atari Corporation's Jaguar hardware for Area

51 and Maximum Force.

"That's easy; Battlezone, and as soon as I started writing

place was party central and inevitably hunger would set in

and someone would be sent to the local burger joint, not

this I played it for 15 minutes. At one time in my life my

These cheaper boards were very attractive to developers too - particularly those who weren't able to stump up the research and development budget needed to take on Sega and Namco. Manufacturers like Konami and Atari Games were still producing custom high-end boards to power releases such as GTI Club and San Francisco Rush, but others such as Capcom and Taito simply relied on their own PlayStation variants for their 3D releases. Other developers didn't make the leap at all. Irem left the arcade market behind in 1994 due to poor sales, followed by Data East in 1996. SNK found the transition to 3D difficult after relying on the 2D power of the Neo Geo for so long – when the Hyper Neo Geo 64 arrived in 1997 it was expensive and behind the curve graphically, causing it to die a premature death

» Twin sit-down racing cabin the Nineties were often able

DEVELOPER TOP PICK





» SNK was one of the last companies on the 3D on, marketing games like Metal Slug instead.

### WHEN ARCADES RULED THE WORLD

It wasn't just the developers struggling to keep up. The pace at which technology was advancing meant that operators needed to invest heavily in new machines to stay relevant in the Nineties. Additionally, major attractions had become important to operators, but they came with a price. Dedicated cabinets with unique control methods like Prop Cycle, Wave Runners and Rapid River were great for drawing customers, but couldn't be upgraded with new kits like lightgun or racing cabinets could, leading to stagnating line-ups later down the line. Inevitably, these costs were passed on to players - the price of a credit would creep up over the course of the decade before settling around £1 for new releases

It's ironic then that one of the great trends of late Nineties arcade gaming began with a small cabinet with low graphical power – *Beatmania*. Konami's 1997 release saw players spinning a turntable and hitting buttons on a keypad to match the notes dropping down the screen – a simple concept, but one which hooked thousands of gamers and has seen over 40 arcade releases to date. Konami, realising that it had a hit on its hands, quickly broadened the concept beyond the DJ simulator to other music-



» Time Crisis ran on Namco's System Super 22. 1991

■ Street Fighter

## is released,

popularising oneon-one fighting

games and earning

Capcom hundreds

of millions of

dollars in sales.

» NBA Jam's success

was enormous, prompting Midway to expand the

formula to other sports with games like *NFL Blitz*.

1993

■ Namco's *Ridge*Racer becomes the first game ever to employ texture-mapped polygons, a technique still used today.

1996

■ Sega opens
Sega World in the
London Trocadero,
combining
theme park-style
attractions with
six floors of arcade

1997

■ Beatmania
launches in
Japan, the first of
Konami's many
popular music

1999

■ Buriki One launches in Japan, becoming the final release for SNK's short-lived Hyper Neo Geo 64 board.

based games, introducing the similarly prolific Dance Dance Revolution in 1998, then Guitar Freaks and DrumMania in 1999. Other developers were taking notice, too – by 1999 Sega had given us the maraca-shaking favourite Samba De Amigo, Namco had introduced the Taiko No Tatsujin drumming series and Andamiro had introduced Pump It Up, a dancing series to rival Konami's Dance Dance Revolution. These games would initially become popular in Japan, but some canny localisation saw Dance Dance Revolution become a worldwide hit (albeit under the name Dancing Stage, in Europe).



While music games were ascending, other genres didn't fare so well. Despite the high quality of releases like Spikeout, scrolling beat-'emups were hard to come by towards the end of the Nineties, in part due to the difficulties faced by developers during the transition to 3D. Traditional shoot-'em-ups had also largely been confined to Japan, whether 2D or 3D. The advances in console technology meant that players were concentrating on the games which they couldn't get at home - and operators responded with their purchases, a fact reflected in the hits of the era. While the likes of Crazy Taxi and Hydro Thunder might have received excellent home conversions later on, it was hard to beat having a steering wheel and pedals.

By the end of the Nineties, arcades had lost their edge over mass-market home consoles, some major companies had fallen by the wayside and operators were feeling the pinch. But with the music game boom buoying the industry and hits still arriving in other genres, the outlook for the new millennium was good. Of course over a decade on, we know better – which brings us to the concluding part of our arcade history...

# MELODY MAKERS

We spoke to Paul Brookfield, the first UK Pump It Up player to qualify for the World Pump Finals, about the evolution of the arcade music game



Why did early games like Beatmania and Dance Dance Revolution have such a high impact?

Generally speaking, because they came with their own dedicated cabinets and were sound-driven games, they had a particular knack for catching attention in a row of machines. Dance Dance Revolution in particular also added a great blend of gameplay and physical activity, being particularly intuitive to first-time players and the double-edged sword of being humourous/embarassing to play.

What are the key considerations for

developers bringing arcade music games to international audiences?

The absolute, number one rule is to make the games as unintimidating as possible. Konami's biggest music-game localisation success is without a doubt, Dancing Stage Euromix, which contained well-chosen licensed songs that had simple difficulty levels, which were offered to players first in the song list.

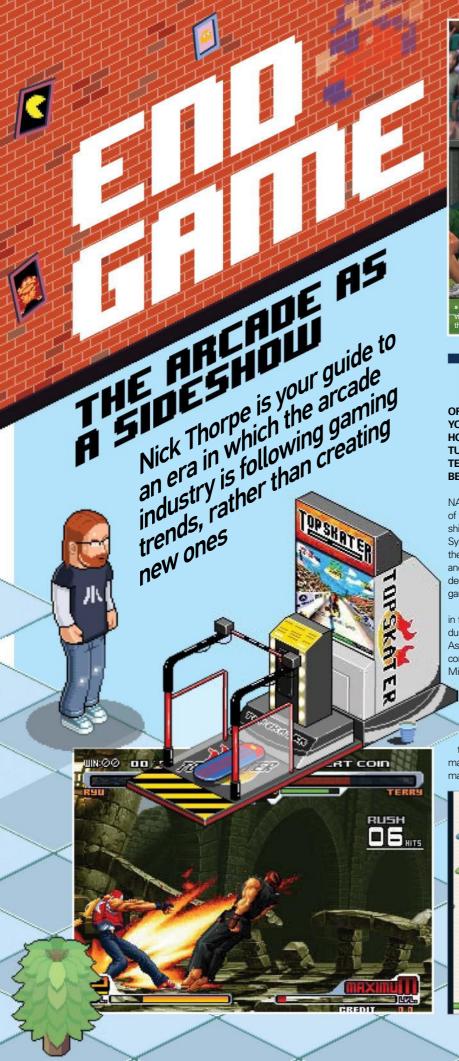
A competitive scene has developed around music games. How heavily are the needs of this audience factored into any development decisions? Massively so. Although there is at least a moderate attempt to add low-difficulty and some licensed content to the games, the vast majority

established series of music

games are purely to satisfy the addicted hardcore. The *Beatmania IIDX* series is now 21 instalments old, and there are songs that on the top difficulty, have only been cleared by a small handful of people worldwide.

What are the key titles for people to play to get a grounding in the history of the genre?

I would recommend that people try the first *Dancing Stage Euromix* for a decent game that remains a shining example of a good localisation, and an instalment from the five-key original *Beatmania* series because it is the father of the modern arcade music game genre. Also, any instalment past the eighth mix for *Beatmania IIDX* for a taste of how far the series has evolved and just how truly, monstrously hard a music game can be.





HE STRENGTH OF
ARCADE GAMES
HAS ALWAYS BEEN
THEIR ABILITY TO
OFFER ENTERTAINMENT THAT
YOU CAN'T REPLICATE AT
HOME – BUT AROUND THE
TURN OF THE MILLENNIUM, THE
TECHNOLOGICAL BOUNDARIES
BEGAN TO CHANGE.

Sega's primary arcade board was the NAOMI, essentially an arcade version of the Dreamcast, while Namco slowly shifted towards the PlayStation 2-based System 246. For the first time ever, the technology at the top of both home and arcade markets was the same, and dedicated arcades struggled as hardcore gamers looked elsewhere.

The number of arcades operating in the USA had slumped from 10,000 during the Nineties boom to just 3,000. As business conditions worsened, companies began to exit the market. Midway closed its arcade operations in the early part of the decade in order to concentrate on the home market, taking with it the recently absorbed Atari Games. In Japan, SNK's failing finances allowed it to be bought by Aruze, a pachinko manufacturer that stripped the Neo Geomanufacturer's assets and allowed it

to become bankrupt. But while these companies disappeared, it's notable that new ones sprang up to replace them. "Sometimes you feel like a total dinosaur stuck in a time warp," says Eugene Jarvis, who founded Raw Thrills in 2001. "But then you go to an arcade and tap into the enthusiasm of the kids and you get massively jazzed about your next project." Meanwhile, SNK's intellectual property was quickly bought back by Playmore, a new company formed by SNK founder Eikichi Kawasaki that quickly entered the arcade market - though still reliant on the ageing Neo Geo hardware.

In an effort to retain the hardcore players, arcade manufacturers began to implement new hardware features. Virtua Fighter 4 popularised the use of memory cards, which allowed players to track their wins and losses as well as customising their characters. Memory cards quickly proliferated across genres - from gun games like Ghost Squad to music games such as the Beatmania IIDX series, and even racing games like Mario Kart Arcade GP. However, international arcade operators didn't adopt the cards in huge numbers, meaning that they're still primarily found in the Asian market. Another major development was the addition of online functionality

# A LONG WAY FROM HOME

Where arcade conversions once sold home hardware, in recent years you're far more likely to see arcade games using licensed products to entice players. While film licences like *Terminator:*Salvation and *Transformers* continue to do big business, you're now also likely to see familiar names from console and mobile gaming appearing in the arcade. The trend became noticeable around 2005 – while Global VR had been using EA licences such as *Need For Speed* for some time, they were joined by the likes of *F-Zero AX* and *Mario Kart Arcade GP* – takes on popular Nintendo series by Sega and Namco respectively. More recently, popular mobile games such



to arcade games. Western releases such as the Big Buck series of hunting games often feature national high score tables and tournament features, while online multiplayer is usually reserved for Japanese games. The poster child for this approach is Sega's Border Break, a mech combat game that has generated over £60 million in sales since its introduction in 2009

But the majority of arcade manufacturers today aren't making games for the long-departed hardcore gamer - they're making them for the people visiting theme parks, seaside resorts and bowling alleys. Though there are still dedicated arcades which are running at a profit, the locations that have best weathered the storm are US chains like Dave & Busters and Chuck E Cheese's, where arcade games serve as



» Manufacturers now regularly utilise popular home console games to provide new product

the main draw. It's a simple change. but one that has required developers to arcade is a much more casual space," Eugene tells us, "so we have to make a game wider as opposed to deeper, and make sure every player has fun and a challenge. We have to go light on the punishment, even though it is always fun to see a player totally destroyed!"

least as far as the Western market is concerned, has been the marginalisation of genres. Music games have suffered heavily, thanks to a combination of recession-fuelled conservatism and the boom (and subsequent decline) of peripheral-based music games on home consoles. Five new music games were introduced to the UK market at 2009's Amusements Trade Exhibition International show, but by 2013's European Amusement and Gaming International show the genre was absent » Arcade memory cards in their own right. featuring a variety of attractive designs



licences attached tend to

## **66** It is always fun to see a player totally destroyed 77

a supplementary attraction rather than adjust their development practices. "The

The other major adjustment, at

WHEN ARCADES BULED THE WORLD

in August, use of memory

■ SNK Playmore releases its final game for the Neo Geo board in April. 14 years after its launch.

■ Square Enix purchases Taito Corporation in September to enter the arcade market

news site Arcade Heroes launches in December, mixing player perspective with industry

■ The London Funland arcade closes in July, following a failure to meet rent payments.

and Konami, the genre's major player, was no longer providing arcade videogames to the UK. Meanwhile,

traditional joystick-based games have almost disappeared. While some notable exceptions exist - Super Street Fighter IV, Virtua Tennis 4 and Pac-Man Battle Royale have all arrived in the last few years - the market today is primarily composed of driving games and lightgun games. The result is that products are developed with those genres in mind. Where Batman was represented with scrolling fighters in the Nineties, in 2013 Raw Thrills adapted the licence with a driving game that harks back to the likes of Chase HO

But ultimately, that situation makes sense. "The arcade is all about physicality and human interface." Eugene tells us, and when you look at the new products to hit the market, the most successful ones hit a number of his key features - "Huge monitors, immersive racing cockpits and physical I/O like lightguns, motion cabinets, leaning motorcycles." No matter how impressive your home entertainment system it doesn't offer domed screens moving seats or air jets - and it probably never will. The likes of Mach Storm would lose something in the home, and it's this fact that ensures that arcade games remain in demand.

Despite the diminished status of the arcade in the bigger picture of videogames. Eugene's ambitions remain sky high. "Like bank robbers living for that one last job, arcade developers dream of creating the next humongous hit - the new Pac-Man, Tetris or Angry Birds that will catch the world on fire. Perhaps in the future, Retro Gamer will

DANCE DANCE

be telling the story of how Eugene created that new arcade sensation. We can only hope so.

/ CREDITIST!

Music games were popular arcade attractions throughout the last

as Temple Run and Doodle Jump have been adapted into hybrid products combining videogames and ticket redemption. The use of home brands provides arcades with name value and often proven high quality, but the success of the conversion depends greatly on the approach taken by the arcade manufacturer. Konami's Silent Hill and Castlevania games were entirely new experiences, but proved to be heavy-handed adaptations that attempted to wedge both series into the lightgun shooter template. More successful was the Mario Kart Arcade GP series, which provided new content and didn't need to veer far from the design of the console games to provide a good arcade experience. The most prolific company has been Sega, whose European arcade team has worked with the likes of Sumo Digital and Codemasters to produce excellent arcade conversions of Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing, Virtua Tennis 4 and GRID.

# 

Funspot arcade in New Hampshire, USA, is a glorious reminder of the days when arcades ruled the gaming world. Paul Drury reports from retro heaven



## FUN THREE

#### BOB LAWTON

OWNER AND FOUNDER OF FUNSPOT

■ Bob opened up the first Funspot in 1952 with his brother John, who sadly passed away in 2003. During the boom years of the Eighties, they ran Funspot arcades across New Hampshire and even as far afield as Florida.



#### **GARY VINCENT**

FUNSPOT MANAGER AND ACAM PRESIDENT

■ Gary took a summer job at Funspot in 1981 and never left. He was instrumental in creating the museum and he still spends many hours restoring old cabinets, ready to bring them onto the arcade floor.



#### **MIKE STULIR**

ACAM BOARD MEMBER

■ Mike is one of the many volunteers who devote their time to making ACAM such an extraordinary place. "I want to make sure these pieces of Americana are here for future generations to see and enjoy," he says, proudly.



OB LAWTON PATS
THE HULKING AFTER
BURNER COCKPIT
CABINET AND SMILES.
"WE PAID \$11,000 FOR THIS IN
APRIL 1987, WHICH WAS A HUGE
AMOUNT OF MONEY BACK THEN.
BY 1 JULY THAT YEAR, IT HAD
PAID FOR ITSELF. PEOPLE WERE
QUEUING UP TO PLAY IT!"

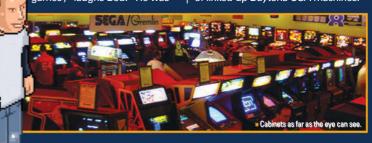
Bob, the founder and general manager of Funspot, can talk about any of the machines in his colossal arcade - officially named the biggest in the world by Guinness World Records in 2008 - as if it were an old friend. And Bob has a lot of friends. Over 600 machines are spread across three floors and walking through the building is like taking a tour through the history of arcades. You'll spot ancient baseball flicker games, electromechanical machines from the Sixties, scores of pinball tables and even one of those 'Love Tester' gadgets.

There's a whole mini-golf course, too; a sweet nod to the

origins of Funspot. Back in 1952, Bob, fresh from graduating with a degree in chemistry, swapped test tubes for golf clubs and built a course on the second floor of the Tarlsen building in Weirs Beach, New Hampshire, a short walk from Funspot's current home. In partnership with his brother John, the pair built up the business over the following two decades, adding rifle galleries, a skee-ball alley and numerous other arcade attractions. Then one day in the mid-Seventies, in walked an animated Italian, who began gesticulating wildly...

"He was waving his hands and saying, 'Let me get rid of all this junk and put in some good games'," laughs Bob. "He was an operator from over in Concord and the first game he brought us was *Tank*. That one machine took more than the whole room of nickel and dime games we had. It showed us what videogames were going to do. I loved that guy. We stayed with him for years!"

So Funspot rode the videogame wave from the pioneering Seventies, through the Golden Age of the Eighties and into the last real hurrah of arcade cabinets in the Nineties. And they're all still here for gamers to enjoy. Classics like *Robotron* and *Asteroids*, obscurities such as *Space Fury* and *Quantum*, monsters like the *G-Loc* full-motion 360 cab and a row of linked-up *Daytona USA* machines.





We may be spoilt these days by having access to all these titles via downloads and emulation, but nothing beats the thrill of playing your favourites on an original cabinet in their natural arcade habitat – a habitat that has sadly almost vanished.

"I was noticing classic games were disappearing and arcades were disappearing," explains Gary Vincent, general manager and part of the Funspot family for over 30 years. "So at a staff meeting in September 1998, I asked if I could gather all the older games together, like a museum to celebrate the history of gaming."

Gary's idea slowly evolved into the American Classic Arcade Museum, or ACAM for short, a superlative collection of over 300 classic arcade games housed on the top floor of Funspot. Walking along the aisles of cabinets, admiring a pristine Death Race, smiling at the Pac-Man machine on which Billy Mitchell famously (or infamously, if you know the back-story) achieved his 'perfect game' and stopping for a sit-down on Buck Rogers is a magical experience.

Even the lighting, décor and background music has been lovingly chosen to recreate the arcade as it was in its Eighties heyday. "It brings back memories of when I first started here," says Gary, wistfully. "All the sights and sounds I remember from my first summer working here in 1981. It's kinda cool."

"Gary's a visionary," enthuses
Mike Stulir, who sits on the board of
directors of the museum. "He can
recognise good ways to entertain
and inform the public. We have
students from computer development
programmes use us as a resource.
One college eliminated one of their
course textbooks on the basis of
what they could learn from us. Last
time they visited, they brought three
busloads of students to come and find
out about gaming in the old days!"

Who said learning can't be fun? Whether you want to explore the history of videogaming or simply enjoy playing all the machines that consumed your pocket money as a child, ACAM is an essential visit for retro gamers. It's open all year round,

though you may want to consider visiting during its annual International Classic Videogame Tournament in late May. Now in its 16th year, the event attracts the cream of arcade gamers from around the globe, meaning you can test your high scoring skills against numerous world record holders or at least grin as you spot famous faces from such films as King Of Kong and Chasing Ghosts.

When you do get to finally walk through the hallowed doors of this gaming mecca, make sure you check out the 'Retro Gamer Wall', where you'll find past articles on Funspot taken from our pages, and then seek out Bob Lawton himself and say we sent you. Despite being in his 80s, Bob still opens up the arcade every day and always provides a warm welcome. "I just love working," he laughs over a beer in the arcade's DA Long tavern, named after his grandfather. "My family all work here, too. It's my life!"

For more on this marvellous place, see www.funspotnh.com.

## MUST PLAYS

#### **COMPUTER SPACE 1971**

■ This is where it all started.
Inspired by the mainframe game Spacewar, Nolan Bushnell and Ted Dabney created their own simplified version, which became the first commercially produced cabinet. This sleek cabinet looks impressive, especially sat opposite Atari's Pong.



#### **INDY 4** 1976

■ This imposing four-player racing game greets you at the top of stairs as you enter ACAM and it's a poignant reminder of the arcade's long history. "It was the third videogame we got after Tank and Seawolf and during the summer of 1976, it was taking \$140 a day," smiles Bob.



#### **DOMINO MAN** 1983

■ An excellent example of creative cabinet design, this game features a moustached, balding artist, who would soon swap his dominoes for beer mugs in *Tapper*: One of the many donations to the Museum since its official launch in January 2000, this one came from Randy Lawton, Bob's nephew.



#### **WACKO** 1983

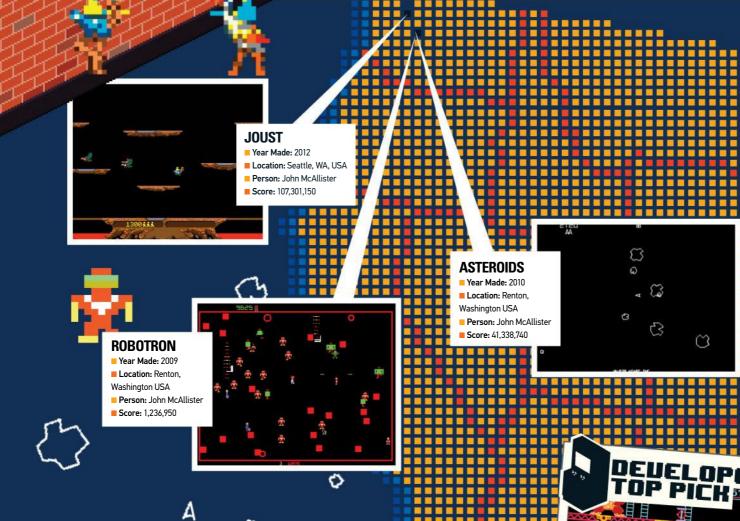
■ No, you are holding the magazine correctly. "This is from that era when manufacturers would do anything to make their game stand out," remembers Gary. "It must have cost lots more to make it crooked like that. I love that people went the extra mile with a bizarre cabinet like this."



#### **SPACE HARRIER** 1985

■ A compelling reason for why nothing beats playing a game on the original hardware, this full-motion cockpit cabinet tosses you through the Fantasy Zone with gay abandon. Modelled here by *Missile Command* champ Tony Temple, who put his back out shortly afterwards. Is the game worth the injury? Yes.





# Walter Day tells **Retro Gamer** about Twin Galaxies and the birth of score attacking

#### Why did you decide to travel America collecting high scores?

I loved playing videogames so much that I opened an arcade as an excuse to be able to play more and more videogames. It was called Twin Galaxies and it opened on 10 November 1981 in Ottumwa, Iowa. I practice Transcendental Meditation every day and, like many people who practice TM, I noticed increases in my mental clarity and eye-hand coordination. So, I was already very open to the idea that the best gamers would be people who were using more of their latent mental capacity and it would express itself in terms of higher and higher scores achieved in competitive gaming. So, I went on a personal quest to find the greatest gamers, the ones who

could merge into a sort of higher-state of consciousness and out-think the program. And, such people would be recognisable by their unprecedented scores and unmatchable skill set.

#### When did you realise that the general public was interested in high scores?

In 1982 a local gamer named Tony Mattan showed me a copy of the January edition of *Time* magazine. It had a cover story on videogames sweeping the world, and in the story was mention of one Steve Juraszek of Illinois who had scored 15 million points on *Defender*. Not surprisingly, the public was viewing this as the world record and people all over America were bent on breaking Juraszek's score. I allowed Tony Mattan to make a world record attempt and he did last for 24 hours. scoring about 24 million points. But, to my surprise, during his marathon the media began to call from far away cities like Kansas City, St Louis, Des Moines, Atlanta and Chicago, wanting updates on Tony's progress. This was only the beginning. Interestingly, as more and more high-score attempts began to manifest, Twin Galaxies would invariably be a part of each story in the media as we would be the adjudicators of the event. A media expert once estimated that Twin Galaxies was in the news more than 10,000 times during the 1982-1986 era, concluding that on any given day during that time there was someone going for a world record on a video game and the media was covering it.

#### How did you go from an oil broker, to a comedian and then owner of Twin Galaxies arcade? That's quite a trajectory.

"It was always Donkey Kong for me. The first game that

really got me hooked into videogames... and one which I

spent a fortune (and many hours) on!"

**GARY BRACEY** 

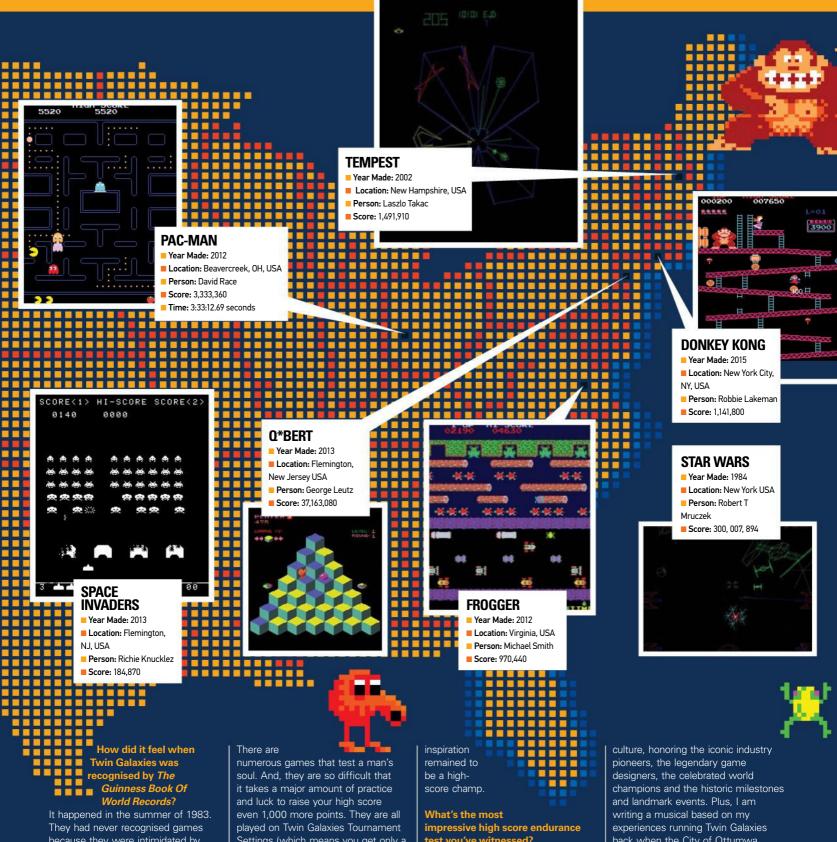
Jon Bloch and I used to do Vaudeville-like skits, performing sporadically in the Catskills (Upper State New York) and in Iowa. And, also, I was an accomplished Rag Time Piano player, appearing on posters in the Eighties. Then, during the Spring and Summer of 1980, I was working in downtown Houston as an oil broker, creating deals between the majors (Conoco, Exxon, Tenneco) and the traders (Tesoro, Tosco and Apex). It was here in Houston that I found videogames as my true love and the first seed of desire was planted to someday own my own arcade.











because they were intimidated by the mass of details and variations in games and gameplay, acknowledging that it was a field that they were reluctant to try and master. So, they relied on our expertise. Our contests and adjudication supplied them with all their scores for the 1984, 1985 and 1986 books. And, then later, the 2008, 2009 and then much of the

What's the ultimate arcade game for score chasing and why?

first four or five Gamer's Editions.

Settings (which means you get only a total of five men). They are Robotron, Defender, Stargate, Q\*bert and Missile Command. And, of course, there is Donkey Kong, the most legendary contest game of them all.

#### When do you feel the golden period for scores was and why?

The Golden Age of High Score Competition lasted from 1980-1985. After that time, there were fewer arcades available and very few promotions or contests. By then, little

# test you've witnessed?

Recently, George Leutz, of New York City, lasted about 85 hours on one quarter, playing Q\*bert to a new world record, eclipsing a record that had stood for more than 30 years.

### Why did you leave TG and do you

I want to focus on the educational and historical aspects of our gaming legacy by creating a set of videogame trading cards that commemorate the history of the global videogame

back when the City of Ottumwa became the "Video Game Capital of the World (1981-1984)." These new projects have me excited so I don't miss running TG.

#### Is it disappointing to see all your hard work currently undone?

TG is about to start up again under new leadership. So, all is well in the Video Game Capital of the World.



# Pong

#### THE TENNIS CLONE THAT HELPED BUILD THE ARCADE SCENE



- » ATARI, INC
- » ARCADE
- » 1972

### It's easy to take for granted today, but Pong was a huge deal when it appeared in 1972. It

was one of the first commercially successful arcade games, paving the way for the likes of *Space Invaders*, *Pac-Man* and many other classics. It was enduring, too, and I can still remember some arcades having old machines when I was a young nipper in the late Seventies, early Eighties.

Pong really came into its own with a second player as it made the game amazingly competitive. Although you can only move your bat up and down, it's actually possible to pull off some insane moves with deft touches of the control dial. There's nothing more satisfying than having a long, drawn out rally before slamming past your opponent's defences with a cleverly angled ball.

It may have had archaic visuals and extremely simple sound, but it really didn't matter. *Pong* was a gateway into another world, a gateway that proved that monitor screens could create more than just passive entertainment, no matter how enjoyable it may have been.

While Pong enjoyed great success in arcades, it also dominated homes thanks to an insane number of official and unofficial clones that ported the game at every opportunity. My fondest memories are playing a variation of Pong that came with numerous other games on my aunty's Binatone system, but there were lots of other devices around and your own memories may be different.

Pong may seem old hat, but if you do manage to find a version to play, you'll discover that it's still ridiculously addictive.

If you spent your youth hunched over an arcade cabinet blasting aliens, Computer Space is where it all began. Paul Drury talks to Nolan Bushnell and Ted Dabney about the granddaddy of videogames



#### IN THE HNOW

- » PUBLISHER: NUTTING ASSOCIATES
- » DEVELOPER: SYZYG
- » RELEASED: 1971
- » PLATFORMS: ARCAD
- » GENRE: SHOOT-'EM-UP



t's summer 1966 and a young
Nolan Bushnell, sporting
sideburns but no bushy beard yet,
is strolling through the Lagoon
Amusement Park in Farmington,
Utah. He's manager of the games
department, working there to help
pay his way through university. He
smiles at the rows of pinball tables and
electro-mechanical machines, guzzling
coins from eager players.

Back at the University of Utah, Nolan is up late, playing Spacewar! in the computer lab into the early hours. The game, created by Steve Russell and friends at MIT in 1962, has two starship commanders locked in a deep space dogfight. It's a big hit on campus. And suddenly, a connection is made... "I turned to the fraternity brother I was playing against and said: 'This is a great game! We could get people to put a quarter in to play this at Lagoon!" exclaims Nolan. "I envisioned a row of screens running from a central computer, each with a coin slot. Then we looked around us at this million dollar computer and thought, 'Mmm, we've got a long way to go..."

It wouldn't be until the next decade that, as co-founder of Atari, Nolan would see his vision of aisles of arcade machines realised. For now, the prohibitive hardware costs – Nolan estimates even the

#### THE MAKING OF: COMPUTER SPACE



display screens cost \$20,000 - meant his videogame dream would have to wait. He graduated in 1968 and joined Ampex, a prominent American electronics company and pioneer in audio and video technology.

"I'd worked at Ampex for about a year, and as an engineer you get all these trade magazines," explains Nolan. "There was an ad in there that alerted me to the Data General Nova computer. Up to then, minicomputers were like \$40,000, and then this comes along for \$4,000 and I'm like, 'Woah, this might be good enough!'"

Nolan eagerly sent away for the manuals to this breakthrough machine and began making paper designs for a Spacewar! setup with four screens running from a single computer. With four coin slots collecting quarters, he hoped it could earn enough to pay for the high initial hardware costs and become a viable proposition to sell, not to bars, but amusement parks. "I told everyone at Ampex I was working on a videogame," smiles Nolan, "and they all thought I was loony."

Well, not quite everyone. Ted Dabney had joined Ampex in 1961, working in the military products unit

"Plus Larry never got anywhere with the programming.

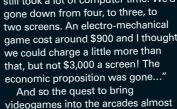
The cycle time of the machines was simply too slow to support multiple screens," agrees Nolan.
"Things like drawing the rocket ship

# fil told everyone I was working on a videogame and they all thought I was loony

NOLAN HAD THE LAST LAUGH, THOUGH...

still took a lot of computer time. We'd gone down from four, to three, to two screens. An electro-mechanical game cost around \$900 and I thought we could charge a little more than that, but not \$3,000 a screen! The

videogames into the arcades almost died with the Sixties. Then, at the start of the new decade, there came





topless dancer at a bar called The Brass Rail. It was done by Dave Ralston. We always thought he had a little thing



for six years before transferring to

the Videofile division in Sunnyvale,

California. "I shared an office with

recalls Ted. "I thought it was great...

if you had a big enough computer!

not but I thought it was something

Ted and Nolan teamed up with

programmer Larry Bryan, who had

access to a PDP computer and was

they began calculating how many

games they could run from one

computer. "We concluded there

was no way it was going to work. It

just wasn't fast enough," notes Ted.

to be responsible for the coding, and

Nolan and he took me over to

Stanford to look at Spacewar!,"

I didn't know if he was mad or

worth trying."









**YEAR:** 1972 SPACE RACE **YEAR:** 1973

NTS SUPER QUIZ

SYSTEM: ARCADE (CHUCK E CHEESE EXCLUSIVE)

an epiphany. Ironically, a game called Computer Space only became a reality when one key component was

"Nolan's a smart guy and he was dicking around with a TV set, adjusting the vertical and horizontal hold and seeing the picture move," says Ted. "He asked me why that happens. I explained it to him and he said: 'Could we use this?' I said: 'Well, we'd have to do it digitally because with analogue we wouldn't have any control.' I explained we'd need a counter for the sync and one for the video and let the video counter change in respect to the sync counter. He said: 'Could we do that?' I didn't know yet..."

By replacing the expensive computer with circuitry built from cheap electronic components that could display and manipulate images on a standard television



screen, the project was suddenly back in business. There was just one problem: the circuitry didn't exist. So, in 1970, Ted moved his daughter out of her bedroom and converted it into a workshop, where he began tinkering with an old telly and offthe-shelf components bought from electronics stores.

"I started by figuring out how to move something on the screen. It took me quite a while but finally I got these counters to do what I wanted them to, so you could change them by one bit and get very slow



outline of your craft. Each dot you saw on screen corresponded to a discrete diode on a circuit board inside the machine. These were arranged in a matrix, one for each direction the rocket ship could face. "What Nolan did was pretty smart," chuckles Ted. "He created the diode matrix and just before it went into

# the screen. Nolan said: 'Now we need a rocket ship!'

TED JOINS THE DOTS...

movement of a little square on the screen or by two bits and get faster movement. The next thing was, well, what are you gonna move? Nolan said: 'We need a rocket ship!'"

The ship you command in your quest to outgun flying saucers intent on your destruction was fashioned from a series of dots, forming the

production, he laid it out on the board in the shape of the actual rocket ship, so if you had a problem, you could easily figure out what part wasn't working properly."

"Rotating the rocket was tricky," adds Nolan, "but the eyeball is quite forgiving. The dots are changing position on a 16x16 matrix and the places you put the dots aren't quite right, but by having the separation of the dots, your eye kind of fudges it and says, 'Yeah, this is the same rocket ship...'"

Now, we all know that in space no one can hear you scream, but blasting alien scum wouldn't be half



#### THE MAKING OF: COMPUTER SPACE



as much fun if performed in silence.
Cleverly using a 6V Zener diode, a
voltage regulating device that just
happened to give off pink noise as it
did its job, Ted added a little amplifier
and an integrator that charged up and
decayed to fade the volume out. "I
built the sound circuits and motion
circuitry," he says, proudly. "Then
Nolan made them into a game."
At this point, RG is profoundly

aware that we are talking about a game that, despite its huge historical importance, most of you have probably never played. Coming from a time before arcade machines used microprocessors, there is no 'code' for the usually helpful MAME to emulate, so unless you live near the Funspot arcade in New Hampshire, which has an actual machine in its classic games room, may we recommend the convenient 'simulator' found at www. computerspacefan.com, an excellent site that also catalogues the location of all surviving cabinets.



Once you've spent some time trying to blast those pesky saucers while dodging their bullets within a strict time limit, we think you'll notice several things. Although Computer Space is clearly inspired by Spacewar!, it is certainly no clone. It's a single-player game, for a start, and there's no central star exerting a gravitational pull either. We also think you'll be struck by the difficulty. Your ship is in perpetual motion, which may adhere to the laws of physics in outer space

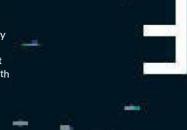
#### BEND IT LIHE BUSHNELL

IF YOU'VE SEEN Computer Space in action, you'll notice that after launching a shot at those vicious saucers, you can 'bend' your bullet towards your intended target by rotating your ship. It's an ingenious feature, which later appeared on Combat for the VCS, though it emerges it was more a case of necessity. "The missile starts out from the front of the rocket ship, but when the ship moves, the front of the ship is in a different place on screen," explains Ted. "There was no way we could 'remember' a point on screen, so it had to move in relation to the front of the ship. Let's call it a guided missile!" Ted added in a clever feature to signify a successful hit, too. "I just inverted the video so the screen flashed white. It was a cheap, easy way to create the sense of an explosion." Ted also used this inversion technique to signal extended play and called it 'hyperspace', yet another debt that Atari's biggest hit, Asteroids, owes to its granddad...

but proves rather inconvenient to Asteroids players, used to their ship slowing down and stopping if you leave off the thrust. This is further compounded by the deadly accuracy of your flying saucer foes. Why did Nolan seem intent on killing the first generation of videogame players with such regularity?

"The idea it was too hard never crossed my mind," he laughs. "All my friends loved it, but then all my friends were engineers. It wasn't until we put it into a beer bar and people were totally baffled that we thought maybe we've overshot our mark! As for making Computer Space a one-player game, the coin-op industry was based around solitary game players. I mean, Bally turned Pong down because it was two-player!"

With the game elements starting to come together, Nolan decided to present his idea to Nutting Associates. The California-based









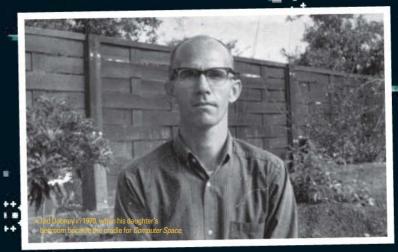
#### IN THE BEDROOM

SOME READERS MAY be aware of the ongoing dispute as to where the pioneering work on the Computer Space circuitry actually took place. For decades, it was thought that Nolan ousted his daughter from her bedroom to set up shop there but, more recently, Ted has gone on record as saying it all happened at his house. We asked Nolan to clear up the controversy. "The real answer is that it was in both, he explains. "Ted was doing his work and I was doing mine. Quite frankly, I had forgotten he was working in his daughter's bedroom as well. The blogs can get carried away. I fuelled it by saying once that I didn't think he even had a daughter. That was grist for the mill...

Ted has a slightly different take on things. "My daughter Terri used to babysit for Nolan, so he knew I had a daughter, and his wife back then, Paula, would not let him do anything in that house. He didn't even own a soldering iron."

company had had considerable success in the coin-op industry with Computer Quiz, but with that product reaching the end of its commercial life, it was eager for new machines to manufacture. "I don't think they really understood what a videogame was, but they thought it sounded like a capital good idea," Nolan winks. "I'd only really got dots on the screen but I presented myself pretty well as an up-and-coming smart boffin - I was speaking British for you there so they hired me as chief engineer. I left Ampex and was working for Nutting in the day, helping them finish up some projects, and at nights I was working with Ted on Computer Space. I specified in my contract I would retain rights to all the videogame technology, though."

The Computer Space circuitry had been coming together nicely, thanks to some assistance from an undergraduate on placement at Ampex by the name of Steve Bristow, and now that he had a position at a major player in the coin-op business, Nolan was





understandably enthusiastic about his groundbreaking project to bring *Spacewar!* out of the computer lab and into the arcades. Then he received some startling news. Someone else had had just the same idea.

As a student at Stanford in the mid-Sixties, Bill Pitts had been

had this suspicion that no one would have worked out how to do it as cheaply as I had. They had one in the coffee shop at Stanford, using a PDP-10, I think. I thought they'd done a great rendition of *Spacewar!*, but I did a quick costing and thought, 'This is no competition.'"

Nolan was right on both counts. Galaxy Game was far more faithful to the source material, but due to basing their machine around an actual computer rather than





# When we put it in a bar, people were totally baffled

NOLAN UNDERSTANDS THAT COMPUTER SPACE IS HARD ENOUGH WHEN YOU'RE SOBER

similarly entranced by Spacewar!.

After graduating, he teamed up with school friend Hugh Tuck, whose hardware know-how and family money nicely complemented Bill's software skills. By the summer of 1971, their version of Spacewar!, entitled Galaxy Game, was almost ready to meet the public, when Nolan heard news of the project.

"I had some trepidation when I went over to see what they were doing," acknowledges Nolan, "but I custom circuitry, it was hugely more expensive at around \$20,000 in total and considerably more unreliable. Though it could never hope to recoup its cost in quarters,

#### THE MAKING OF: COMPUTER SPACE

Galaxy Game beat Computer Space to market by two months, debuting in September 1971, and thus has the honour of being the first arcade videogame. That original machine was replaced by a superior version the following year, utilising a PDP-11 that supported two play screens simultaneously, which remained in situ at Stanford's Tresidder Memorial Union throughout the Seventies. For more on this innovative oddity, see chapter two of Replay, Tristan Donovan's wonderfully readable history of videogames, or visit the machine itself in its new home at the Computer History Museum in Mountain View, California.

Undeterred, even encouraged by the appearance of this unexpected rival, Nolan pressed on, with Ted joining him at Nutting and proceeding to build a prototype cabinet ready for field-testing. The game debuted at the Dutch Goose bar in Menlo Park, California, in



November 1971, with both proud parents accompanying their baby.

"Ted and I took it over in the back of my station wagon, and as soon as we plugged it in, there was an immediate cluster around the machine and play after play," enthuses Nolan. "We were convinced we had a major hit on our hands. But you see, the bar was a hangout for Stanford students, all smart as hell. Lots of engineers and maths and physics majors. Newton's second law wasn't a big problem for them! We put it in another few places and you could best describe the clientele as bimodal. They had no clue about what was going on. They'd say: 'I can't control this thing. How do you make it go right and left?' I remember trying to teach people about the thrust control and it just wasn't part of their DNA."

Worse still, the less cerebral crowd seemed to have taken their frustration out on the machine.

The prototype cabinet featured a joystick-cum-trigger controller, which snapped after a single day out in the field. For the version put into production, four buttons were used instead - rotate left, rotate right, thrust and fire - which may have bemused tipsy punters but was at least able to physically withstand their drunken advances.

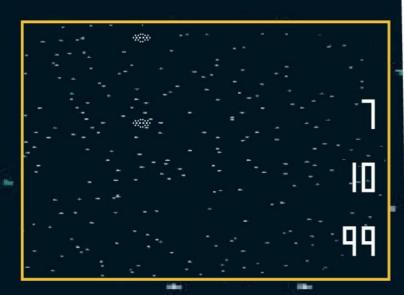
More pleasing to players was the stylish cabinet the game sat within. "Form follows function," states Nolan. "This was a space game and so should have a space age cabinet. I made a model from Plasticine. I had a little bit of plastic for the screen and a piece of wood for the back, and moulded it to that shape. Ted found a fibreglass guy who figured out how to make it into the cabinet. I sent my model to the manufacturer and they scaled it up."

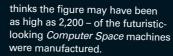
Fortunately, this didn't result in a Spinal Tap Stonehenge-style fiasco. and around 1,500 – although Nolan











And the game flopped. Well, that's what the received wisdom seems to conclude. We wish to challenge this notion. The sales figures may have been dwarfed by future hits like *Pong* and *Asteroids* – which, you could



» Nolan poses with a surriving Computer Space cabinet, of which less than 100 are accounted for

Andy Capp's Tavern, it sat next to a Computer Space cabinet, convincing Nolan that, in gameplay terms,



# LE I'm treated like a rock star. It's been 40 years coming and I love it! >>

TED DABNEY IS LIVING PROOF THAT GOOD THINGS COME TO THOSE WHO WAIT IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY



argue, was a spiritual successor – but at the start of the Seventies, a successful pinball table would only sell around 2,000 units. It provided an income stream for Nolan and Ted, which helped to fund the *Pong* project. Indeed, when the very first *Pong* prototype was placed in

simplicity was the key to success. It was a philosophy that he and Ted would adhere to when they left Nutting and formed Atari the following year, thus kick-starting the whole videogames industry.

"I felt this was a medium,
not just a product," says Nolan.
"Remember, there were more games
on the computers at university than
Spacewar!. I'd done a game called
Fox And Geese, there was a baseball
game... people were programming!
I was very happy with Computer
Space. When you create something

with your hands as well as your mind, it has a special place in your heart."

While Nolan went on to gain fame and fortune with Atari, Ted left the company in 1973, after an acrimonious falling out with his former friend. His crucial role in those early days of the games industry went unacknowledged for years, but recently, due to the efforts of games historian and author Leonard Herman, among others, the situation is changing.

"I don't give a diddly-squat about games," laughs Ted, "but getting this recognition is fantastic. I'm treated like a rock star. It's been 40 years coming and I love it!"

Thanks to Marty Goldberg and Jerry Jessop for their help with this article.

# Space Men



# We talk to three industry legends about their connection to Computer Space



STEVE BRISTOM had several placements at Ampex while

studying at the University of California at Berkley in the late Sixties and early Seventies. He later followed Nolan to Nutting Associates and worked on the two-player version of *Computer Space*, before moving to Atari, where he stayed until 1984.

Nolan was my supervisor at Ampex and he had me working on some prototype circuits, which turned out to be portions of the memory and motion controller boards for Computer Space. I saw the schematics for the game in the office he shared with Ted and I saw pieces of the prototype in a more assembled form when I visited them at Nutting. I first saw the production

version when I started working at Nutting in March of '72. Production was just starting in earnest and I was the only person who troubleshot and fixed the boards. Of course I told people what I was doing and how cool it was! I was responsible for assembling and maintaining the two-player version at the AMOA show in Chicago in November '72. After that, I returned to school and

took over the 40 or so coin-operated games that Syzygy/Atari had placed all over Berkeley and Oakland. I had two Computer Space machines and one was in Larry Blake's, a bar at UC Berkeley, near a Galaxy Game, and I'm sure we outearned it. The coin box was never overflowing, but, in fairness, it was a one-gallon paint can, which could hold a lot more than the Pong prototype!



ALCORN
was a
colleague of
Nolan and

Ted's at Ampex and was one of Atari's first employees. He created *Pong*, which became the first major hit for coin-op videogames. He stayed with Atari into the Eighties, working on such successes as the home *Pong* and the VCS.

I first saw Computer Space when Nolan and Ted invited some of their Ampex friends over to Nutting. I thought it was an interesting machine but didn't expect it to be a great success. When I came to work on Pong, Nolan gave me a set of schematics for Computer Space, but I really didn't use them, as they were drawn in a style that made it difficult to understand. We discussed

the fundamentals of his patented motion circuit and I went from there. Remember, Nolan told me *Pong* was going to be a home game, so it had to use far fewer chips than *Computer Space!* I remember Nolan and Ted talking about one of the first locations for a *Computer Space* machine at a mall. The machine had a prototype joystick and it was destroyed in a

day. They gave up and went with buttons. I never actually serviced a Computer Space – Steve Bristow has more experience with that – but I do recall servicing a Pong cabinet at the Stanford student union and competing with a Galaxy Game by Bill Pitts. I would be scooping quarters out of our game while Bill was struggling with his.



ARCHER MACLEAN has been in the games industry for

over 30 years, creating such home computer hits as *Dropzone*, *IK+* and *Jimmy White's Whirlwind Snooker*. He also restores arcade cabinets and, among his large collection of pristine machines, is a beautiful blue *Computer Space*.

I was hunting for a Computer Space for ages, and eventually one came up on eBay about 12 years ago. It was a bit dead and had a large foot sized 'kick' hole on the lower front. This didn't put me off as I believed I had the electronics skills to sort the PCB out and my mate John is an expert at candy-apple sparkly paint sprays on Sixtiesstyle fibreglass beach buggies! When it arrived,

it had an aged-looking two-page typed note lying in the bottom, which basically said, 'Any problems, call Nolan direct on (415) 961-9373'. I think he's gone a few places since then! Amazingly, it's been 100 per cent reliable since getting it working in 2001. The screen is an ancient valvebased TV, which takes a minute to 'glow' into life, and the chips used on the PCBs are Jurassic-era

ECLs and TTLs. Most of them have had their ID chemically removed to prevent cloning back in the day. Once it was restored, it has been in great demand from museums and television companies. The best was when it was used for the actual film presentation at the 2009 BAFTA Fellowship award given to Mr Bushnell himself, nearly 40 years after he designed it.



INSTRUCTION MANUAL FOR NUTTING INDUSTRIES

# NUTTING INDUSTRIES

When you think of the pioneers of the modern coin-op industry or the game console business, names like Bushnell and Baer come to mind along with companies like Atari or Magnavox. As Marty Goldberg shows, the last name Nutting deserves a similar level of reverence

hile most talk of the early video arcade industry usually centres around Nolan Bushnell and Atari, there's another individual whose firms and their contributions to both video arcade games and the coin-operated amusements industry overall are arguably equally as important. Nutting Industries (NI), Milwaukee Coin Industries (MCI) and Dave Nutting Associates (DNA) were a succession of companies spanning a 17-year period of innovation, resulting in products that either redefined the way things were or led the way in showing how things were moving to become. All three were also created by the venerable David Nutting.

The story begins in 1966 when David was working at Brooks Stevens Design Associates, a product design firm with experience in every industry. Seriously, every industry. By this time Brooks Stevens had designed everything from the original Oscar Meyer Wienermobile to logos and packaging for Miller Brewing to the very first SUV, the Jeep Wagoneer, which David had assisted on as well. It was around this time in 1966 that David got a call from his brother, Bill Nutting. "Bill gave me a call and told me about his idea

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and asked me if I would be interested in repackaging his teaching machine into a coin-operated game," says David. That idea was a plan to get both brothers into the coin-op industry, an industry they knew nothing about, with a new 'game' based on a product Bill had been an investor in. That product, a teaching machine for the US Navy, was designed to test students by using a filmstrip projected onto a screen to ask multiple-choice questions. Students would then answer by pushing A, B, C, D or E buttons. During one of their meetings, one of the other investors jokingly suggested, "Why not put a coin slot on the quiz machine and make it an entertainment device?" So now here was Bill asking if he could leverage David's design and engineering background to do that very thing. "I want you to help repackage my group's multiple-choice teaching machine into a coin-operated guiz game," came the call to his brother David in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, setting up the same successful start-up formula mirrored later by Bushnell/Dabney and Jobs/Wozniak; the visionary and the doer.

As David recalls, "Bill was learning that coinoperated equipment was sold through distributors located in the major cities. Bill flew out to Milwaukee where we spent several days putting together a plan. At the same time, Bill visited distributors in Chicago,



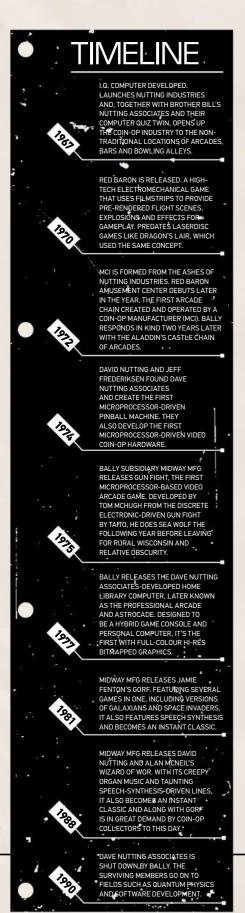
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» [Fig. 3] David Nutting working at the drawing board in 1972 at MCI.

ing at the FIG.3

» [Fig. 2] The original headquarters for all three companies at 3404 N Holton Street in Milwaukee, WI as it appeared in 1972 when it was known as MCI.

Detroit and New York, learning more about the business. My expertise was design and engineering and Bill's was in marketing. So our verbal arrangement at that time was that I would design and engineer the final product and Bill would be the marketing and sales. I had a good friend who was an electronic engineer with Cutler Hammer. Harold [Montgomery] designed all the circuitry and I designed the cabinetry and electromechanical devices like the projector."

The arrangement worked fine as the prototype was developed and tested successfully; that is until another relationship - one that usually takes a toll in any startup - took precedence. Bill's wife Claire decided she didn't like the arrangement and played the divorce card, threatening to become another notch in a staggering statistic. Silicon Valley has the highest divorce rate in California, and California itself is 20% above the rest of the nation. Bill didn't want to become part of the statistic, so he called David and said he was going to manufacture the game in California and that David should shut down his operation. The news wasn't what David wanted to hear, but it was also obvious to David that the current working relationship he had with his brother wasn't going to work. He had already sunk way too much money into the operation to stop. So the brothers went their own ways and started their own companies to market the same game. Bill, under Nutting Associates, would be marketing it as Computer Quiz and Dave, under Nutting Industries, would be marketing it as IQ Computer. Setting up a manufacturing location at 3404 N Holton St in Milwaukee and hiring Eugene Wagner for marketing, David's game became an instant success (as did brother Bill's)

he US coin-operated industry was in the midst of a long battle against the stigma of gambling and organised crime; something it would not shed until the 1970s when videogames took over the industry. New York State even had a ban on pinball games that lasted for over 30 years, treating them no differently than slot machines or other gambling devices. By the late 1960s, the industry had organised under the Music Operators of America (MOA). The MOA's existence owes itself to the age-old battle against the US music industry that Steve Jobs more recently fought in the format of digital rights management (DRM) and 'renting' of digital music. That being the music industry has consistently tried to squeeze every nickel and dime out of people's enjoyment of music that they could. The MOA was started in 1948 by a group of influential jukebox distributors and operators to fight against the repeal of the jukebox royalty exemption. It eventually grew to become a powerful organisation representing the entire spectrum of coin-operated devices, including electromechanical, pinball, pool tables, jukeboxes and vending machines.

At the time of the release of *Computer Quiz* and *IQ Computer*, the MOA had been working hard to fight the typecasting of coin-operated machines, specifically pinball – a stigma that had severely limited the number of locations operators could place machines. For instance in Los Angeles, California, about six hours south of where Bill was living, pinball machines were banned until the mid 1970s. The Nutting brothers' games proved to be the right tool at the right time as operators used the machines to work their way into new locations. Both games could go

FIG.4NO.	DESCRIPTION		SIZE
653	18 WHEELER 280 Compact System	3/23/78	
654	BALLY BLACKTACK (PIN BALL U.R.)	4/10/78	
1056	BALLY STRIKES & SPARES	4/17/78	
657	Video RinBall LOID	4/24/78	
658	Home Computer add on	DNA	5/5/18
659	CRT memory " "		
660	Dual-Digital tape all on		
lotal	Light Dan		

» [Fig. 4] A page from Bally's own project logbook showing some of the projects being pursued in 1978. A fair portion were by Dave Nutting Associates (listed as DNA).

# FROM THE ARCHIUES: NUTTING INDUSTRIES

everywhere because of their perceived edutainment value. Operators would get into a location with the game, establish a relationship and then slowly bring in pinballs, pool tables and vending. In a lesson learned by both Nuttings and later leveraged by Nolan Bushnell with his creation of the fake competitor Kee Games, the fact that there were two manufacturers of 'Quiz' games also awoke the marketplace and opened up more operators and locations. In the amusement industry at that time, a great manufacturing run for a machine like a pinball was somewhere around 1,000 to 1,500. Computer Quiz had a run of 4,200 units and IQ Computer had a run of 3,600.

Over the next several years, David and Nutting Industries continued on the edutainment arcade game path using the same filmstrip technology, starting with a two-player version of *IQ Computer* called *Dual IQ Computer* and then various quiz replacement packs as well as another version of the unit, called *Golf IQ*. David also looked to diversify by hooking up with a manufacturer and distributor in London, England, creating a subsidiary to market non-coin-operated versions to educational institutions as Modec Inc, and by expanding into food service vending machines via some patents that Harold's father owned. It was the game offerings that needed to grow, however,



## FIG.5



» [Fig. 5] The manual for Nutting Industries' / Il Computer.
Together with its twin Compute.
Quiz by Nutting Associates, it opened up locations formerly closed to arcade games thanks to their seedy reputation over the preceding decades.

# WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

### **David Nutting**

Retired and living in Arizona, in 1984 David had moved to Colorado to study quantum physics. He's now the author of two books, the 2005 released *Language of Nature – Quantum World Revealed* and the 2012 Secrets to a Creative Mind: Become the Master of Your Mind.



# Jamie Fenton

Jamie now lives in Sunnyvale, California. Spending the last 30 years working for a long line of game, graphic and software company start-ups, she currently works for Amazon's Lab 126 on the multimedia and performance teams for the Amazon Kindle and Kindle Fire tablets.



### Alan McNeil

After creating the follow-up to *Berzerk*, called *Frenzy* for Stern Electronics, Alan also went on to do *Winter Games* and *Sub Battle* for Epyx, but has chiefly spent the last 30 years as a software developer writing apps across a plethora of platforms as a consultant



DAVID NUTTING ON OBTAINING INTEL'S FIRST MICROPROCESSOR DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

and in 1969 they introduced *The Puzzler* designed by that same London firm. Ward Marty Johnson would replace Eugene as marketing head by the end of 1969, just as they were working on their most ambitious project. Initially titled 'Leisure Time Coin Game', by the time of its unveiling in October 1970 it was renamed *Sensorama*. The first arcade game to feature a professional sports tie-in, it was designed for placement at bowling alleys and featured 13 audiovisual bowling lessons given by pro bowler Dick Ritger.

By 1970, though, it was clear that these educational arcade games were running their course, and with electromechanical (EM) arcade games already being dominated by the likes of Bally, Midway, Chicago Coin, Williams and Sega, a new format was needed. Brother Bill Nutting and his Nutting Associates got their new format in the form of video-display-driven arcade games when Nolan Bushnell had called up Bill's sales manager David Ralstin out of the blue. David was certainly open to the same synergy between new technology and games happening, and went so far as to place ads in local newspapers looking for people to submit ideas. However, overall he wanted to expand the projection technology into fully projected games based far away from the realm of guizzes. Looking to create a unique first-person experience with WWI airplane dogfights, in 1970 he began work on what would be the last game released under Nutting Industries, Red Baron. Using a pre-rendered animated

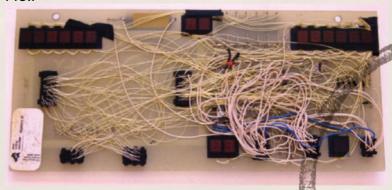
film that functioned by jumping to different animations, much in the same way LaserDisc games like *Dragon's Lair* would some 12 years later, the player was given the sense of flying a WWI biplane into aerial combat. It was accompanied by recordings of actual machinegun fire and plane engines along with haptic feedback in the form of the controls vibrating every time the plane's gun was fired. Unfortunately, Nutting Industries ran into bad financial problems afterwards, forcing David shut it down and start over...

It was in the exact same location, and with some of the same people, but on paper Milwaukee Coin



» [Fig. 6] A special coin David Nutting had minted to give out at the Music Operators of America (MOA) show in 1968 – the main coin-op show in America.

## FIG.7



» [Fig. 7] The processor card for the Flicker pinball machine that David and Jeff retrofitted to use a microprocessor.



FIG.8



» [Fig. 8] David Nutting's brother Bill with his most famous product, Computer Space

FIG.9



» [Fig. 9] Jamie Fenton's video coin-op development station around the time of her games GORF and Robby Roto.

Industries (MCI) was a brand new company. MCI was carrying on where NI had left off and producing film-driven war-themed arcade games like *Blue Max*, *Desert Fox*, *U-Boat* and *Flying Ace*. However, it was the direction that David and the MCI board wanted to take in 1972 that really set MCI apart from other coinop companies. Firms at the time sold to distributors and what are called operators, the people who actually run the machine on location. At the time, most locations were usually arcades, bars and bowling alleys. Coin-op companies might put their own machines out at these locations for testing during development, but they never actually owned the locations.

One of MCI's customers gave it the idea to change all that. During the 1960s, Jules Milman and his company American Amusements Inc had sought to wipe out the negative image of arcades by designing a new breed that were to be placed at the then new concept of mega shopping centres in the Chicago area, more commonly known as shopping malls. Called Carousel Time, these family-friendly locations with carpeting and a ban on smoking and eating on the premises were far different than their seedy penny arcade counterparts. The success of Carousel Time led the MCI board to decide it should look into running its own mall-based locations featuring MCI games. Based on the successful Red Baron game (which had spawned the recent Super Red Baron follow-up by MCI) the first Red Baron Amusement Center debuted in the Milwaukee area Mayfair mall in 1972. Within the vear they had grown to about seven locations in the Midwest. Nolan Bushnell also tried to duplicate the idea in 1973 with Atari's own mall-based arcades in the San Francisco Bay Area, such as at Bay Fair Mall, but it never quite caught on (at least not until he combined it with pizza to create Chuck E Cheese). However, future

David Nutting partner Bally did manage to succeed with its own in 1974... by purchasing American Amusements and rebranding it as the (more recently) well-known Aladdin's Castle.

ith the success of the locations and the EM arcade game market starting to shrink during 1974, the MCI board wanted to concentrate its resources on the Red Baron locations. David, meanwhile, wanted to investigate the new form of electronics called microprocessors. The gateway into this futuristic world arrived via an Intel rep who had stopped by MCI to extol the virtues of the firm's soon-to-be-released 4040 4-bit microprocessor. He took new hire Jeff Frederiksen, who had experience programming a Burroughs mainframe computer, down to an Intel seminar in Chicago. "I wanted to be the industry leader and develop the first microprocessor pinball. I convinced them to sell us one of the first microprocessor development systems," says David.

Developed under a consulting contract with Bally, the pinball project also led to the creation of the final Nutting company in this article, Dave Nutting Associates. David formed DNA, a game engineering firm, as a partnership between him and Jeff Frederiksen in the early summer of 1974. On 20 August, Bally in turn sent them two Flicker pinball machines (a game yet to be released) to retrofit into solid-state microprocessor-based prototypes as proofs-of-concept. Completed by September, the new system was demoed to Bally management at the end of the month and over the next several years became the blueprint for the burgeoning microprocessor-based pinball industry, whose machines were distinguished by their glowing LED score displays.

# DEFINING GAMES



# **Gun Fight** 1975

Released by Bally subsidiary Midway Mfg, it was originally titled Western Gun and released by Taito in Japan. DNA turned it into a microprocessor-controlled arcade videogame, introducing software coding to the industry. According to David Nutting, its release caused a RAM shortage in other industries. It's also the first game to feature bitmap graphics, a concept only previously available in high-end graphics research systems at universities and corporations.



### Sea Wolf 1976

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Featuring a life-size periscope, it's essentially a videogame version of Midway's earlier electromechanical games Sea Raider and Sea Devil. Its advanced sound effects and first-person environment proved a big hit in the mid-1970s and it remained one of the most popular games of the period until Midway released Taito's Space Invaders in 1978. That same year, the sequel Sea Wolf II was also released, allowing two-player action with side-by-side periscopes.



### **Boot Hill** 1977

The 1977 follow-up to Gun Fight, Boot Hill was programmed by Alan McNeil who later did the arcade classic Berzerk for Stern. Using dual joysticks to control the positions of the cowboy and his gun, it also features a colourful western backdrop that the game is projected onto via a reflective glass technique common in games of the period. Besides expanded gameplay, it also added a death song and burial of the player on the infamous Boot Hill



### **GORF** 1981

Jamie Fenton's classic shoot-'em-up features several games in one, along with speech synthesis: "We used the TI speech chip – sometimes [it] would vocalise using garbage memory and it sounded like people speaking in tongues." With levels that included licensed versions of Namco's Galaxians and Taito's Space Invaders, that reason alone is why there are not many GORF ports out there, according to lamie.



### Wizard Of Wor 1981

David Nutting and Bob Ogdon's game was inspired by the scene in *Alien*, where Sigourney Weaver is tracking the escaped alien via a small monitor. Using the same speech system and style of taunting as *GORF*, the standout feature is its very theme: the wizard. "When we put a voice into the machine, that got us into the mythology of who, exactly, was doing the talking. So we invented the Wizard. We used the Wizard to disrupt the flow of the game," explained co-designer Bob Ogdon to Arnie Katz in 1982.

It was right around this time that the duo pursued their greatest accomplishment, however. The Intel 8080 had been released that past April, and according to David, "As soon as we were able to acquire the 8080 processor we developed our videogame hardware based on a mass RAM system. For every pixel on the screen we had a dot in memory, giving us full control of the entire screen." What David is describing is the frame-buffer-based process now used by every videogame coin-op and console known to man: bitmapped graphics. Already in use in high-end graphics research computers at the time, David and Jeff were the first to see its potential in videogames. Video arcade games and home consoles in that period were manually generating hardware-based sprites (called 'stamps' in coin-op industry speak), even once microprocessor-based games became more common. So the process they introduced was truly far ahead of its time, enough so they knew they'd need to look for some programmers to hire for future projects.

Jeff had been attending UW-Milwaukee at the time he joined MCI and studying under Richard Northouse, a professor in the School of Engineering and Computing. Approached for some students skilled in programming, Richard contracted out two: Tom McHugh and Jamie Fenton. Recalls Jamie, "I entered the game business a little reluctantly. All the tales about Bally being part of the Mafia etc. Since I was in Milwaukee I did not know about the Chicago scene. For a few weeks we worked for Richard and were later hired on directly to DNA. My first assignment was 'Mirco Pin'. Mirco was a pinball company that Jeff and David pursued a relationship with independently of Bally. It was like the Bally Fireball but had more going on. After that I got to work on a blackjack game on the videogame hardware and

that really impressed David. I remember the place [where DNA was located] vividly. It was a commercial space shared with the Red Baron arcade game chain, and there were a lot of games to play with. You just wandered around with an extension cord."

According to David, the first game they started for Bally subsidiary Midway on their new hardware was a baseball game (eventually released as Tornado Baseball), but it would be Tom McHugh's project that would hit the market first for Bally in November 1975: Gun Fight, Midway's licensed version of Taito's Western Gun. In a process similar to what they had done for the Flicker pinball machine, the game was gutted and retrofitted with the bitmapped microprocessor-based system they had designed. With Gun Fight, the video coin-op industry had just met its future. And as Dave further notes, it wasn't the only industry to be affected. "Our system used a frame buffer of RAM that would write to the CRT. RAM in 1975/76 was in short supply. In order to get a good price on RAM, Midway had to commit over three million dollars on their first release. This order consumed over half of all RAM in production in the world at that time, causing great shortages to other industries." Also according to David, Taito turned around and copied their 8080-based hardware for its game Space Invaders.

From there, the now classic *Sea Wolf* (by Tom) and the racing *280-Zzzap* (by Jamie) games followed, along with the previously mentioned *Tornado Baseball*. The string of hits led Bally to buy out DNA outright, and the group moved down to Chicago to essentially become Bally/Midway's research and design wing in the same way that Cyan was for Atari. It was followed later in the year by the start of the design of Bally's simultaneous entry in to the new home computer and programmable

# In 1981, David Nutting and Bob Ogdon created a spin-off from DNA called Action Graphics to develop games for the Bally videogame system (at that time owned by Astrovision and renamed the Bally Astrocade). The firm was staffed by many of the same people under DNA who had originally been programming for the system when it was directly under Bally. Many of these games were direct ports of Bally/Midway coin-ops but under different titles, such as Muncher (Pac-Man). Incredible Wizard (Wizard Of Wor), and Space Fortress (Space Zap). Action Graphics also did original games like Solar Conqueror. As the third-party demand for other consoles like the 2600, 5200 and Colecovision started to explode in 1982 and 1983, Action Graphics started doing contract work creating games for many of these third-party companies, or in

some cases porting games they had done on

another platform. In an example of the latter,

they did Activision's ports of *Beamrider* for the Atari 5200, Átari 8-bit computers, Colecovision and Commodore 64. Action Graphics lasted a year after even DNA had been shut down.

though by that time (considering the collapse of the US console industry) it was doing

mostly computer games.

# "This order consumed over half of all RAM in production in the world at that time"

DAVID NUTTING REVEALS HOW GUN FIGHT'S PRODUCTION CAUSED A GLOBAL RAM SHORTAGE



FIG.10

» [Fig. 10] DNA developed this hybrid game console and computer system in 1976, released in 1977. It was later renamed the Bally Professional Arcade and then Astrocade.

FIG.11



» [Fig. 11] The back of the microprocessor-driven Flicker pinball machine's backglass showing the modifications Jeff and David made to support LED-based scoring (the first of its kind).

console markets: The Bally Home Library Computer. Created as a full-colour bitmapped personal computer and gaming console (the first bitmapped framebuffered console, in fact) that could also be leveraged in new coin-op designs, it saw a mail-order-only release in September 1977, with wide release in 1978 as the Bally Professional Arcade. More hits followed for DNA, most notably Wizard Of Wor and Jamie's smash game GORF. However, the video coin-op industry went through a crash starting in '82, causing many firms to either downsize or leave all together. Sadly, DNA didn't survive and was shut down by Bally in early 1984. Interestingly though, this was just as Bally was acquiring the game firm Sente (founded by several ex-Atari coin-op engineers and helmed by none other than Nolan Bushnell), which would serve the very same purpose as DNA over the next four years.

Special thanks to Keith Smith.





ith modern-day game characters often being designed and scripted to ape Hollywood movie stars, it's pleasing to note that a yellow circle with an insatiable appetite remains the

most enduring videogaming star to date. After all, which gamer hasn't played some variant of *Pac-Man*? According to a May 2008 report by the Davie Brown Celebrity Index (dbireport.com), which scores celebrities to evaluate potential product spokespeople, *Pac-Man* was recognised by 94 per cent of US consumers, outstripping even *Mario. Pac-Man*'s appeal is, ironically, akin to Hollywood heavyweights like Tom Hanks.

Part of this appeal is no doubt down to the fun, peaceful nature of Pac-Man and his actions. He explores a simple maze, munching dots, pursued by a quartet of cartoon ghosts. When Pac-Man eats one of the maze's four power pellets, the ghosts turn blue and flee, having suddenly become edible and decidedly non-threatening. However, even when a ghost is consumed, its eyes 'escape', hastily retreating to

the central ghost pen, whereupon it's reborn.

This gentle, good-natured gameplay was no accident, as the game's designer Toru Iwatani explains. "In the late Seventies, videogame arcades, which in Japan we call 'game centres', were just playgrounds for boys, and the only videogames on

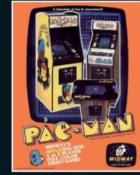
offer were brutal affairs involving the killing of aliens," he remembers. "My aim was to come up with a game that had an endearing charm, was easy to play, involved lots of lighthearted fun, and that women and couples could enjoy."

Iwatani started thinking about videogame ideas in which the key word was the verb 'eat'. And, yes, the pizza rumour is largely true – suitably, while at a lunch, a fast-food favourite forever changed the course of gaming history. "With 'eat' established as the key word, a shape caught my eye," recalls Iwatani. "I had ordered a round pizza, and it was missing a piece." In a 'eureka' moment, Iwatani says, "the shape of Man flashed through my mind"

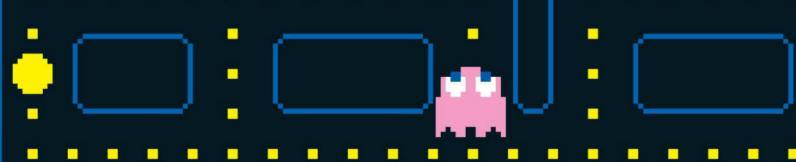
what is now Pac-Man flashed through my mind."

» Toru Iwatani with an altogether cuddlier version of Blinky/Akabei, along with similarly soft versions of Pac-Man.

Even in those early gaming days, videogame characters had a little detail, but Pac-Man was forever destined in his first



- PUBLISHER: NAMCO/MIDWAY
- G DEVELOPER: NAMCO
- RELEASED: 1980
- PLATFORMS: ARCADE, VARIOUS
  - GENRE: MAZE GAME



# 

With its efficient, simple gameplay and aesthetics, Pac-Man was popular fodder for the hacking brigade. Basic hacks involved minor gameplay tweaks, such as speeding things up, while slightly less basic hacks messed about with the maze, graphics and sound, adding to the original game's pristine polish a veneer of sticky and semi-random digital jam. The hideous Joyman, with its ghastly audio and broken maze layout, most notably kicked Pac-Man in the head with all the subtlety of a size-ten boot.

The most effective hacks are those that respect the original formula – Hangly-Mar's amended mazes – but GL's Piranha is an exception. Removing the maze and shifting the setting to a claustrophobic underwater cavern – the eponymous piranha pursued by ravenous octopuses – gives the game an edge in terms of focus and originality that other hacks typically lack.

incarnation to remain a yellow disc with a basic mouth, like an incredibly simplified version of Iwatani's lunch. He notes that some suggested at the time that other components should be added, such as eyes, but then there would be no end to the additions. "As design concepts, both Pac-Man and the ghosts have a simplicity and endearing charm," Iwatani says of his decision to keep the graphic design streamlined, also suggesting that the visuals of the game helped it appeal to female gamers of the day.

The elegant clarity of the character design also influenced the game itself. The food for Pac-Man to eat was initially strewn all over the screen, but Iwatani was keen to ensure gamers would immediately know what to do. "I wanted to simplify gameplay operation, and so the idea occurred to me of constructing a maze in which movement was restricted to the four basic directions – up and down, left and right," he says. With this structure in place, the game's objective became more obvious, and the lead character soon gained his moniker, 'Pakku Man', based on Japanese slang 'paku-paku', which describes the sound of the mouth while eating. (The original game's title subsequently became *Puck Man*. The

wily hoodlums amending the 'p' in 'puck' to an 'f'.)
With the game's basic content dealt with,
Iwatani realised it wasn't yet much fun, and so
enemies were added to the mix, providing tension
and excitement, and making it a challenge for players
to grab food from the maze. Unusually for the time,

US publisher, Midway, renamed it Pac-Man to stop

Iwatani not only developed rudimentary artificial intelligence for the ghosts, but ensured each one had its own personality of sorts, due to moving and attacking Pac-Man in its own way. "The adversarial TV cartoon *Tom And Jerry* helped shape the relationship between Pac-Man and the ghosts," recalls Iwatani. "Had the programming been such that the four ghosts constantly attacked Pac-Man's present location according to the same algorithm, the ghosts would look like a string of beads. Where's the thrill in that? So I introduced AI-type algorithms that had the ghosts coming at Pac-Man from all directions."

And so we were introduced to Blinky, Pinky, Inky and Clyde (Akabei, Pinky, Aosuke and Guzuta in the original Japanese release). According to Iwatani, the ghosts attack in waves, before dispersing and attacking again, which gives the player some regular breathing space and appears more organic than the kind of incessant attacks that had plagued earlier arcade games like Space Invaders. (Over time, these waves are harder to identify, and the ghost attacks become swift and relentless, somewhat contradicting Iwatani's desire for a non-stressful game,

but providing a necessary long-term challenge for seasoned players.) Although gamers often disagree with exactly how the algorithms work in practice, Iwatani has in the past stated that Blinky is designed to chase Pac-Man, but that Pinky's goal is to aim just in front of Pac-Man, hence why the two often seem to 'sandwich' the hero. The movement of Inky and Clyde is a lot more random, the end result being that Pac-Man is pursued in a





natural way, rather than in a robotic, pre-defined manner, which makes the game seem more real.

The attacks aren't entirely one-sided, however; as noted earlier, the maze contains four power pellets, which temporarily transform the ghosts into a 'scared' blue form, enabling Pac-Man to turn the tables, hunt them down and eat them. "The inspiration for the power pellet was the spinach in the TV cartoon Popeye," explains Iwatani. "The power pellets didn't exist in the planning stages at all - they emerged during the development stage as a feature for turning the game around, and made the game vastly more interesting."

Although the completed Pac-Man ended up shipping well over quarter of a million units, Iwatani notes that the game's impact wasn't immediate: "In Japan, the game met with a lukewarm reception at first, but it then proved to be a long seller over several years." Amusingly, its success in the USA also took people by surprise, with 'experts' of the time judging Rally-X to be 1980's game to watch. However, Iwatani's ability to attract all kinds of gamers, rather than just teenagers keen on blowing up aliens, hit home. "Overseas, it was a massive hit - people who normally didn't play videogames became avid fans, and there was much media coverage of the playing of Pac-Man," he recalls.

The game has also stood the test of time, being converted to myriad platforms, and it regularly appears on compilations and various online services to this day. "I designed the game so that players of any age and either sex could play it straight away, without reading a game manual," says Iwatani of his creation's enduring popularity. "The game also contains numerous detailed stratagems for reading the players' psychology."

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Iwatani claims he'd not revise his game, given the chance to go back and do so. "At the design stage, there was a 'shutter' feature, which opened and closed, acting as an obstacle in the path of the maze," he says. "But I'd change nothing from the final game. Why? Because Pac-Man is complete to such an extent that to add or to subtract anything at all would be unacceptable."

Despite having worked on a range of titles over the years, including Time Crisis and Ridge Racer, it's clear Iwatani's heart always remained with his disc-based creation. During the



» Semicon's mid-Nineties Hyper Pacman provides an almost Bomberman-like take on Pac-Man,

# THE MAKING & REMAKING OF: PAC-MAN

# CONVERSION CAPERS

With myriad Pac-Man conversions available, we look at the most curious examples



# ATARI 2600

Embarrassingly drawing attention to itself via an 'Atari National *Pac-Man* Day', this conversion supposedly resulted from marketing pressure. A flickering mess, the game's dreadful maze layout and ropey gameplay led to a shortfall in sales, with five million cartridges left gathering dust.



MSX
Namco's 1984 MSX release eschewed the horizontally stretched mazes of most home conversions, instead shifting the score display to the side of a smaller maze that retained the arcade parent's aspect ratio. This device remains in use today – eg: in *Pac-Man* plug-and-play TV games.



### GAME BOY ADVANCE

A touch of the crazies descended over Nintendo HQ when the NES Classics line reached Europe. With collectable boxes ditched and prices rais you got a botched port of the bog-standard NES conversion for more than the superior Pac-Man Collection cost at the time. Nice.



## VIC-20

While most VIC-20 owners had Atarisoft's dire conversion, Japanese Commodore fans were enjoying HAL Laboratories' superior take on Pac-Man. Commodore renamed the game Jelly Monsters outside of Japan, but fell foul of Atari's legal hammer of doom, and withdrew the game.



# FUJITSU FM-7

Instead of following the MSX conversion's method of dealing with varying aspect ratios between arcade and home screens, 1984's Japanese FM-7 Pac-Man release rotates the maze by 90 degrees. This means no stretched maze and no weeny graphics, but the change disorientates.



The Pac-Man conversion for Apple's handheld is mostly unremarkable and accurate, but the lack of tactile controls results in curious control methods: 'swiping', an on-screen D-pad, and tilting to move Pac-Man. Swiping works best; directions are confirmed via an on-screen joystick.



# PAG-MAN MILESTONES

# A brief overview of notable arcade-based

# MS PAC-MAN (1981)

Fed up waiting for Namco's Pac-Man sequel, US distributor Midway struck a blow for gender equality by releasing GCC's Pac-Man hack. Along with speeding up the game and amending the hero, Ms Pac-Man includes new mazes, more varied ghost behaviour and movina fruit.



SUPER PAC-MAN (1982) Namco's *Pac-Man* sequel disappointed many outside of Japan, due to the fact that the gameplay was substantially altered. You still clear mazes, but munch targets behind gates that open when keys are guzzled. A 'super power dot' makes Pac-Man grow Hulk-like, to devour everything in his path.



# JR. PAC-MAN (1983)

Midway again did the naughty, creating this effort without permission, and Namco terminated Midway's licensing agreement. Namco still doesn't recognise the game as official. With its scrolling levels obliterating the original's tightly honed strategic gameplay, it's easy to see why.



» A rampaging *Pac-Man* on level one devours a ghost before laying eyes on the cherries. Meanwhile, a resurrected Pinky sets out for revenge.



» Pac-Man Arrangement, released in 1996 as part of Namco Classics Collection Vol.2, is a successful Pac-Man update, with pretty graphics and interesting new features.





# DEVELOPER HUIGHTS



S LIBBLE RABBLE! (PICTURED)

SYSTEM: ARCADE YFAR: 1983

**SPAC-LAND** SYSTEM: ARCADE YEAR: 1984

**G RIDGE RACER** SYSTEM: ARCADE

YFAR: 1993

Eighties, he was involved in both Pac-Land and Pac-Mania, with the former being his favourite. "It pioneered action videogames in which the scene flows horizontally. According to its creator, Shigeru Miyamoto, Nintendo's Super Mario Bros. was influenced by Pac-Land," he says, proudly.

However, it was during 2006 that Iwatani finally got the chance to both return to Pac-Man's roots and design a brand new engaging, modern-day evolution of his original creation. Instead of the arcades, the chosen platform was Xbox Live Arcade, and the game became Pac-Man Championship Edition (PMCE)

"The time was right for a next-generation Pac-Man, because the Xbox Live Arcade environment supports real-time competition with score-ranking via the internet, and improved design through its hardware specification," explains lwatani about the origins of the highly acclaimed game. "My aim with the game was to achieve legitimate evolution, with simplicity of game design and absence of the superfluous as my guiding principles, because, in my opinion, few players look for complexity in gameplay."

Guided by the same ground rules that defined Pac-Man - immediacy, simplicity, immunity to language and cultural differences, and "that sense of wanting to play and have fun, which is what the world's videogame players are looking for" -Pac-Man Championship Edition broadly retains the original's core gameplay, tasking the player with navigating a maze to eat dots, fruit and power pellets and avoiding roaming ghosts.

However, some major changes were made to the formula, in order to keep the game relevant and ensure it was more than just the original game reskinned.

Rather than the player having to clear a maze to proceed, Pac-Man Championship Edition plays like a time-attack game, and the player has a strict time limit in which to score as many points as possible. As with Pac-Man, this is done by consuming dots and 'scared' ghosts, but the longer you stay alive, the more each dot is worth (and the faster the game becomes). Also, the maze is now split in half. Clear one half of dots and bonus fruit appears in the other; eat said fruit and new dots are spawned in the previously cleared half. "The horizontal maze came about due to the prevalence of widescreen displays," explains lwatani, noting that the split-maze device also creates non-stop action, unlike the original Pac-Man, which 'interrupts' players upon a level's completion. "And the timeout feature increases the sense of speed and excitement in the game, making it a very thrilling

experience to play. Also, score ranking via the internet provides competition, which has been a great success." lwatani adds that one of the key aims was to have people worldwide competing, the logical modern-day equivalent of Eighties' high-score table on the original Pac-Man. It works brilliantly, ensuring you'll always want to return for one more game.

Perhaps ironically, PMCE was, unlike Pac-Man, critically acclaimed right from the start. 1UP.com ranked it alongside Geometry Wars in terms of a classic game format being reworked, noting that

# THE MAKING & REMAKING OF: PAC-MAN



# Pac-Man follow-ups



# PAC & PAL (1983)

Here, Namco again moved further from the original Pac-Man. Ghosts can only be stunned rather than eaten. and now flipping cards opens gates to reveal items. The 'Pal' of the title is the infuriating Miru, who makes off with your bonus items, taking them to the inaccessible ghost pen.



# PAC-LAND (1984)

Pac-Man finally left the maze, gained legs, arms and a face, and was tasked with battling through this early side-scrolling arcade game, its levels peppered with Pac-Man imagery. Although repetitious, the game is initially fun and it's more successful than Namco's previous two efforts.



# PAC-MANIA (1987)

Pac-Man finally returned to his roots in *Pac-Mania*, although as you can see his surroundings are markedly different. The isometric maze scrolls, and the ghosts tend to roam in packs. Although, in Pac-Man's favour, he can now jump and he occasionally finds bonus items that speed him up.



» Several levels in and the ghosts become faster – you have little time to eat them after eating a power pellet.



» Piranha is a decent Pac-Man hack, removing the maze





# Pac-Man's guiding principle is TORU IWATANI

it was "a lot more than just a tarted-up Pac-Man." Joystiq's Jared Rea blogged: "A better name for it would have been Pac-Man 2, [...] a name that gets the point across that Pac-Man Championship Edition is the first true sequel to the game since

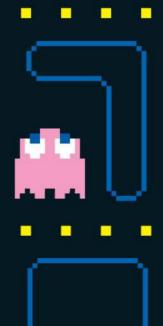
lwatani modestly suggests that some of the acclaim might be due to low expectations for a Pac-Man game, and says the response of game players exceeded his expectations, citing the many internet-based critiques that offered "splendidly glowing evaluations". (Happily, and despite claims to the contrary, Iwatani also assures us that PMCE is not necessarily to be his swansong, since he continues to be involved in videogame production. Although at this point in time (2015) he's yet to have been significantly involved in a new game in the way he was with PMCE. He's not left our thoughts completely however, as he made a cameo appearance alongside Pac-Man in Adam Sandler's recent movie Pixels.

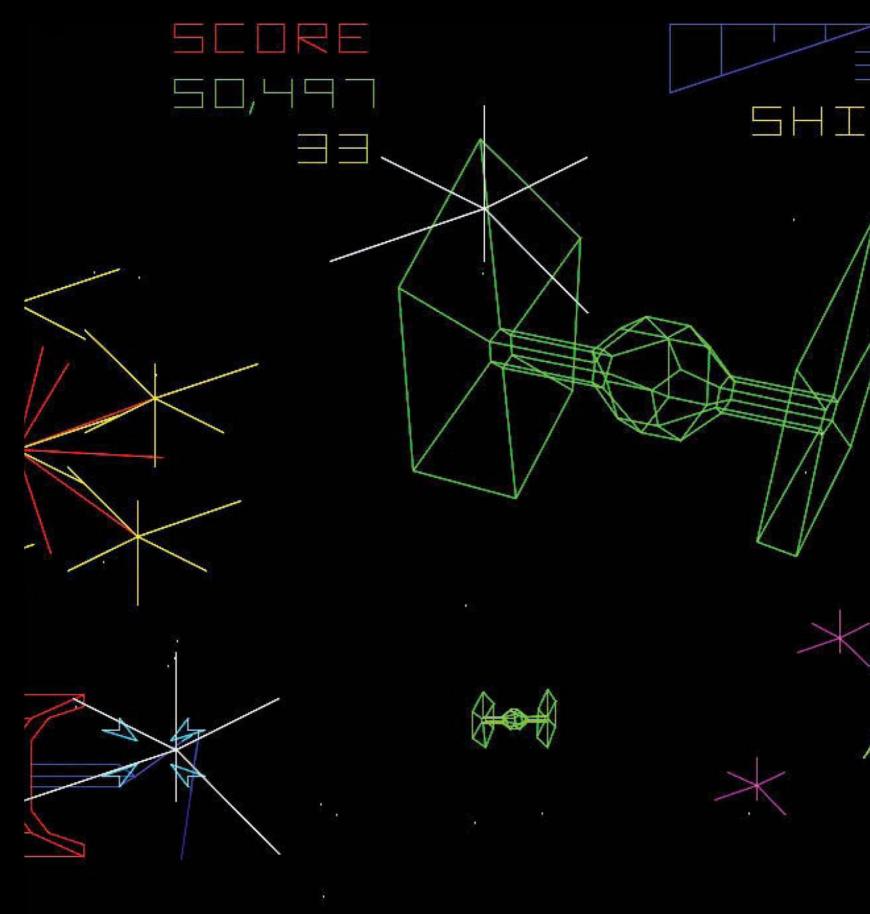
With 30 years of experience in videogames design, including the most iconic games character of them all, Iwatani is now, perhaps suitably, involved in teaching aspects of videogames design to students at Tokyo Polytechnic University, along with conducting research into games for social purposes. Although Pac-Man has always remained popular throughout the years, we wondered what Iwatani made of the games industry's tendency towards over-complication and movie-like games, along with the relatively recent resurgence in retro-orientated titles. "We should carefully gauge the preferences of light users, who normally don't play videogames, and the preferences

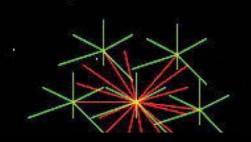
of videogame aficionados, and then design products to suit each," he suggests, thoughtfully. "A sumptuous party dress may be of limited practical value in daily living, and the same applies to over-elaborate videogames in the videogame market." On retro titles - 'pick up and play' games popularised by the internet, XBLA, Nintendo DS, Wii and iPhone - Iwatani thinks this might be a sign that the actual game, rather than aesthetics, is again becoming the main concern for developers: "Hardware specifications 20 or 30 years ago restricted powers of expression, and so the rules of the game were decisive in attracting users. The current boom in retro games is evidence of a universal fascination with game-playing itself."

We finish off the interview by returning to the subject of Pac-Man. We're keen to know how Iwatani feels to be the designer behind a game that almost everyone knows - one that perhaps only *Tetris* can challenge in terms of its incredible widespread appeal? "People view the work in different ways, from different viewpoints. Some see it as being broad and shallow. For others, it is narrow yet deep and praised," considers Iwatani. "What is gratifying about this is that people find such different reasons for loving it." And as a final word, Iwatani reckons that there are still things his 35-year-old creation can teach modern-day games designers, developers and publishers. "Pac-Man is the perfect videogame because its design gives top priority to the player and to a spirit of service," he says. "Its guiding principle is 'fun first'. This concept is in my view invincible and what I look for in the videogame creators of today, that they understand the importance of capturing people's hearts."

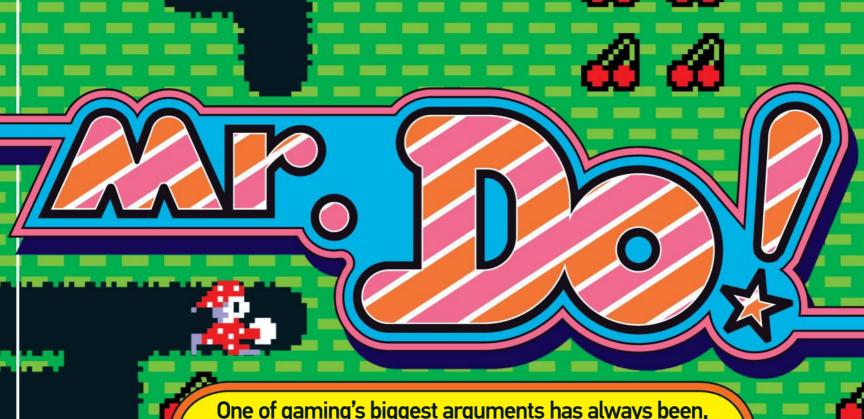
With grateful thanks to Tetsuya Hayashi for invaluable ass in realising this interview.











One of gaming's biggest arguments has always been, 'Which is better, Dig Dug or Mr. Do?' While everyone has their own answer, Kieren Hawken went digging to see what everyone's favourite clown has to offer



PRESS

1 OR 2 PLAYERS BUTTON

(\*) (\*) (\*) (\*) (\*) (\*) (\*)

PRESENTED

BY

UNIVERSAL B1982

CRED IT 9

\*[Arcade] Sadly, there's no co-operative play in Mr. Dol

hey say that in the videogame industry you just need one big hit to assure your success. Nintendo was on the verge of bankruptcy when Donkey Kong came along, Taito was far from a household name before Space Invaders and Galaxian was the game that sent Namco onto the path of success. Universal Entertainment hit the sweet spot itself when it came up with Mr. Do! in October 1982. Although the company previously had reasonable success with Space Panic in 1980 (regarded as the very first platform game) and Lady Bug the year after (an interesting Pac-Man

clone) it was struggling to break into the US market and needed something to grab people's attention, *Mr. Dol* did just that.

The name itself was both unique and memorable; short and snappy with a big exclamation mark to drive it home. Do himself was just as appealing; a fun and friendly clown adorned with lots of bright colours. Other operators had already found that bright and bold colours attracted a larger audience away from the standard demographic of arcadegoers, Atari's Centipede and Konami's Frogger have both used this to great effect and became very popular with casual players, Universal was very much trying the same strategy. In fact, programmer of the Atari 2600 version Ed English remembers the original Mr. Do! prototype that he was involved in testing was quite different to the final product. "I was the first person to receive an early version





# **CLOWNING AROUND**

We quiz Ed English about his 2600 conversion

# How did you come to work on *Mr. Do!* for the Atari 2600?

After graduating with a Computer Science degree, I landed a job in Miami, programming embedded chess machines for Fidelity Electronics. There I learned game theory and was tutored by a chess grandmaster. The idea was he would teach me to play better chess so I could teach the computer to play better. Great fun! From there, Parker Brothers hired me to help reverseengineer the Atari 2600 and to develop games for it. After disassembling some of the best game cartridges to learn how they programmed, I was ready for my first game assignment, converting the Frogger coin-op into an Atari 2600 cartridge. That took me 16 weeks and I made some good use of the Atari's limited capabilities to reuse sprites, while painting the screen, and to do two-part harmony music while doing sound effects. My Frogger cartridge sold four million copies the first year. I left Parker Brothers with another engineer, Ed Temple, and we started a game development company, Individeo. We liked to say, 'Two Ed's were better than one!' Individeo developed all of Coleco's Atari 2600 games for two years. Mr. Do! was the first Atari cartridge I programmed for Coleco. We also programmed Front Line, Roc N' Rope, Cabbage Patch Kids (never released), Looping and a couple others for Atari 2600 systems.

# How hard was it back then to me into the humble Atari 2600?

I always thought the programmers who worked at Atari were handicapped in a way; they had a manual that told them how the hardware worked. We had to

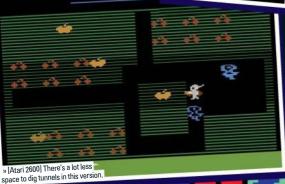
try different things to figure out how the hardware worked. And no manual said, 'You can't do that.' So we did innovative techniques like reloading sprites and field registers (image blocks) midraster scan and interlaced the screen to get more graphics to display. It was uncharted territory and fun to explore what was possible.

Humble is being generous. The Atari 2600 did not have any operating system, Programmers had to write all the code on their own. 128 bytes of RAM, 4KB or 8KB of program ROM, and some registers you could write to make images display and sound effects. I worked with a four-byte stack. Slim pickings, but, like a puzzle trying to put it all together, it was a lot of fun programming.

# Were you pleased how it turned out, are there any ways you wish had

Overall, I was pleased with how Mr. Do! for Atari turned out. It had challenges in the game layout that required some clever coding to map onto the limited Atari 2600. Sometimes I had to interlace Mr. Do! and the cherries when they were on the same horizontal line, as there were only two sprites to work with. So, one frame I would show Mr. Do! and the next frame I'd show the cherries. It was done in a way to minimise the flashing of Mr. Do! to not be too tiresome on the eves.







# ATTACK OF THE CLONES It was the Eighties, so of course Mr. Do! had its copycats



# FRUITY FRANK

## AMSTRAD CPO

■ Programmed by Steven Wallis and published by Kuma Computers, you are not going to find many more direct Mr. Do! clones than Fruity Frank. The object of the game and how it plays is almost identical; dig through dirt, collect the fruit, kill the baddies with boulders or your ball and move onto the next level. The only real change is omission of the bonus letters to gain your extra life. One of the most pleasing things about Fruity Frank is how good it looks, utilising the CPC's full palette to great effect.



# **BOB'S GARDEN**

■ A public domain game written by Justin Leck, Bob's Garden is very highly regarded among Amiga fans and we can see why. It almost perfectly copies across everything from the original Mr. Do! while adding a few small features of its own. The colourful graphics are really nice and the sprites in particular are very well animated. It really sings in the sound department too with a wide range of great tunes playing throughout the game. Add in some great presentation and you have a real winner.

# The final game changed the look of Mr. Do! to be more colourful

Ed English

▶ of the *Mr. Do!* arcade game, which I still have," he remembers. "The final arcade game changed the look of *Mr. Do!* to be more colourful, to appeal to a wider audience, based on feedback Universal was given. The all-white clown character for the *Mr. Do!* prototype I was given was the *Mr. Do!* I became familiar with. It wasn't until after I completed the Atari 2600 version of *Mr. Do!* that the final changes were made." Interestingly Coleco, which Ed was contracted to, acquired the rights for the home console versions of *Mr. Do!* well before the game was even finished, just to stop Atari getting its hands on it.

r. Do! became part of a short trend of digging games, started by Namco's *Dig Dug* around six months earlier. Other arcade games that followed this lead were Taito's The Pit and Sega's Thunderground, albeit to far less success. Although, at a glance, Mr. Do! appears to be nothing more than a blatant clone of Namco's game, it does, in fact, play quite differently and requires a far more tactical approach. The basics of both games are very much the same: dig tunnels, kill monsters and score as many points as possible, however Mr. Do! adds so much more to the equation with more monsters to contend with, who are also of greater intelligence, and the need to collect fruit. Random tunnel-making won't get you anywhere in this game, you will need to plan your route from

the moment you start. This is because the monsters start chasing you from the moment they appear and can also move faster than our hero. Carefully-dug tunnels gain you valuable seconds and also allow you to create traps. The giant toffee apples in *Mr. Do.l.*, act much like the boulders in *Dig Dug*, in that they can be dropped on your foes to squash them, but be careful how you do it because you might end up squashing yourself! They can also be used tactically, too, to block a path behind you, for example. Although this does only work for a short time, as the enemies can eventually push them out the way. The level doesn't finish until all the fruit is harvested, or you kill all enemies.

Another key element of *Mr. Do!* is the Alphamonsters, these fellows are basically an enemy with one letter of the world 'EXTRA' pinned to them. When you kill them, you light up that specific letter, collect all the letters and you not only end the round early, but also get a neat little animation and an extra life. The latter of which is extremely useful as there are no continues in the game. From time to time a bonus item will appear in the centre of the screen, these are usually an item of food such as a cake or cheese. When you collect these, the screen turns red and all the enemies are frozen for a short time. This also calls out an Alphamonster and, after a short pause, a group

of blue monsters who will not only come after you, but also eat your fruit. If you manage to kill the Alphamonster during this sequence the blue meanies ULTIMATE GUIDE: MR DO! THE MAKING OF: COMPUTER SPACE





### MK. EE

### **BBC MICF**

■ Without doubt one of the most famous *Mr. Dol.* clones out there, *Mr. Ee!* is so close to Universal's game that we're amazed the developer wasn't sued. Everything about this game is pretty much identical to the original coin-op from the graphics (including the actual *Mr. Do!* sprite) to the tunes and sound effects. The level layouts are the same, the bonus system's intact and even the vertical field of play has been ripped. There isn't a lot more we can say about *Mr. Ee!*, it's just *Mr. Do!*, but with a different name.



# MR. DIG

### **ATARIST**

■ Published by leading PD label Budgie UK and programmed by Robin Edwards using the STOS game creator, Mr. Dig is a pretty lacking clone of Mr. Do! for the Atari ST. The graphics are average at best, the music has disappeared and the bonus system has gone walkies too. You also rarely get more than a couple of bad guys on screen at one time, making the game incredibly easy. Mr. Dig is definitely one of the poorest clones we tried out, which is a real shame as the ST has no decent alternative.



# **HARD CHEESE**

### ZX SPECTRUM

As you can imagine the Speccy has more than a few Mr. Do! clones in its library, but this is definitely the most interesting one. Published by dk'tronics (of Popeye and Maziacs fame) in 1983 it was programmed by the duo of Paul Johnson and Eugene Farrell. The first unusual element is that you are now a little guy in a bulldozer and you appear to be collecting cans of Coke, as opposed to fruit. Instead of a ball you now launch this flashing green block at the enemies. Hard Cheese is fairly basic, but a lot of fun.



### MR. DUU

### **ACORN ARCHIMEDES**

■ Published on the cover of Archimedes World magazine, Mr. Doo is a great clone for the acorn machine. Instead of a clown, though, you now control a wizard, but the core gameplay is exactly the same. The only real additions to the game are the power-ups that can be collected. These help you turn the tables on the enemy and complete the levels quicker. Mr. Doo has lovely colourful graphics, great digitised sound and addictive gameplay that will keep this game right at

the front of your Archimedes disk box.

# **CONVERSION CAPERS**

All the Mr.Do! conversions that you can shake an apple at



■ The Sharp X68000 version of the game was

included on a double-disk set with the equally-

Japanese title Mr. Do! Vs. Unicorns). The X68000

exact port of the original coin-op's source code,

so it is pretty much arcade perfect in every single

way, including the use of the correct screen ratio.

excellent sequel Mr. Do's Castle (using the

version of the original Mr. Do! looks to be an

**SHARP X68000** 



# **ATARI 2600**

lacktriangle As you can probably imagine, several sacrifices had to be made to port Mr. Do! to the Atari 2600. The biggest problem is the lack of resolution, which means you can't form any complex tunnel systems to escape the bad guys. It also plays a little on the slow side. It's a cut-down version, sure, but its flaws don't spoil the core game too much, thankfully.



# COLECOVISION

■ Of the early ports, the ColecoVision iteration of Mr. Do! has always been the most highly regarded, and rightly so in our opinion. The colourful graphics certainly look the part and the developers did a great job of replicating the audio on Coleco's console, too. The only flaw with this version is the bland single-colour sprites, which look a bit naff next to the rest of the visuals.



# **APPLE II**

■ The Apple II version was never going to be pretty, but its coders did a fairly decent job, all is almost non-existent, though: another flaw of Mr. Do! does remain authentic in the all-important gameplay department.



EMTRA

things considered – you can certainly tell what it is. Bar a few odd beeps here and there, the sound the hardware, unfortunately. Thankfully, Apple II

FXTRA



■ Known as Neo Mr. Do!, this version for the powerful SNK console is more of a remake than a straight conversion. The most striking addition is the outlandish backgrounds, which can actually be quite distracting at times. The best new feature, though, is the powerups, these add a whole new element to the already excellent gameplay.

# **ATARI 8-BIT**

■ Programmed by DataSoft, the Atari 8-bit port of Mr. Do! very much rivals the ColecoVision port when it comes to the early conversions. While the colours are not as vibrant as its competition,

> the multi-coloured sprites are a huge improvement and the audio is far superior. This version also nails it in the gameplay stakes too.



■ Ocean's Game Boy conversion of the game

is another that takes a few liberties in order to

suit the hardware better. The levels now scroll,

instead of taking up a single screen and many of

the layouts have changed. The Game Boy version

also has in-game music and little animations

after each stage. A fun, portable and very

playable rendition.

# **COMMODORE 64**

■ Another home computer conversion by DataSoft, it won't come as any surprise to learn that it's incredibly similar to its Atari 8-bit port. The only real differences coming in the form of a smaller range of colours and slightly less impressive sound effects. It cements itself as another very solid version of an already great arcade game.



As you would expect, given the almost identical hardware, the MSX has many similarities with the ColecoVision port. Once again we have rather bland single-colour sprites mixed with otherwise attractive graphics and gameplay that stays very close to the coin-op. The addition of annoying in-game music is not so good though!



# SUPER NINTENDO

■ Although THQ isn't a company renowned for its quality, this late 1996 SNES port is terrific. Why it came about so late in the system's life, though, is anybody's guess. It remains close to the arcade while adding a few minor enhancements in both the audio and visual departments. SNES owners should track this one down.



# SEND IN THE CLOWNS

You might want to look away if you're scared of them



# **ATARI CLOWNS**

■ Although they were never actually named, the two clowns that appear in the popular 1980 Atari 2600 game Circus Atari are among the earliest examples of clowns in a videogame (having first appeared in arcades in 1977).

## **KICKMAN**

■ Kickman is the titular character from an obscure 1981 Midway arcade game. It plays a little like Kaboom! with your character trying to catch balloons in his hat while riding a unicycle. Interestingly it also features a cameo by Pac-Man.

# **CIRCUS CHARLIE**

Another clown to feature in a game carrying his name, Circus Charlie is a hugely enjoyable 1984 Konami coin-op that was later ported to several home systems. The game is set over seven different circusthemed stages.

# RONALD MCDONALD

■ More than just a videogame character. Ronald McDonald is known for his association with a certain fast food brand. He appeared in a wide range of different titles going right back to the Atari 2600.



## KINKY PINKY

■ One of the most fearsome bosses from Eugene Levy's excellent 1988 Williams arcade game Narc, Kinky Pinky is the right-hand man of Mr. Big and responsible for running his hugely-profitable seedy porn business!

■ Bonker The Clown appeared in three of the four Clay Fighter games, a popular series of fighting games by Interplay that originated in 1993. The game was notable for its use of rendered clay models and comical interludes

# MAD CLOWN

■ Mad Clown is one of the opponents from the 1994 SNES game Super Punch-Out!!. He is the third fighter you face on the world circuit and utilises his circus skill of juggling balls to great effect along with his oversized fists

### **SWEET TOOTH**

■ Markus 'Needles' Kane, (or Sweet Tooth, as he's more commonly known) is one of the popular characters from the Twisted Metal series. He's the definition of killer clown and got more darker as the series progressed.



### ADAM

■ Anybody who's played Cancom's 2006 zombie slash-'em-up Dead Rising will be very familiar with Adam. One of the most annoying and downright violent characters in the game, his twin chainsaws cause some real damage.

# **DROPSY**

■ The newest entry in our gallery of clowns, Dropsy is the star of last year's fan-funded PC game of the same name. A traditional point-and-click adventure, it was ported to iOS shortly after, with an Android port currently in the works.



are turned into toffee apples. On very rare occasions dropping an apple on an enemy will cause a diamond to appear, if collected this will not only reward you with 8,000 points, it will also complete the stage for you and give you a free game, this was a very unique feature for an arcade videogame in the early Eighties.

r. Do! ended up being the most successful game released by Universal by quite some margin. Although it spawned numerous sequels, including the excellent platformer Mr. Do's Castle, none of them quite captured arcade audiences in the way the first game had. We had to know if Ed English knew if it was a winner from the day he first got to test it "As soon as I saw the Mr. Do! arcade game I knew it was a winner Colourful animated graphics, intuitive, addictive gameplay, increasing challenges, with fun sounds and music. As a player/programmer exploring the arcade prototype game that was sent to me, I always felt I could do better next time I played it. Mr. Do! would get trapped or have an apple fall on him and it was always my mistake. The acceleration

of the difficulty was well paced so you could gradually improve your skills and reach higher levels. It had a fun, carnival-like theme with simple but rewarding gameplay. Overall it was a great orchestration of gameplay, audio and visuals. A real gem was created!"

Mr. Do! had a real lasting impression on Ed. "When my partner, Ed Temple, and I left Parker Brothers to start a game development company, we rented a small three room office in Massachusetts," he remembers. Us two 'Ed's' ended up programming all of Coleco's Atari 2600 games for two years and they would always ship the arcade games to our offices. It was a small building and the other tenants were mostly accountants and lawyers who would knock on the door to see what all that noise was. It was nearly always Mr. Do! blaring out the music and sound effects. I still have that very same arcade cabinet in my house to this day, in fact I even called my cat Mr. Do!." We couldn't let Ed go without asking one last question, though, which one is better

- Mr. Do! or Dig Dug? "Mr. Do! makes Dig Dug eat dirt!" Ed laughs. 🏃

Special thanks to Ed English.

# THE Arcade games that never made it home UNCONVERTED



) Hitting multiple enemies with the bell is not only an effective tactic, but a high-scoring one. Each enemy is worth twice the points of the last, making combos worth trying.

Attacking with the trailing bell requires planning – you're responding to enemy movements rather than directly assaulting them, and enemies can still evade when the bell is moving.

» Returning characters from previous games have received a makeover for their appearance in *Tinkle Pit*, but retain their old abilities – these Pookas from *Dig Dug* can travel through walls.

> When a whole cake is collected, this slice will grow into a whole cake and a new slice will spawn. Growing your items is an important step to achieving high scores.



# TINKLE PIT

■ Developer: Namco ■ Year: 1993 ■ Genre: Maze Game

■ If you ever need reminding that the arcade market of the early Nineties was a weird, transitional scene, *Tinkle Pit* should serve well. Despite the declining popularity of traditional maze games and the market's preference for the 3D games which were finally beginning to come of age, Namco chose to release *Tinkle Pit* into arcades in 1993. That's the same year it released *Ridge Racer*. But while it's true that *Tinkle Pit* is something of an anachronism, it plays rather well.

You play as a young blonde chap, who happens to be accompanied by an anthropomorphic sleigh bell. He's promptly plonked into a maze to fight all manner of enemies, including familiar Namco characters drawn from games such as *Toy Pop* and *Dig Dug*. The main way to defeat enemies is with the bell. Pressing a button fixes its position, allowing your hero to run around the maze while leaving a trail of string behind. When the button is released, the bell will follow the trail back to your position, knocking out any enemies it encounters along the way. You can also collect yellow energy balls which are thrown forward and bounce

around the maze, but these are single-use and can only defeat one enemy at a time. Stages are cleared by eliminating every enemy. Every few stages, a boss will appear which takes multiple hits to defeat.

Tinkle Pit manages to keep things interesting, with good scoring mechanics largely responsible for this. Greater scores are awarded for knocking out multiple enemies with the bell, encouraging you to leave longer trails. However, long trails allow enemies more time to leave the bell's path. Additionally, each stage contains pick-ups which award more points. These come in small and large varieties, and you're encouraged to pick up large items to allow small ones to grow. Pick up all eight large items and you'll get a major bonus.

There's a lot to like about *Tinkle Pit* and Namco fans will enjoy spotting all the returning characters – there's even a power-up which turns you into *Pac-Man*. However, thanks to its Japan-only release and the general decline of maze games as a genre, it's easy to see why *Tinkle Pit* didn't receive any conversions.

# **CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE**

**PENGO** 1982

Sega's block-kicking penguin has appeared on a variety of formats since his debut, including the Atari 2600, Commodore 64 and Game Gear. However we're big fans of the 1995 Mega Drive remake which features new mechanics and a multiplayer mode, as well as an excellent conversion of the original arcade game.



# **ARBALESTER**

Developer: Seta Year: 1989 Genre: Shoot-'em-up



» A relatively unremarkable shoot-'em-up, but Arbaleste

If you're not well versed in medieval weaponry, that title might seem a bit strange to you. An arbalest is a crossbow variant, which is of course perfect for a game about fighter planes. Arbalester is a rather traditional shoot-'em-up in the same vein as the likes of 1942 – no bullet hell here. As well as shooting forward, your plane bombs ground-level targets by default, and comes equipped with an exchangeable secondary weapon that can send miniature planes or massive flying fortresses at the enemy.

Visually the game takes an age to get going, with very little variation in the sea backgrounds of the early stages, though it does pick up a little

later on with the inclusion of cloudscapes and forests. Much better are the gigantic bosses on offer, but these are sadly few and far between. *Arbalester* is a largely unremarkable shooter, with little to distinguish it from the more accomplished competition that had arisen in the late Eighties. This likely put paid to its chances of a NES release back then, but paradoxically increases the appeal of the game today – it has the simplicity of a mid-Eighties shoot-rem-up but feels fresher due to a lack of familiarity.

# **CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE**

# **1943: THE BATTLE OF MIDWAY** 1987

Capcom's shoot-'em-up also has a realistic theme, but as the sequel to the popular 1942 it received a number of home conversions, appearing on the major home micros as well as the NES and PC Engine. Arcade-perfect versions later appeared on Capcom Classics Collection Volume 1 for PlayStation 2 and Xbox.



# **CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE**

### **NBA JAM** 1993

After blowing the arcade sports genre wide open, it was inevitable that NBA Jam would make the trip to home consoles, and it eventually arrived on the Mega Drive, Mega-CD, Game Gear, Game Boy and SNES. It happens to be a fair bit better than Rim Rockin' Basketball, too.



# RIM ROCKIN' BASKETBALL

■ Developer: Incredible Technologies ■ Year: 1991 ■ Genre: Sports

Rim Rockin' Basketball is a strange release. Struggling forth on noticeably dated hardware, the game offered a more serious take on basketball than the likes of Midway's Arch Rivals. The game switches perspective as the ball is turned over to the opposing team and players are limited to simple shots and passes. Certain fouls are included and the occasional graphical touch such as a shattering backboard enlivens proceedings, but overall this is not spectacular work.

The game's major saving grace is its multiplayer, as up to four players are supported by the cabinet. However, there's a major downside to this – a full game will last the best part of an hour as the game counts down its quarters in real time, but



» The attacking team is always running upwards, as the

credits only last for a fraction of a quarter. As a result, playing a full game of *Rim Rockin' Basketball* is ridiculously expensive, especially when multiple players are involved. Games from Incredible Technologies never received home conversions, explaining the failure of *Rim Rockin' Basketball* to make it to consoles.

# BEST LEFT IN THE ARCADE

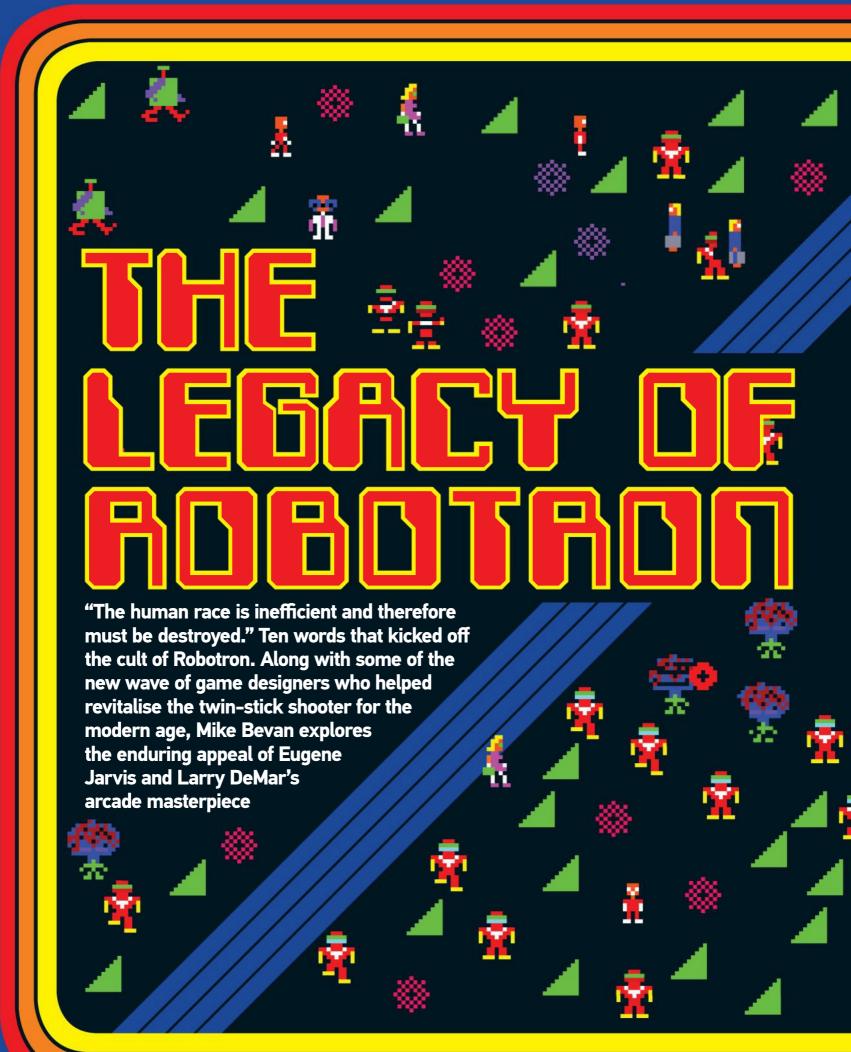
# **MIRAI NINJA**

■ Developer: Namco ■ Year: 1989 ■ Genre: Run-and-gun

Licensed from a film of the same name, *Mirai Ninja* is a run-and-gun game that was exclusive to Japanese arcades. The basic premise isn't too different from games such as *The Legend Of Kage*, with a seemingly limitless supply of ninjas zapping in to provide shuriken-fodder. The game doesn't look too bad, with nice stylistic touches like a life indicator written in kanji, and it contains some rather neat sections with massive rotating sprites that admittedly look very impressive. Unfortunately, that's where the praise ends.

Stage design in *Mirai Ninja* is incredibly dull, with flat layouts that barely differentiate themselves from one another. Enemy design is similarly bland, with few foes providing any real challenge – even the bosses are pushovers. Worse yet, power-ups are limited to a screen-clearing smart bomb and a triple shot. It feels extraordinarily dated, bearing in mind that ninja games such as *Strider* and *The Revenge Of Shinobi* appeared in the same year. If licensing was the factor that prevented this from making a home appearance, we should be grateful.



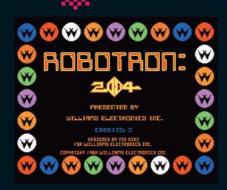






fast. It was a real challenge to be able to play an arcade game past five minutes on one quarter. And the games were made for quick reflexes and fast thinking. Of all the games that ruled the arcades, Robotron was the most manic, complex and pulse-pounding experience that anyone had encountered. Two joysticks, moving and firing in

any of eight directions independently, assumed that anyone good at the game was a real master. Eugene Jarvis had created the ultimate arcade game."



obotron. Its very name can send even the most battle-hardened arcade fan into a volley of nervous spasms and involuntary muscle twitches. An

unrelenting barrage of digital cybernetic hostility in a single black screen, this savage blaster chewed up players and their coinage as if there was no tomorrow, which was rather apt considering the game's apocalyptic storyline. Yet despite its unyielding nature, *Robotron* remains highly regarded among retro gamers and developers alike, something that's evident from **RG**'s Desert Island Disks feature over the years – it's still the foremost requested game among our castaway list of veteran designers.

Created by Eugene Jarvis and Larry
DeMar, Robotron was the third videogame
the pair designed for Williams Electronics,
following the equally well-received
pairing of Defender and Stargate. It's a
nightmarishly dystopian vision, as the
encircling robotic horde hunts the last
surviving human family, seeking the
rapid demise of our goggle-eyed hero.
"The game was inspired by a number
of influences," recalls Eugene. "First
off, I loved Al McNeil's robot killer game
Berzerk. The great sounds and primal killor-be-killed action were a huge rush. But
I became frustrated by the single-joystick

control. I wanted to make a game with significantly more firepower. I was also inspired by the early Commodore PET game *Chase*, which used 24x80 line text-based graphics, where the player tried to run away from enemies while luring them into a minefield to their death. Throw in elements from *Defender* and *Pac-Man* and you've got a lot of the gameplay.

"We started with the game engine from Defender/Stargate. I concentrated on the character/projectile behaviour, level design and game mechanic, while Larry basically did everything else, including all the mindblowing special effects. To move the pixels, Larry and I specced out what we called the Robotron graphics DMA chip, which may have been the first graphics co-processor for a colour bitmapped system capable of rendering arbitrary-sized programmable 2D images. The DMA chip made possible all the amazing explosion and particle effects in the game, as well as powering the gluttonous pixel rate."

Notwithstanding the game's splendid presentation and masterful use of colour and sound, it's the now-familiar twin-joystick control system that's *Robotron*'s crowning glory. With the first stick to move the player character and a second to guide an unending stream of bullets, it's far easier to get to grips with than *Defender*'s complex controls. *Robotron* wasn't the first videogame to use it, but it was arguably the first shooter that needed dual-stick controls as a conscious design choice. So was there a 'eureka!' moment when Eugene wired up that second stick for the first time?

"Totally," Eugene grins. "I started with one-joystick control, where you would just try to lure the robots into electrodes like the *Chase* game. And it was fun – for about five seconds. Then I realised you have to kill shit. Once I wired up the second 2600 stick for firing and screwed it to the control panel, I knew I was on the right track." Eugene's experience as a sound engineer on Williams' pinball games came in handy at this point. "I used the old ball-lock sound

with echo decay from Firepower for firing, and I threw in a Defender explosion for a robot hit, and I started feeling the tension and release. Then when I dialled up the robot count to 128, the adrenal cortex overload was complete. Within moments, I was a sweating, gasping mass of smoking neurons..."

The fact that *Robotron's* action takes place in a claustrophobic single-screen arena sets it apart from the pair's previous games, and helps ramp up the tension to coronary-inducing levels. "Where the cool thing about *Defender* was the freedom to fly beyond the single-screen space into an entire planetary world, *Robotron* was all about the tension of confinement," Eugene muses. "There was no escape from the confrontation, no fight or flight, only fight or fight."

One small ray of hope among the overall nihilism of the game is the ability to save members of the last human family: Mommy, Daddy and little Mikey. Quick reflexes can save them from electrification by Hulks or reprogramming by roaming Progs into cybernetic zombies. "This 'family' has direct parallels with the Defender astronauts," says Eugene. "I felt strongly that a game has to be about more than just killing – first from a play mechanic perspective. If everything is just a shoot-kill then the game gets old and stale quick. Spicing it up with a rescue dynamic enriched the game and added a lot of variety to play."

As for the game's renowned difficulty, Eugene is unrepentant, revealing that it could have been even more evil.





# ROBO LOVE

Robotron is the greatest game of all time. It's why I joined Williams/Bally/Midway and created Smash TV. I went there to revive the dual-joystick nechanic. Eugene is still a good friend of mine,

and I learned many lessons from him that I use to this day."





"In the Eighties, the arcade scene was dominated by hardcore players, the type that would be playing Call Of Duty and other FPS games today," he reflects. "Robotron actually went out even harder at first, but it was just too brutal. The controls required independent motion of both hands, which was very new, and even today many players can't walk and

chew gum at the same time. We had to

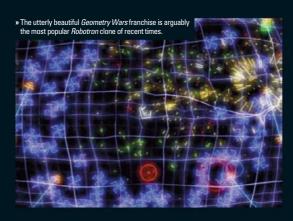
lighten up the game."

We can only imagine what sort of state our wrists and synapses would have been in if he hadn't. Interestingly, it seems that if you were left-handed, you might have had a small advantage. "Observing cigarette burns on control panels, I could tell that *Robotron* had about a 50/50 mix of right- and left-handed players, which is very unusual since lefties make up only 10-15 per cent of the population," he remarks. "Because lefties have to adapt to a right-handed world, they are more ambidextrous than righties. Hence they make better *Robotron* players!"



"When Robotron came out, I felt that the twin-stick control would rapidly dominate the industry," Eugene reveals. "But surprisingly few titles came out – probably due to the hardcore nature of the interface and the rising dominance of casual players. A big problem was the standard single joystick or joypad in consoles such as NES and Atari 2600. The ubiquitous single-stick paradigm effectively locked the twin-stick genre out of the consumer space. Most of the ports suffered from lack of dual joysticks, hardware performance, or if there were two joysticks, how do you nail them down to the coffee table?"

The hardware issue plagued many of the official home ports of *Robotron*, although some third-party efforts, such as Paul Holmes' Spectrum homage *Wild* 





West Hero, went some way to capturing the spirit of the arcade original. Even Eugene and Larry's sequel to the game, Blaster, abandoned the twin-stick model, and, despite flourishes of brilliance, was something of a flop. "Blaster is fun, but it failed to resonate with players for a few reasons, including the videogame crash and a tiring of space themes," Eugene admits. "We faced the problem all 3D flight games have suffered for many years. The action is very compelling and exciting on a primitive visual level, but it is hard to get meaningful gameplay and interaction as you blow through the universe at the speed of light. Repeat play becomes a huge issue."

One arcade game directly influenced by *Robotron* was Atari's excellent vector shoot-'em-up, *Black Widow*, as its creator, Bruce Merritt, explains: "We had a *Robotron* game in Atari engineering's common area and many of us had calluses from wrenching the joysticks, shooting brains and protecting our nuclear family. It was definitely inspirational in the use of controls in *Black Widow* – it was hard to argue how effective two sticks were in escaping in one direction while firing in another."

By 1990, arcade videogame hardware had evolved enough to tempt Eugene to return to the twin-stick shooter genre, with Mark Turmell and artist John Tobias. "The original concept for *Robotron* was really more in line with a huge

multi-chamber world like Smash TV," he says, referring to his famously violent gameshow-themed shooter. "In arcade [design], the rule was ship the game when it becomes fun, and with Robotron a simple random-number-driven world generator did the trick, obviating the need for a hugely detailed world. So Mark, John and I wanted to go back and do this huge world culminating in the fabled 'Pleasure Domes'. Also, we were really jazzed to develop a new storyline based on Running Man and RoboCop memes."

The final instalment in Eugene's unofficial *Robotron* trilogy, 1993's *Total Carnage*, featured a distinctly Gulf Warinspired atmosphere, and ditched most of the static arena 'lock-ins' of *Smash TV*, something that Eugene admits may have been a mistake in terms of player excitement levels. "For *Total Carnage*, we tried a scrolling mechanic, and the game really lost something," he admits.

"It became just a fire-hose kind of shooter without the tension."

Outside of Eugene's own inventions, there were a few other interesting takes on the format, including Jeff Minter's surreal but brilliant homage, Llamatron, which

was released as a shareware title for the Atari ST and Amiga. Midway's Robotron X, released in 1996 on the PlayStation and PC, and later ported to the N64, brought the original game up to date in 3D, with varying





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# The ten best games of Eugene Jarvis... aside from Robotron



Defender's stark beauty, multidimensional gameplay and stunning pyrotechnics were a revelation back in 1980, more surprisingly given that it was Eugene's videogame debut. It revitalised the fortunes of manufacturer Williams to such an extent that Stan Jarocki, marketing head at arch-rival Midway was heard to comment: "For a first effort, Defender is amazing."



The first in Eugene's much-admired driving series, Cruis'n USA was a lighthearted take on the arcade racer, with a physics engine that favoured spectacular spins, crashes and airborne vehicles over realism. The game's visuals, which were painstakingly digitised from real-life locations, are a real asset in bringing the various courses from around the US to life.



# IREPOWER

This highly regarded pinball table from legendary designer Steve Ritchie was the first electronic pinball machine to feature now-standard elements like 'lane change' and multi-ball. Eugene was responsible for the game's software and memorable sound effects, while the table's classic layout went on to inspire the hit video pinball simulation, *David's* Midnight Magic.



Vid Kidz' last videogame, this unofficial Robotron follow-up is a fast-paced

3D space shooter. Despite negative

comparisons to Robotron, Blaster is a

great bit of programming; its psychedelic Lego-brick visuals convey a real sense

of speed. The game's rarity and heritage has made it popular with collectors, with

the attractive Duramold cabinet being

particularly sought after.

OG BLASTER

Eugene's triumphant return to the twin-stick shooter, *Smash TV* is an exploration element, a variety of funky weapons, and some particularly gnarly bosses, including the infamous Mutoid Man. Winning a brand new VCR was never so much fun.



ultra-violent gameshow-themed blaster where big guns, rather than points, mean prizes. Building on *Robotron*, it adds an



# 09 CAUIS'N **WORLD**

Racing games were big business in the Nineties, so it was inevitable that Eugene would be asked to produce another. This time there's a globe-trotting theme and a new stunt system. After one last sequel, 1999's *Cruis'n Exotica*, the series became the highest-grossing arcade racing



# **13 STARGATE**With *Defender's* massive success under

their belt, Eugene and Larry left Williams to form their own company, Vid Kidz. Stargate, the sequel to their debut hit, was the first project under this new moniker. It features similarly blistering ameplay, adding new enemies and features, like the Stargate itself, which served as a portal to nearby humanoids in distress.



This controversial scrolling shooter was one of the first games to use the digitised graphics technique later made famous by *Mortal Kombat. Narc*'s body count would make Arnie blush - blowing the appendages off drug lords with Uzis and rocket launchers is entertainingly silly, although pacifists can go for the less lethal approach of arresting suspects for bonus points.



The final slice of twin-stick mayhem from Eugene and Mark Turmell, *Total* Carnage takes place in a fictional Middle Eastern state where a crazed dictator is in cahoots with evil space aliens. Despite some clever ideas, it doesn't scale the lofty heights of its predecessors, but is still an enjoyable romp.



# FURIOUS

Licensed from the popular 2001 street-racing flick, this arcade racer is very much the spiritual successor to the Cruis'n series. The Fast And The Furious lives up to the name of Eugene's production company, Raw Thrills, providing a high-octane rush through a variety of well-known US locales.







success depending on how well players were able to utilise the 3D camera.

"Llamatron was a very cool and humorous take-off," says Eugene, praising Minter's take on his game. "But like almost all the classic arcade titles, the 3D thing just never worked out for Robotron. The 2D complete information God's-eye view is what makes the game happen. Getting whacked in the back or blindsided in a 3D world will never be fun. You really

need the complete info of 2D to be able to handle the central nervous system overload Robotron is known for."

# The twin-

Ironically, it was one of the banes of a retro gaming fan's life that turned out to be the saviour of twin-stick shooting games - the rise of the first-person shooter. "It wasn't until the dominance of FPS games drove dual-stick adoption in the Xbox and PlayStation DualShock controllers that the twin-stick approach became standard, almost 20 years after Robotron," says Eugene. "Next, the rise of retro players and the indie development community on Xbox Live Arcade created the current twin-stick game renaissance in its original 2D form."

One of the first, and arguably most

PLRYER &





# ROBO LOVE

JEFF MINTER (LLAMATRON) ene Jarvis was my absolute hero back then,

style. My favourite was without doubt Robotron. This superlative game was presented in what was

signature style of Jarvis and Larry DeMar – fast action, large bers of brightly coloured enemies, and wonderful explosions that shattered the enemies into tiny pieces all over the screen when t. A twin-stick control system allowed you to move and fire with great precision and accuracy – an absolute necessity in a game that brutally, beautifully, sensually difficult."



650 IGH

influential, of the new wave of twin-stick shooters was Bizarre Creations' Geometry Wars, originally included as an Easter egg in Project Gotham Racing 2. "When I started at Bizarre, I ended up working on PGR1, being given most of the tasks the more senior coders couldn't be arsed to do," says designer Stephen Cakebread. "One task happened to be the code that interfaced with the Xbox joypad, so one evening while prototyping some code that dealt with the two analogue sticks I got a little bored, and because I was aware of the idea of the twin-stick shooting mechanic, and already had some code reading both sticks, it felt natural to experiment making a twin-stick shooter.

"One of the big differences in play that I noticed was the importance of position in Robotron, due to the eight-way shooting, whereas position in the first Geometry Wars is fairly unimportant - mostly you just circle forever. This added an extra layer to the gameplay in Robotron, so I wanted to replicate that feeling in the later GW games, but without limiting fire direction. So its influence on Geometry Wars is that it made me aware that you can make a fairly tactical game even when it's very chaotic, and prompted me to work on the gameplay to increase the number of decisions the player had to make. Robotron's design is excellent, and anyone making a modern twin-stick shooter should definitely play it, as it has a lot to teach."

"My first experience of a game of that type would have been *Llamatron* on the Atari ST," says indie developer Charlie Knight, "I think I must have discovered Robotron after playing that. Robotron's a really pure game, and I think that's a lot of the reason it's so well regarded. I'd say I got more from Llamatron on account of it being much less punishing, but it lacks

# Eight rock-hard arcade games



DONHEY HONG

The King Of Kong goes to great lengths to convince us that Donkey Kong is the hardest

arcade game. We haven't played everything

to compare, but we'd guess it was pretty close, given the notorious Elevator stage, in

which Donkey Kong bounces lethal springs

across the screen at breakneck speed.



Sinistar is notable for being modified to be far harder than originally intended, after dollar-hungry arcade operators complained that players were lasting longer than two minutes. It also features perhaps the most terrifying videogame boss of its era, the eponymous Sinistar. "Run, coward," indeed.



**TEMPEST**Dave Theurer's abstract vector shooter brought a nightmare into the arcades, being inspired by a childhood dream of monsters pouring out of a hole in the ground. Like Robotron, Tempest is a wonderfully pure blaster, testing players' nerves before completely and utterly overwhelming.



# SUPER ZAHHON

For some reason, Sega saw fit to make the sequel to its hit isometric shooter scroll at roughly twice the speed, making slamming into a wall or missile less a threat, more a foregone conclusion. The claustrophobic tunnel sections only serve to make things even trickier. Suffice to say it wasn't nearly as popular with arcade goers as the original.

Robotron's punch and immediateness. I can't think of many other games that come close to it in this sense. In terms of it being an influence, it's the essence of every twin-stick that followed, and my own are no exception. Bullet Candy, my first commercial game, started life as a fairly dull clone before I realised that it'd be more fun to put my own spin on it. More recently, with Scoregasm, I guess in terms of the game's structure and pacing the influence is more diluted, but the essence is still there for all to see.

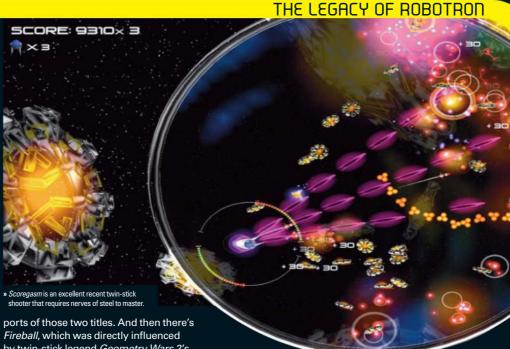
"I was a huge *Robotron* fan, but <u>was</u> hugely let down by the Genesis version," says Radiangames' Luke Schneider. "Without the dual joysticks of the arcade version, the immediate and visceral connection to the action was severed. I picked up a PlayStation with a DualShock for Metal Gear Solid, and its real influence on me was instilling a strong desire to create a dual-stick shooter. Trying to replicate Robotron on dual-analogue sticks isn't wise, though, because the eight-way directionality is so important to the design, and analogue sticks aren't eight-way.

"When I started Radiangames, my first game had to be a twin-stick shooter. JoyJoy was released in 2010. Since then, I released two other twin-stick-influenced games, Inferno and Ballistic, with enhanced



While I was at Atari, I would take breaks that lved walking to the very back of the building, which had a small arcade that included many classics, one of which was Robotron. I found that

vas the only videogame that I actually got exercise playing, and I always felt great afterwards. The bonus chain design was awesome and had a pinball scoring way about it – the first collection was 1,000, then 2,000, 3,000, 4,000 and 5,000 points thereafter. If you died or ended the wave, it would reset to 1,000 points for your t pickup. This design element was brilliant. It was just mag



by twin-stick legend Geometry Wars 2's Pacifism mode, but is, of course, not a twinstick shooter since there's no shooting.

"Despite the influx of twin-stick shooters from both myself and other developers, there's still a couple of unique things about Robotron's design that still makes playing the arcade version special today: the eight-way directional focus and the 'everything spawns in at once' wave design. Those elements combine with the authentic 8-bit era sound effects and graphics to create a game that will remain

a classic forever."

**Developer Puppygames** is unleashing a whole trilogy of Robo-influenced twinstick shooters, starting with Ultratron for the Xbox 360 and PC. "Ultratron was a very traditional eight-way movement, eight-way shooting, Robotron-esque game," says coder Caspian Prince. "Ultratron 2 added the now-ubiquitous mouse-toaim controls. For Ultratron 3,

we're throwing in a bunch of old arcade memes in order to liven it up somewhat. We've got dots to gobble, which earn money to spend on upgrades. We've got pets that you buy in the shop between levels, which follow you around and help zap the enemies in one of three distinctive ways. And lastly we're un-evolving the level spawning away from the Ultratron 2 style of constantly spawning enemies, making it more like contemporary titles such as Mutant Storm."

With the current resurgence of games utilising the dual-stick mechanic, from Super Stardust Delta to Lara Croft And The Guardian Of Light and Minotron, and dozens of quality PSN, Xbox Live Arcade, Xbox Live Indie and iOS titles to choose from, there's never been a better time to celebrate the twin-stick shooter. "I love that developers today are inspired by classic titles like Robotron and Smash TV," says Eugene proudly,







FLYING SHARH
Modern shooters are designed so nearby enemies won't fire on you, giving players a sort of survival buffer. Toaplan's early shoot-'em-ups, which also include Twin Cobra and Truxton, feature baddies that have a habit of firing mercilessly, even if they're right on top of you. The result? Much cursing, angry clattering of joysticks and very little change left in our pockets.



JOUST 2

Joust 2 was a victim of circumstance, being designed as a kit conversion for arcade cabinets with vertical monitors, the most common at the time because of the ubiquity of Pac-Man. While the original used a horizontal screen, giving you plenty of warning of incoming enemy buzzard attacks, the sequel's restrictive field of vision made for a far tougher game.



The R-Type games, alongside Konami's Gradius titles, are renowned as some of the most punishing shoot-'em-ups ever created, requiring superlative reflexes and the memorising of large chunks of their level layouts to even have a remote chance of seeing them through. *R-Type's* famous mothership is not for the faint-hearted, and the rest of the game is harder still.



6H05T5 'IT' 6DBLITS
The Ghosts 'N' Goblins series as a who notably difficult, but the original is probably the hardest of the lot - even the opening stage requires pixel-perfect timing and a high degree of skill just to make it to the first boss. Adding insult to injury was the fact that Capcom made you play through the game twice to reach the true ending and rescue your sweetheart.

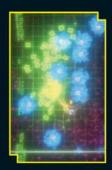
**Eugene Jarvis's** classic blaster 20 games with a d



With a twin-stick control scheme hjacked from Robotron, Bruce Merrit's underrated vector-graphic blaster tasks players with keeping a series of webs clear of marauding enemy bugs. Black Widow is fast, fluid and compelling, and as with Robotron, it's a game that ideally requires playing on an original arcade cabinet to fully appreciate its genius.



Jeff Minter's loving *Robotron* pastiche dials down the rabid difficulty, and the result is a considerably more genteel offering with a liberal sprinkling of hairy Minter touches. Bouncing bullets, smart bombs and herd bonuses are just some of the goodies on offer, and you can even Blu-Tack two joysticks to the floor for the full arcade-style experience.



The mini-game proved popular enough for Bizarre to release a sequel, Geometry Nars, Etror Exolvided. The second sequel was even better, and included modes like Pacifism, in which players have no weapons, and enemies can only be killed by flying through gates.



# 1

their way onto home computers in the Eighties. Paul Holmes' Wild West Hero, released on the ZX Spectrum, was one of the finest. Atarisoft obviously thought so too, signing up Paul for the official Spectrum Robotron port, which sadly never materialised. Along with the authorised conversions, a number of third-party clones made



of familiar enemies along with some all-new bad guys. It's a decent effort, with faithful 3D re-creations of foes and those famous shattering explosions, but the in-game canner can be a little disorienting at times. Midway's 1996 3D revamp features super-enhanced hero U-Gene (geddit?) strapping on his blaster to fight a range



# SILITIET'S TIITE Simon Pick's quirky C64 shooter, a sort

of cross between *Robotron* and *Pac-Man*, sees our frog-like hero zipping around caverns, zapping nasties and collecting jewels. It's extremely good fun, doubly so because of its hilarious sampled sound effects, with baddies that emit gurgling screams on dying, accompanied by shouts of, "Got him!"



heroes from previous Capcom arcade games, including Mega Man, Arthur from *Ghosts 'N' Goblins*, and Cammy from the *Street Fighter* series.

games that led the resurgence of twinstick shooters. More free-form in design than *Robotron*, its glowing visuals and spectacular particle-based explosions were reminiscent of vector arcade games like *Asteroids* and *Tempest*. Starting life as an Easter egg in *Project Gotham Racing 2, Geometry Wars* is probably the most well-known of the



driven title where players guide a sphere around the screen, collecting crystals while avoiding or shooting enemies. The action gets hectic on later stages where enemy numbers approach Robotron levels, and bullets ping The first game to support full colour on the Mac, *Crystal Quest* was a mousedangerously around the arena.



Another of the early games of the 'twinstick revival', Mutant Storm displays plenty of evidence for Robotron being a major blueprint, in the same way its predecessor, Space Tripper, channelled Defender. An updated version, Mutant Storm Reloaded, was later released for the 360, while this original release recently made its way to iOS devices.



# One of the first twin-stick shooters

features a concept pinched from Sixties sci-fi flick Fantastic Voyage, although saddy no Raquel Welch. Basically, you're stuck inside a body in a tiny ship, and the game revolves around battling hostile viruses and ridding surrounding cells of hostile infections. available for the PS3, Blast Factor









Released on PC and PSN in 2008, this unique title, created by Jonathan Mak, is described by its author as "an albun of games exploring the expressive power of abstract shooters". Against a soundscape of crunching guitar riffs, the game makes frequent visual nods to *Rez*, *Centipede* and *I*, *Robot*.



Despite its stupid title, IMAED A GAM3 is a decent Robotron clone, with zombies, natch. The most impressive thing about this XBLG title is how many it has cold – over 300,000 have blasted zombies and been driven nuts by the annoying background song to date.



Charlie Knight's follow-up to Bullet

Robotron has a neat gimmick, allowing you to use your own music, from which the game spawns its own unique levels. But be warned: it features some of the most over-the-top strobe effects ever seen in gaming. If you thought Space Giraffe was a bit too in-your-face, you might want to give it a miss. 



Indie developer Radiangames' debut release was a twin-stick shooter called JoyJoy. Ballistic carries on the tradition, being a lovely-looking blaster with an interesting weapon system and a surprising amount of depth. Those with 80 Microsoft Points to spare could do a lot worse than heading over to Xbox Live Indie Games to give it a go.



Candy mixes Javivis with trippy, Minter-esque visuals to create a game that's a bit tasty. Played across a branching, non-linear galaxy, creating a different experience each time, *Scoregasm* flings baddies, bullets and scoring opportunities at you thick and fast, and is a welcome addition to the genre.









you piloting a nano-ship in a Petri dish setting, striving to protect a central nucleus. One clever touch is the ability to use up the life force of the nucleus to give yourself a weapons boost, turn your ship into a projectile, or release a devastating shockwave. But take care: if the nucleus dies, it's game over.

BatCat Games' innovative shooter sees

stick shooter, sporting attractive neon graphics and a variety of nifty powerups. The opening stages are a little leisurely, but it doesn't take long before the game starts throwing ambush levels and bosses into the mix to add to the merriment. Best of all, the 360 version can be had for just 80 Microsoft Points. *Ultratron* is a *Robotron*-esque twin-



Minter amounced a return to the quickfire production values and arcade-style purity of his classic catalogue. *Minotron* is a re-imagined take on *Lamatron* for iOS, with sprites lifted directly from the Atari ST original, and the return of old favourites like 'screaming Mandy' – the homicidal floating Mandelbrot. With 2010's Minotaur Project, Jeff



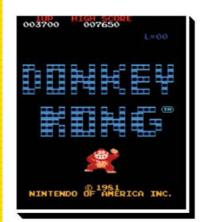
Released on the Vita, this remarkably

pretty game was the second twin-stick shooter in the Super Stardust series, following the acclaimed Super Stardust HD. The visual hook of both games is the rotating 3D 'planet' that spins below your ship as you move, scrolling orbiting asteroids and hostiles with it.



# Donkey Kong

Martyn Carroll takes a definitive look back at Nintendo's timeless classic and unravels its brilliance by speaking to the very people who know the coin-op intimately



hen it comes to iconic videogames, Donkey Kong is the daddy. Created by gaming legend Shigeru Miyamoto and released to huge success in 1981, it's one of the most celebrated and treasured games in history. It goes without saying that it has single-handedly defined the platform genre and introduced us to not one but two of the most popular videogame characters ever - the titular gorilla and his tormentor Mario Such is its impact that some enduring videogame myths have built up around its creation. Was the game supposed to be called 'Monkey Kong' but the name got misinterpreted somewhere along the way? Probably not. Was the game originally designed as a vehicle for Popeye and Brutus? Apparently so. Was the game responsible for saving an ailing Nintendo of America from certain bankruptcy, and providing the Japanese parent with the funding and impetus to develop the Famicom and therefore change the course of gaming forever? Quite possibly.

The facts are that in July 1981 Nintendo produced Donkey Kong as an upgrade kit for Radar Scope, its Galaxian-inspired game released the previous year that, despite initial success, had largely flopped in the US. The majority of US-based Radar Scope machines were converted, clearly indicating that the space shooter hadn't been pulling in as many quarters as hoped. The new game certainly did the trick, as Nintendo quickly went from manufacturing conversion kits to building dedicated cabs to meet the massive demand. This led to two cosmetic 'flavours' of Donkev Kona: the new, widely produced blue-coloured cabs with added side art, and the rarer converted Radar Scope cabs that retained their original red paintwork.

A year on from its initial release, Donkey Kong had reportedly earned Nintendo \$180 million. This success led to a clamour of console and computer manufacturers looking to license the coin-op. Once more, the whole episode is now swamped in folklore, with deals done that supposedly led to lots of hand-wringing and toy-throwing.



It's even commonly suggested that Donkey Kong played a part in scuppering negotiations that would see Atari release the Famicom in the US. All that aside, the deals resulted in Coleco receiving the home console rights and Atari settling for the home computer rights.

Coleco immediately played an ace by bundling the game with its ColecoVision console, causing hardware sales to skyrocket. It also put the game out on the Intellivision and Atari 2600 consoles. Such was the popularity of the game that even the scaled-down 2600 version shifted more than 4 million units, generating a massive \$100 million in sales. Atari itself released the game on its 400/800 computers and ported it to several others, including the VIC-20, C64, TI-99/4A and Apple II. Inevitably, unlicensed clones with cheeky titles like Donkey King and Killer Gorilla flooded many computer platforms in the early Eighties. Nintendo, meanwhile, capitalised on the success of the original with a couple of arcade sequels and a range of Game & Watch handheld titles. Mario would, of course, go on to dominate Nintendo's character roster for the next decade, but our anthropoidal friend swung back into contention in the mid-Nineties with the release of a new Donkey Kong title on the Game Boy, and the first of Rare's Donkey Kong Country games for the SNES.

The original game may be approaching its 30th anniversary, but it is most certainly far from being forgotten. In recent years it has even been thrust back into the public consciousness thanks to the high-profile battles over the Donkev Kong high score world record. Diehard players Billy Mitchell and Steve Wiebe have also been involved in a long-running battle to claim the world record, with their efforts to one-up each other's achievements memorably chronicled in the 2007 documentary The King Of Kong. Earlier this year, a brand new competitor named Hank Chien appeared and entered the fray, so now it's a three-way fight for the most coveted title in competitive videogaming. In October 2015, Robbie Lakeman claimed the coveted title with a colossal score of 1.177.200 - but it will have probably changed hands again by the time you read this! \*\*

# the expert



# PROFILE

- » Name: Hank Chien
- » Age: 36
- » Date of birth: 4 August 1974
- » Hometown:
- New York, USA » Occupation:
- Plastic surgeon

The battle to be 'King of Kong' was famously fought between Billy Mitchell and Steve Wiebe. That all changed in February 2010 when newcomer Hank Chien set a (now broken) new record

### ■ Is it true that you only started playing Donkey Kong after seeing the King Of Kong documentary?

I think I may have played one game of Donkey Kong prior to watching The King Of Kong, but yes, it's pretty much true I had never played the game. After watching the documentary, I decided to play just for fun. I had no idea where I could find a Donkey Kong machine, but I was aware of MAME. I improved very rapidly on MAME and after three months I reached the kill screen. At that point. I decided to find a public machine and thanks to the internet I found one pretty quickly at Barcade in Brooklyn. I then searched eBay and Craigslist for my own machine and after a few months I was able to find one in reasonable shape for a reasonable price.

# 126100 126100 22222 150 n 125 m 75 m 50 m HOW HIGH CAN YOU GET

- » Upon passing the fifth level, the game loops until level 22, where a bug prevents further play.
- 14500 014500 4600
- » Is it better to take the low or high route? Expert players

### At what point did you realise that you had a chance at the crown?

My initial intention was not to break the world record. I really was just playing for fun. In fact, I was going to try to break a million and then sell my machine. I wasn't even sure I could even break a million until I actually did it. It was 13 September 2009 and I had a business trip that day and had a flight to catch in two hours. My high score at the time

was around 940,000. I started to play a game in those two hours and I scored 1,037,700 and barely caught my flight. My first million point game was only 12,500 points shy of the world record. At that point I realised I had a shot and I started playing seriously and recording my attempts.

### Can you describe the events that led to you scoring 1,061,700 points on 26 February 2010?

After my first million point game, I actually did not play much because I was discouraged by the Twin Galaxies rules for scores over a million. Basically at that time it had to be done live in front of a referee. The rule was changed in November 2009, but with the holidays and work, Donkey Kong took a back seat. However, in early February I put my mind to it. In the coming weeks, I had several very close games, so I knew I could do it. Then came 26 February, a Friday. Ordinarily I would have been at work, but a huge snowstorm covered the city and my car was buried in snow so I was stuck at home with nothing to do but play Donkey Kong. In the evening I had a really good start and didn't die until late in the game. The rest is history.

# Your achievement generated lots of press once Twin Galaxies verified it. It must have been a pretty crazy few weeks for you...

After I broke the world record it was really crazy. People were calling my office, my home, my parents' home, email, Facebook, you name it. I was flooded, and that's on top of my ordinary busy life. It was fun to get all that attention, but only for about a day!

### ■ Did Billy Mitchell or Steve Wiebe offer their congratulations?

Billy Mitchell acknowledged my achievement, but I have not spoken to him directly. I would like to meet him at some point. Steve Wiebe called and emailed to congratulate me personally.

■ Billy reclaimed the high score in July this year, then Steve grabbed

# atformingPer

Things to look out for when attempting to topple the silly gorilla



omin' Barrels Jump them, smash them or



they feature on most screens.



Loopy Lifts
Be careful jumping to and







» Hank pictured here practising on his very own Donkey Kong cab in his Manhattan apartment

## it once again in September. It looks like neither of these guys plan to give it up any time soon. Are you planning to try to take it back?

Steve is a great player and he has been working hard to reclaim the world record, so he deserves the top spot. Congratulations to him! I do plan on taking it back, but my main goal is to maximise the game to the best of my ability, whether it is a world record or not. In my original world record game, I held back a lot and made some careless mistakes, so I know I can do a lot better. To score high you have to take a lot of risks and be really aggressive.

## ■ What kind of high score do you think is possible, with a perfect run?

The current world record is nowhere near the maximum. The thing about Donkey Kong is that there are so many variables and so many ways to play the game, it's hard to say exactly what the maximum score is. I think that the achievable maximum score is close to 1.2 million, but it would require a lot of skill and luck to pull it off. The theoretical maximum is a lot higher - maybe 1.5 million. A great thing about the game is that the world record will always be beatable. This saga isn't over yet.

## ■ There's been talk of The King Of Kong becoming a dramatised movie. If this happened and you were featured in the film, who would you like to play you?

I don't think there are any Hollywood actors good looking enough to play me, but if I had to choose, maybe Brad Pitt or Johnny Depp could do it! \*

# **Expert strategies** from the newest challenger to the **Donkey Kong** world record



## **■ TOP TIP**

For beginners, just clear the boards as fast as you can. On the barrel board always keep an eye on the barrels above you and prepare for the worst case scenario. There really aren't many secrets; it's just a matter of practice.



## **BONUS PLAY** When playing for a high

score, it's a combination of knowing when to hang around and accumulate points and when to finish the stage to claim the bonus. It is not always beneficial to stay around on a board as the bonus timer ticks down very fast, particularly in the later levels. You have to know when you can 'beat the clock' and when you just have to call it quits



# **■ HAMMER TIME**

Whether to grab the hammer or not is a complicated question. On the barrel board the top hammer is safe, but the bottom hammer is dangerous. I grab it when I'm playing for points but when I'm playing for survival I'll usually skip it. On the conveyers and rivets that's even more complicated I



### **■ RIVET ROUTE**

could probably write a short book on it.

There are two patterns on the rivets that are commonly used, yet there is no consensus even among the top players as to which is better for survival or for points. In one pattern you clear all the rivets on the left and then try to grab the top hammer. In the other, you clear all of the rivets except the one on the level with the bottom hammer, then grab the bottom hammer and run across Even those two patterns are not foolproof and you have to know what to do when it falls apart.

# the sequels

There are dozens of Donkey Kong spin-offs, but only three true sequels



### **Donkey Kong Jr** Released: 1982

The success of Donkey Kong meant that the sequel arrived faster than a tossed barrel on a greased girder. But what's this? There's not a single barrel to be seen. Donkey Kong has been caged by Mario and the moustachioed one has unleashed all manner of jungle critters in an attempt to stop DK's plucky son from rescuing his dad. Donkey Kong Jr is a platform game,

but a lot of time is spent traversing vines and chains, which can be cumbersome. It doesn't help, either, that Junior is rubbish at jumping, and the result is a slightly awkward sequel that, while utterly charming, lacks the smoothness and grace of the original.



# **Donkey Kong 3**

Released: 1983

DK Jr played a little on the sluggish side, but you certainly couldn't level that at this fast-paced shooter that's far removed from the platforming roots of the series. The title character is once again the cranky nemesis, but Mario by now had better things to do, leaving goofy urchin Stanley to step in and deal with DK. The frantic action takes place over three stages set in a greenhouse,

and in each one Stanley must continually blast the pesky primate with his insect spray gun, forcing him up into the rafters where stinging bees ultimately await him. It works brilliantly as an arcade game, in that you offer up a credit and get your five minutes of fun, but the game lacks variety and doesn't warrant repeated plays, thereby denying it the lasting appeal of its forebears.



# **Donkey Kong (GB)**

Released: 1994

When it comes to resurrecting and reinventing a franchise, nobody does it better than Nintendo. This game, launched alongside the Super Game Boy in 1994, is a perfect example. It begins as a nifty homage to the original coin-op, with the

arcade's four screens authentically reproduced with a few little extras thrown in, but instead of the game looping back to the beginning once DK hits the deck, it instead presents the player with a squillion extra screens to negotiate. In the majority of these, Mario must find an oversized key and carefully carry it to the locked door, which leads to the next level. Part-puzzler, part-platformer, this is an excellent update that deservedly spawned its own spin-off series in the Mario vs Donkey Kong games on the GBA and DS.

# the machine

Donkey Kong fan Chris Ellison shows off his rare red-coloured machine, which he has painstakingly restored to mint condition

Chris, a 39-year-old IT support worker from Gresham,
Oregon, had hankered after his own *Donkey Kong* cab
ever since first playing the game in his local bar and grill
aged 11. He ran an ad on Craigslist looking for a red *DK* cab and a lady not too far away answered his call.
It transpired that she'd acquired it from a local vendor
who originally purchased it new as a *Radar Scope*machine. Unfortunately, it needed a lot of work.

"It was one step away from a landfill,"
Chris tells us. "The bezel was so scratched
I could barely make out the monitor. The
coin door was rusted and the coin mechs
were jammed up. To make matters worse,
someone had attempted to cut a hole in
one of the sides. I wanted a red *DK* really
badly but man, this thing was a mess."

Undeterred, Chris transported the cab home and began the process of bringing it back to its brilliant best. "Donkey Kong was and always will be a passion for me," he says, "and it's just as much fun now as it was back then."



To restore my *Donkey Kong*, I began by lightly sanding down the entire cabinet to give the primer something to adhere to. All of the imperfections including the busted edge and the place where someone had attempted to cut a hole were reconstructed with Bondo putty and sanded flat. The primer was shot with a spray gun. I couldn't get the oil paint to shoot correctly so it was applied using a foam roller. The paint colour was matched by removing a red chip from underneath the coin door where it hadn't seen daylight since 1981.





The original board had developed bad RAM somewhere. Since I don't have the expertise to do this kind of a board repair, I sent it to Dick Millikan of Auburn, Washington, who is known for board repairs. Dick sent me a working board. Being a huge *Donkey Kong* fan, it was mandatory that the Brasington kit was installed. This is an add-on kit that enables the game to save high scores. It's also necessary if you want to install the *D2K: Jumpman Returns* hack. *D2K* is arnazing!



The monitor is the original Sanyo 20EZ that has been recapped – this is where all the capacitors on the monitor PCB are replaced. It is currently using the original flyback.

#### CONTROL PANEL

The control panel has been replaced with a reproduction. Interestingly enough, the original panel was using the *Radar Scope* red button for jump, which I chose to re-use. The P1 and P2 buttons are the original Nintendo dark blue. The new instruction cards are also reproduction, as well as the dust cover.



#### ARTWORK



The control panel itself is in good shape. It is not dented, warped, or Swisscheesed. The control panel overlay is in

decent condition, though it has a hole worn in it at the front. I have a new overlay for it that I found on eBay about a year ago. I will install it when I restore the machine cosmetically. Regarding the joysticks, which are Seimitsu/SNK LS-30s, one of them was new when I got the machine, while the other has moderate wear.

#### COIN MECH



The coin mechanisms are original. I decided to paint the coin door and

leave the coin entry wear marks for authenticity's sake.

## developer Q&A

We speak to industry veteran Garry Kitchen to find out how he managed to squeeze Donkey Kong onto the Atari 2600



How did you get into game development? In the mid-Seventies, while in college studying electrical engineering, I was hired by a small engineering consulting company. Among other projects, I developed and patented a handheld billiards game called Bank Shot, based on

a 4-bit microprocessor and an array of 72 LEDs. When the Atari 2600 came out the handheld games started to suffer at the expense of the newest, greatest thing – videogames. In response, I bought an Atari machine, opened it up and reverseengineered it so that we could compete in that space. I've been developing games ever since.

#### How did you land the job of converting *Donkey Kong* to the Atari 2600?

At the time, around 1981/1982, there weren't a whole lot of independent videogame developers who knew how to program the Atari 2600.

I had the knowledge as I had reverse-engineered the platform the previous year. My brother Steve owned an engineering company and he had a relationship with an executive at Coleco – I believe his name was Eric Bromley. Steve got the *Donkey Kong* contract with Coleco and subcontracted the project to me. It's all about relationships.

#### Did you get any assistance from Nintendo?

No, nothing. My only source was the actual arcade game. I had direct access to a machine, which Coleco provided, but I didn't get to keep it!

## What would you say was the most challenging aspect when working on *Donkey Kong*?

I wanted the 2600 version to look just like the arcade game, but there was a technical problem. The Atari hardware did not have enough memory to display a full bitmap background – the background memory only held enough bits to cover half the screen, so the video display driver would display either a repeating pattern or a reflecting pattern. With this limitation you could not display the slanted ramps that were such an important aspect of the look of the game. This frustrated me until I came up with a technical solution to overcome the limitation, allowing for slanted ramps. It required a rewrite of much of the code but I think it was worth it.

How long did you work on the game, and were you up against a deadline?

It was a three to four month schedule, which was about half the time that should have been allotted. The deadline was immovable, with the ROM cartridge needing to go into manufacturing in time for a holiday shipment. I worked without sleep for the final 72 hours to deliver it on time. It took me a month to physically recover from the ordeal.

## The game is often criticised for only featuring two of the original's four screens. Given more time, do you think you'd have been able to squeeze in those extra screens?

There were two factors that prevented me from including the other two screens. The cartridge was 4KB in size, and the beta version of the game, after three months of labour and two screens complete, came in at around 6KB. I was over by 2KB. Bigger cartridges were available, but Coleco made the financial decision not to go for an 8KB cartridge, despite my recommendation and pleading. So, rather than having an extra 2KB to play with and add more screens, I had to spend the last month crunching out 2KB just to make the two screens

fit in a 4KB cartridge. The second factor was the schedule. There was no time left. The other screens would have been impossible on the allowed schedule.

## The game was a huge seller, with sales of more than 4 million units. Were you lucky enough to get a slice of the profits?

I got a very, very tiny slice. Enough to make it worthwhile, but I

certainly didn't get rich off it.

#### Looking back, how do you reflect on the game?

Not to pat myself on the back, but I still love the game. I thought it turned out pretty well. From my perspective I focused on the quality of the game experience that was in the cartridge rather than lamenting the fact that the other levels were missing. I really wanted to get the iconic first level, with Mario jumping over barrels, to feel as close to the arcade game as possible, and I'm comfortable with how that turned out.

## These days you're involved in iPhone development at AppStar Games. What's your take on the Apple devices' importance?

The importance of the iPhone cannot be overstated. The single most important thing it has done is change the buying habits of the videogame consumer. Two years ago my eight-year-old son would ask me for a \$30 cartridge for his Nintendo DS. Today he asks me if it's okay to download a \$0.99 iPhone game, and he's equally satisfied with the experience. Apple has taught the consumer that good games can be had for under \$2 and the games industry will never be the same. The genie is out of the box and the industry will never get it back in.

### The conversions









#### **01.** CPC (Best Conversion)

That Stuart Campbell awarded it the prestigious accolade of best 8-bit arcade conversion of all time back in issue 76 should be a big indicator of how good this version plays. Featuring big, bright colourful visuals, faithful gameplay, and all four stages, it's a nigh-on perfect conversion for Lord Sugar's unfairly mocked wonder machine, which is why we're awarding it best conversion

#### **02.** Atari 2600

This is a poor conversion, even by Atari 2600 standards. It's missing two stages (Cement Factory and Spring), DK looks like a deranged gingerbread man, the barrels look like cookies, and the behaviour of the enemy flame sprites – they simply yo-yo from one end of the screen to the other – is easy to circumvent. The controls aren't great either.

**03.** Spectrum Poor graphics aside,

the intensity at which Kong lobs his barrels is relentless, and coupled with Mario's weedy jump is a perfect recipe for irritation. In this version it also takes Mario an unnecessarily long time to climb ladders – although this might have something to do with the giant arse that Sentient Software has retrofitted him with, only visible when he's climbing ladders.

**04.** C64 (Atarisoft) This superb version by Douglas D Dragin

is another great port. Released in 1983, it's the first official port to include all the stages - impressive considering it was one of the earliest titles for the C64, and subsequent ports on machines boasting far more tech managed just three. With great presentation, and the option to tweak the difficulty of the game, this is generally the more popular of the two C64 versions that saw release.

**05.** C64 (Arcana) As well as the great Atarisoft offering, C64 owners received this equally impressive one by Arcana, which also did the CPC version. Featuring all four stages – although this time it's worth noting that they follow the original Japanese level order – great sounds, smooth gameplay and all the cut-scenes, it's another great conversion.

#### **06.** NES

As you would expect being on the NES, and from Nintendo, this is a great conversion. The visuals look authentic, and the gameplay and controls are solid. It's missing the Cement Factory stage and the sounds and music differ from the arcade version. This is the most popular of all the home conversions, which is why the cart stayed in production for a staggering five years.

#### **07.** Apple II

Despite no Cement Factory, this conversion still offers an authentic game of *DK*, delivering some of the more trivial





















elements of its arcade parent – such as the 'how high can you get' intro screen and the inclusion of Pauline's girly possessions – at the price of good graphics and sounds. It's the nippiest conversion of the game out there, and one of a handful to allow players to tweak the difficulty.

#### **08.** ColecoVision

Once again no Cement Factory stage, but nonetheless a decent effort that looks and plays well. Unfortunately its controls let it down, though this has more to do with the inaccurate nature of the console's disc-stick controller than anything else. Coleco also released a version for its Coleco Adam computer. It doesn't look as good as the console port, but it does include all four stages.

#### **09.** VIC-20

The graphics are below par, and the game isn't very smooth, but it's not all bad news: the game sounds fantastic, and, amazingly, features all four stages, which is really quite unbelievable. This is as good a job as Atarisoft could be expected to muster up on the modest tech. Taking this into account, this is another decent conversion of *DK*.

#### 10. TI-99/4A

Biggest surprise of the night, though, goes to this fantastic conversion for the TI-99/4A. While the visuals look a little washed out, and the sound effects are painful, the sprites do look nicely detailed and

the game is the complete package featuring all four levels from the arcade game in the US order. The gameplay is nice and smooth too. A great conversion.

#### **11.** Atari 800

Without doubt the best version to be found on an Atari machine, and was another of a disproportionate number to include all four stages. There are slight differences to the arcade original that only astute Donkey Kong fans will

pick up on, but most will see this as a good-looking and complete port that certainly puts the dismal 2600 effort to shame.

#### **12.** MSX

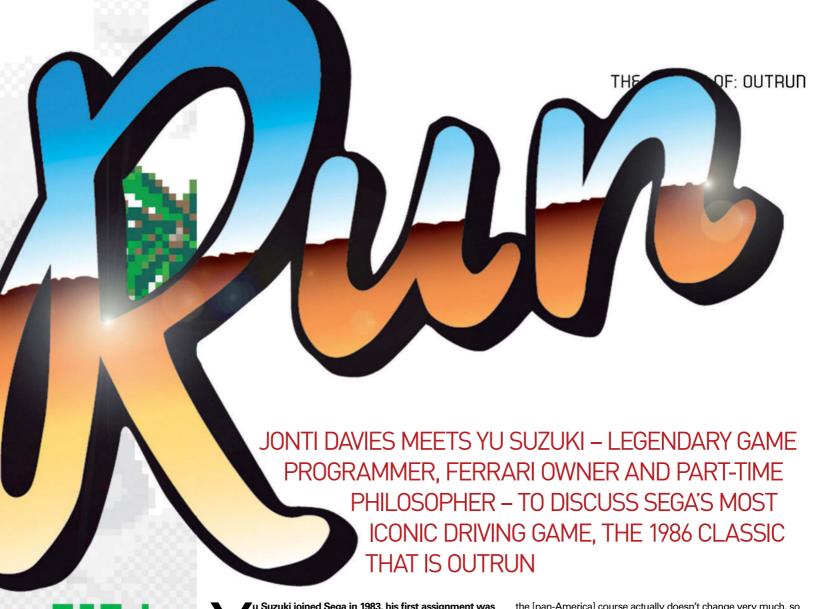
Unsurprisingly, the MSX conversion, which was also by Sentient Software, suffers from the same issues that plague its similar Spectrum port – namely it doesn't look great and Donkey Kong seems to be working himself into an early grave at the top of the screen. This is probably the worst

of all the conversions published by Ocean.

#### **13.** Intellivision (Worst Conversion)

Mario looks like Q\*bert in dungarees, Donkey Kong like Swamp Thing, and Pauline like an orange dinosaur. It only features two stages and it controls like a dead body. It's rumoured that this version, developed by Coleco, was so bad that, upon seeing it, Mattel thought the company was trying to sabotage its machine. We can believe it.





u Suzuki joined Sega in 1983, his first assignment was Champion Boxing on the SG-1000. From there, Suzuki's progress began to gain momentum. By the end of 1985 he had already established himself at the vanguard of coinop development, having masterminded a couple of major successes for Sega in the form of Hang-On and Space Harrier. But Suzuki's journey towards becoming a legendary videogame producer was about to shift to a higher gear, and it was the following year's OutRun driving game that turned Suzuki into an internationally renowned programming superstar.

Before a brief diversion to code the thrilling sci-fi blast of Space Harrier in time for a December 1985 release, Suzuki's attention was first centred on the racing genre. The result of Suzuki's initial drive was Hang-On (which appeared in Japan's arcades in July 1985), a high-speed bike racing game where players literally felt as though they had to hang on to the coin-op cabinet's handlebars. Part of Suzuki's motivation for Hang-On's production was a desire to see to it that Sega overturn Namco as Japan's leading manufacturer of racing games, and while Hang-On was a superb title - and one which radically altered Sega's image - he accepted that his first racing game alone hadn't been sufficient for Sega to overtake its main rival, the developer of Pole Position. Namco was still synonymous with driving games; Sega was being lapped. Suzuki wasn't fond of repetition, so instead of producing another bike racing game he opted to create the car driving game that would become OutRun. Well, that's one side of the story. The other, less weighty but

equally important reason for Yu Suzuki's determination to create OutRun came from a Burt Reynolds flick, as he confesses to us: "The main impetus behind OutRun's creation was my love of a film called The Cannonball Run. I thought it would be good to make a game like that. The film crosses America, so I made a plan to follow the same course and collect data as I went. But I realised, once I'd arranged everything, that the scenery along the [pan-America] course actually doesn't change very much, so I revised my plan and decided to collect data in Europe instead..." Although *Cannonball Run* clearly had a great influence on Suzuki's work with *OutRun*, the game also bears what must have been a coincidental similarity to the euphoric scene in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (also a 1986-vintage production) in which Ferris, the sassy Sloane at his side, speeds off in a rosso corsa Ferrari 250GT. Regardless, Suzuki's attention had been diverted away from America, towards Europe.

Suzuki's maverick approach to game development would, during the Nineties, become accepted practice (12 years later, for example, fellow Sega-man Yuji Naka would take his Sonic Adventure team to South America purely for research purposes), but in the mid-Eighties Suzuki was already doing things the interesting way, literally journeying around the world just to make sure that his game would be the real deal. Suzuki's plans culminated in a European research adventure. "Because of the 'transcontinental' concept," he recalls, "I felt that I should first actually follow such a course myself, collecting information with a video camera, a still camera, and other equipment. I started out from Frankfurt, where I hired a rent-a-car, and I installed a video camera on the car. I drove around Monaco and Monte Carlo, along the mountain roads of Switzerland, stopping in hotels in Milan, Venice and Rome, collecting data for a fortnight. I have many happy memories of that trip. There were many places I visited where communicating in English wasn't sufficient: one time, when ordering a meal, I thought I had asked [in a European language] for a single bowl of soup but was surprised when four bowls of soup were brought to me!"

Soup or no soup, there was still much work to be done during Suzuki's fortnight in Europe. "The next step was to talk with local people in the places I visited, and [later] to make those discussions and other episodes reflected in the game," Suzuki remembers. The result was a unique videogame snapshot of the

#### IN THE HNOW



- » PUBLISHER: SEGA
- » DEVELOPER: AM2
- » RFI FASED: 1986
- » SYSTEMS: ARCADE, VARIOUS
- » GENRE: DRIVING

#### VERSION **EXCURSTONS**



#### Sega Mark III/Master System

This was the first console conversion of OutRun, appearing in Japan on 30 June 1987 - less than 12 months after the coin-op debuted in Japan. It wasn't a bad

effort, either: in terms of presentation it's superior to most 8-bit computer versions, and the game also supported the Mark III's Yamaha YM2413 FM sound unit, which helped ensure the soundtrack didn't sound too far removed from the original tunes heard in the coin-op.



#### **Mega Drive**

In August 1990 OutRun was released on a Mega Drive cartridge. having been successfully ported to the console by conversion specialist Sanritsu Denki (now an

independent developer known as SIMS, this company was at the time wholly owned by Sega). The Mega Drive version of OutRun was notable for featuring a new, exclusive song called Step On Beat.



#### **PC-Engine**

This Japan-only PC-Engine conversion by NEC showed up at the end of 1990. It's an excellent piece of work, easily outstripping the Master System version while

giving the Mega Drive release a good run as well - in spite of the supposed superiority of the Mega Drive hardware.



#### Sega Saturn

The brilliant Saturn version of OutRun was released in Japan under the Sega Ages banner in September 1996. Not only does this disc contain both the Japanese

domestic and international variations on the arcade code, but it also features a 60fps refresh rate that outperforms the coin-on's 30fps standard. The Saturn build even includes newly arranged versions of the classic four-song soundtrack. which were personally reworked by Hiroshi Kawaguchi in early 1996. This OutRun release was handled by Game no Rutsubo, another specialist Japanese conversion outfit.



While certainly highly respectable versions of the game, OutRun in both Shenmue II (where it appeared as a mini-game) and Yu Suzuki Gameworks (as part of a five-game

retrospective compendium) differs from the original arcade in a couple of areas; specifically, the player's car is a generic Ferrari-style motor but not the original Testarossa design, while the timbre of the music is also slightly changed. In spite of these discrepancies, both Dreamcast appearances were in fact produced by Game no Rutsubo, who had done such a spellbinding job with the Saturn version.



This was the first handheld version of OutRun, released in 1991. As expected, the Game Gear version struggles to re-create the look of the coin-op, but it does succeed in

achieving a first for *OutRun* outside of the arcade; plug in a Link Cable and two-player racing becomes an option.



#### me Boy Adva

This surprisingly fine version of OutRun appeared along with dinky takes on After Burner, Space Harrier and Super Hang-On as part of the Atari-published Sega Arcade

Gallery, which was released in the UK in January 2003. Ironically, in spite of its quality, the Bits Studios-converted GBA OutRun never appeared at retail in Japan.



OutRun on a mobile phone? Yep, and there are some keitai versions available in Japan that look superior to some of the 8 and even 16-bit console renditions of the game

Shame about the controls though



#### Commodore 64

The loading times on this 1987-vintage C64 version were unbearable, and the gameplay wore livery that was only vaguely similar to the real OutRun. There was no

choice of routes, and only Magical Sound Shower and Splash Wave were represented (albeit in an approximated way) on C64 OutRun's soundtrack. On the plus side, there were a few POKEs you could input to either stop the clock from ticking down or to enable you to pass through other vehicles. Thank goodness for the Saturn.



#### Sinclair 7X Spectrum

The Probe-developed 1988 Speccy version of OutRun was, like the Commodore 64 release, published by US Gold. Also like that Commodore 64 title, it was barely a

fraction of the game that players knew from the arcades.



#### **Amstrad CPC**

OutRun on the CPC, also released in 1988 and programmed by Probe, wasn't much better than the Spectrum version: it had no ingame music, and again it looked

like a distant, ugly relative of the coin-op. On the plus side, CPC OutRun had the proper route-switching setup (which the Commodore 64 release infamously was without) and it was bundled with a tape of the music from the arcade version, so you could stick that on the stereo while playing and sort of trick yourself into believing you had a virtual arcade in your bedroom.



OutRun on the MSX and MSX2 was released in 1988. It was a simple reduction of the coin-op, looking even more stripped-down (although a lot more colourful)

than the C64 version. Although MSX OutRun was released immediately after the FMPAC sound source cartridge came out, this Pony Canyon-published release failed to take advantage of the new hardware add-on, resulting in a blippysounding mediocrity.



#### Commodore Amiga

For those who were lucky enough to own an A500 as early as 1989, Probe had an Amiga conversion of OutRun that resembled the coin-op much more closely (at least to the

point where it was obvious what the source material was) than the CPC and ZX versions it had also coded.



Likewise, the ST version of OutRun, which was released in 1988, shortly before the Amiga build appeared, was a continent away from the 8-bit computer ports it outran.



DOS users weren't left out of the OutRun conversion circus. either: Sega published a version programmed by Distinctive Software employees (under the

Unlimited Software alias) in 1989. It was a worthy effort, although the Amiga and Atari ST versions had greater shine. mid-Eighties, a Japanese interpretation of European geography. OutRun is in many ways the game that is most representative of bubble-time Japan's extravagances: it's a production with concessions to luxury (driving a Ferrari Testarossa, sitting inside a state-of-the-art coin-op cab), taken at endless high speeds across effusively bright European-styled country, all to an inspirational soundtrack where the only hint of melancholy arrives beyond the final checkpoint, as Last Wave fades out.

Even while the bubble lasted, however, there were some limits. Sega's resources were not endless and the technology available to Suzuki at the time - while fearsomely powerful compared with other hardware of a mid-Eighties vintage - didn't stack sufficient memory to facilitate all of Suzuki's dreams. As a consequence of these and other factors, most notably a lack of time, Yu Suzuki found it necessary to make a few compromises during OutRun's development. It turns out that these cuts were not to any great gameplay detriment, yet Suzuki was instinctively unhappy with being forced to sacrifice any of his ideas: "I was only able to put around half of the things I wanted to do into OutRun," he says. "Because of budget and development time limitations, some of the contents I'd planned had to be squeezed or cut. I'd made preparations for eight individual characters and I wanted to include various events at each checkpoint, which would have made the player experience a story; something like the Cannonball Run film. I also wanted to give players a choice of supercars to drive, so that they could enjoy differences in car performance."

Of course Suzuki's hoped-for garage of driveable Ferraris was eventually realised to near-perfection in 2003's OutRun 2, but for the original game he had to be satisfied with just one Ferrari. "Naturally I was yearning for Ferraris," Suzuki says. "Above all, the most talked-about car of the time was the 12-cylinder Ferrari Testarossa. The first time I saw the car was in Monaco, and I was really moved by its beauty – I thought, 'there is no choice: this is the only one'. There are many other charming Ferraris, but memory problems made it impossible to include them in the game... So we decided that the player's car should be the 12-cylinder Testarossa."

On returning to Japan, Yu Suzuki and his team set out to conduct further research. Suzuki had already explored the





# "Five of us squeezed into a car and drove for three hours to see a [privately owned] Testarossa" Yusuzuki on his team's dedication to Ferrari's hottest car of the Eighties

potential for *OutRun*'s scenery and environment throughout his European rent-a-car expedition; his team's next objective was to learn more about the Testarossa, but this was fraught with problems, as Suzuki relates: "Only a tiny number of Testarossas had been brought into Japan, so we had some trouble finding an owner to help us with collecting car data. Eventually, five of us squeezed into a small car and drove for three hours to see a [privately owned] Testarossa. We took photos of it from every side, at five-degree intervals, and we

of the engine."

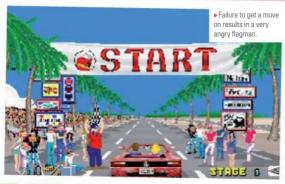
also recorded the sound

Suzuki's work on OutRun was a model of thoughtful, conscientious design. Suzuki has previously spoken of keeping a notepad and Dictaphone next to his bed, so that he could quickly note any ideas he had in dreams. It's no coincidence that OutRun's opening stretch of road is traffic free: this was to ensure that players stood no risk of being discouraged by suffering a collision early in the game, so soon after inserting a 100 yen coin to play. Instant explosions on collisions between vehicles, too, in spite of being prevalent in racing games prior to the OutRun era, were not to Suzuki's liking, and he deliberately omitted this faddish conceit when designing both Hang-On and OutRun. On the other hand, Suzuki reckoned that zooming out into the lead and then just staying there for the rest of the race wasn't much fun either, which is partly why OutRun is a race against the clock, rather than an inter-vehicle competition.

Yu Suzuki's personal gameplay preferences happened to be in tune with those of the majority of players, leading to design decisions that would help *OutRun* to push driving games away from their tendency towards 'the impossible',

as Suzuki explains: "At the time of *OutRun*'s development, driving games were made whereby a collision with another car would automatically result in an explosion, and they had many things that would be impossible with real cars. Even if you were good at driving actual cars, the skills needed in those games were completely different. I wanted to make a driving game where people who were skilful drivers of cars could also achieve good results in the game. For that reason, where at all possible, we simulated features such as horsepower, torque, gear ratios and tyre engineering close to those of real cars. For features that were difficult to control, we added Al assistance. For its time, I think the level of *OutRun*'s production was very high."

The Al assistance Suzuki speaks of was used to particularly good effect with the handling of the Testarossa. The 'drift' techniques Japanese racing game developers tend to talk about are, according to Suzuki, essential in good driving games - if the car's tyres grip the road surface too closely, the handling of the car will be too twitchy – but prior to OutRun this wasn't commonly appreciated by driving game developers. The response of *OutRun*'s Ferrari was pitched perfectly, however, neatly averting all of the frustrations that players feel when they're attempting to control cars which are prone to understeer, oversteer or 'twitchiness'. And it's just as well, really: not only did OutRun present endless one-way traffic through which you had to weave a path, but it also presented a choice of routes at the end of each stage, demanding that you swerve left or right to head towards the next easier/trickier area. In a game as gorgeous as OutRun, while the primary thrill was in the ride, part of the fun was just seeing what the next stage looked like. Suzuki concurs,







#### THE CAR IN FRONT IS A TESTAROSSA



#### Turbo OutRun

Turbo OutRun was the first of many pseudo-sequels to Yu Suzuki's original formula, and this one gets even closer to

the Cannonball Run inspiration by virtue of its settin as a pan-America race. It also introduced a turbo feature for limited quick boosts.



#### attle OutDun

An exclusive game for the Sega Master System, *Battle OutRun* stripped away all of the notions of luxurious

driving from the original *OutRun* game and replaced them with chean criminal-chase 'thrills' Hmm



#### OutRun Europa

becoming a series of sort-of OutRun games appeared on the Game Gear, SMS and C64

in 1991. It tried to be the Sega-authorised contende to Taito's excellent *Chase HQ*, but failed due to shoddy design and cheap production values.



#### OutRun 3-D

Another SMS release, OutRun 3-D was designed to take advantage of the SegaScope 3D Glasses.

t seemed futuristic, although the developer's ack of confidence in the concept was belied by ts reassurance-veiled-as-a-boast, "WITH 2-D MODE!"



#### OutRun 2019

*F-Zero* meets *OutRun* in this Mega Drive release from 1993.

I ne diverging routes of utRun at least are retained here, however, the errari has been replaced with an awkwardly style



#### TutRunners

This is one of the better

OutRun sequels, the coin-op

version featuring linked

cabinets for multiplayer

racing and the System Multi 32 board powering lat sprite-based graphics drawn in a style similar to Yu Suzuki's 1988 classic, Power Drift



#### utDun 2 / OutDun 2 CD

This great game had a full Ferrari licence with eight drivable supercars, as well as new game modes and

awesome Chihiro-powered 3D graphics. It was the first real sequel to *OutRun*, and it had only taken 17 years to arrive.



#### Sega Ages 2500 Vol. 13 OutRun

This is in part a sequel to *OutRun* and in part a

game, in dull polygonal 3D graphics. A new Arrange mode means you needed to overtake rivals within each stage, and then stay ahead of them until the end of your drive



#### utRun 2006:

This is the homecoming of OutRun 2 and SP, collecting fine Xhox, PS2, PSP and PC

conversions of the arcades together with addition console/computer-exclusive material. Essential.

explaining that the emphasis on the scenery was deliberate: "I wanted to make a game where you could enjoy magnificent changing scenery and landscapes while driving, and really get a nice sensation from playing it – not a stoic racing style of play."

From the use of a roofless Testarossa and the choice of Coconut Beach as the game's first stage, to the names of the soundtrack selections (breeze, wave, shower) and the various pastel shades used to draw the sky, *OutRun* feels almost tangibly fresh; the perfect game for summer. We mention this to Suzuki, quietly hoping we haven't just perceived the experience horribly wrong all these years. "Yes, that's correct," he nods, to our relief. "I wanted to make stages where you could smell the fresh fragrance of new leaves and flowers, like in the green meadows of Switzerland, so I'm happy that you were able to sense that."

For such a cohesive, finely crafted game, it's surprising to hear that the team behind *OutRun* was very much a randomly assembled group of individuals from within Sega. "The team consisted of four programmers, five graphics designers and one sound creator," Suzuki says, "and we had the [coin-op] cabinet made by commissioning another team. The game development team was made up of people who happened to be available at the time, so I wasn't able to assemble the team according to my wishes. I wrote all of the important planning and programming parts myself; I don't think anything was really influenced by the development staff. I recall the bulk of development work taking between eight and ten months to complete. However, during those eight to ten months I was almost living at Sega," he laughs.

Although the other programmers and graphics designers working on *OutRun* appear, according to Suzuki, to have had scant influence on shaping the game, one man – Hiroshi Kawaguchi (the artist formerly known as Hiroshi Miyauchi) – had a tremendous effect on what has become one of the most highly regarded aspects of *OutRun's* production: its music. Kawaguchi joined Sega as a programmer in 1984, coding alongside Yuji Naka on the SG-1000 game *Girl's Garden* while writing music purely as a hobby outside of work. Suzuki heard some of Kawaguchi's tunes and was so impressed that he commissioned him to produce the soundtrack for *Hang-On*, after which Kawaguchi quit his role as a programmer and became a full-time in-house composer at Sega.

Yu Suzuki, himself a guitarist, had specific requests of Kawaguchi for his *OutRun* assignment: "During the planning stage I explained in detail to the sound engineer what type of tunes were needed. I told him that basically I wanted eight-beat rock rhythms at a tempo of 150bpm. I remember selecting a number of tunes to be used as points of reference. In those days we couldn't use samplers or PCM sound sources, so the timbre of the tunes was a synthesizer creation, which led to us having some difficulty when attempting to trim data quantities for playback of the tunes. I remember wanting some guitars and voices in the soundtrack, but it was impossible to achieve with the technology of the time, so I ultimately had to give up."

The final soundtrack represents one of the finest, enduring examples of Japanese videogame music. *OutRun* offers players a choice of three tunes – *Passing Breeze, Magical Sound Shower* and *Splash Wave* – via a mock car-stereo screen before the action begins. It's a concise collection of aurally luxurious numbers, each upbeat and catchy to the point where players would anticipate every subsequent bar. Somehow these tunes fit *OutRun*'s graphics perfectly, and they even seem to

be in tune with the feel of the Testarossa's acceleration and handling. This is explained in part by Yu Suzuki's balanced commitment to *OutRun*'s sonic, visual and responsive aspects – "I couldn't think of the game and music as detached, separate things," he tells us – but there's also the fact that Hiroshi Kawaguchi, after working with Suzuki to deliver the excellent *Hang-On* music, was beginning to understand Suzuki's wishes and his way of thinking. We ask Yu Suzuki to reveal his favourite *OutRun* cut and he responds without any hesitation: "*Magical Sound Shower*"

Aware of all five senses (he has even contemplated the potential for games that challenge players' sense of smell), Yu Suzuki wanted to make OutRun a tactile experience - not just something to appeal to the eyes and ears. Hence the cabinet designs he commissioned, which were early examples of coinop setups capable of delivering force feedback to players at appropriate moments, such as whenever the Testarossa crashed into a roadside signpost. There were four flavours of OutRun cab - Deluxe and Standard moving types, an upright with a force feedback wheel only, and a cockpit version without any such movement. The appeal of the jolting DX and SD versions was overwhelming, and after their initial trial runs non-feedback cabinets became relatively rare in Japan. Regardless of the presence/absence of moving parts in these prestigious cabinets, all of them used Nanao-brand monitors. It was essential that OutRun's super-quick sprite-scaling and undulating roads were displayed on the best possible screens, and it was fortuitous that these cabinets were the last wave of Sega machines to use Nanao monitors. As part of a cost-cutting exercise. subsequent Sega coin-ops would use lower-spec Samsung displays - while the Nanao screens would stay bright forever, the later Samsung monitors were prone to screen-burn and visual signs of ageing.

The *OutRun* arcade machines had an unexpected effect on the crowds of players who used to hang out at Japan's game centres; no previous driving game had inspired such dedication. And players went to extraordinary lengths in the pursuit of high scores. Around 1988 it was common in Japan to find *OutRun* machines with broken gearsticks: the so-called 'gear ga-cha' trick – where opportune gear-down/gear-up shifts would be rewarded with a prolonged white-exhaust speed boost – was published in Japan's then-widely read *Gamest* magazine, along with a photo-led guide to explain the intricacies of the move. Arguably the most aggressive of OutRunners were not playing in the intended spirit of the game, but such determined play helped to establish *OutRun* as a phenomenon in the arcades, as well as a commercial success that covered Yu Suzuki's travel expenses many times over.

Yu Suzuki has always been blessed with a clear vision of what he wants, even if – as in the case of the unfinished *Shenmue* saga – he hasn't always managed to get it. But with *OutRun*, Suzuki's vision was realised as perfectly as could have been hoped for, leaving players and its designer and programmer with a supreme, satisfying experience born out of red metal, pastel skies and accelerating away towards the horizon. We'll leave Yu Suzuki with the final word; he deserves it: "*OutRun*'s concept was not about frantically racing to just barely take first place. It's about giving a ride to a beautiful woman, who sits at your side, and driving around in a luxurious car with just one hand on the steering wheel, taking first place in the race by a wide margin – and with time to spare."



» Cutting it this close can be incredibly frustrating.









HANG-ON (released 1985; Arcade version pictured)



SPACE HARRIER (1985; GBA version pictured)



AFTER BURNER II (1987; Arcade version pictured)



POWER DRIFT (1988; Arcade version pictured)



VIRTUA RACING (1992; Arcade version pictured)



VIRTUA COP (1994; PS2 version pictured)



VIRTUA FIGHTER 2 (1994; Arcade version pictured)

# » The open road, a blonde gal at your side, Magical Sound Shower playing. Thanks, Yu.

## DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

#### SPACE HARRIER

SYSTEM: ARCADE YEAR: 1985

#### **VIRTUA FIGHTER 2 (PICTURED)**

SYSTEMS: ARCADE/SEGA SATURN YEAR: 1995

#### **SHENMUE**

SYSTEM: DREAMCAST



"The main impetus behind OutRun's creation was my love of a film called The Cannonball Run. I thought it would be good to make a game like that"

YU SUZUKI ON HIS FASCINATION WITH THE BURT REYNOLDS FLICK







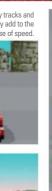


FERRARI F355

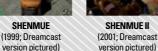
CHALLENGE (1999)

PS2 version pictured)

वित्र क







SHENMIIE II



PROPELLER ARENA (unreleased: Dreamcast version pictured)



**VIRTUA FIGHTER 4** (2001: PS2 version pictured)



**OUTRUN 2** (2003: Xbox version pictured)



PCV-PHI (2006: Arcade version pictured)



SEGA RACE TV (2008: Arcade version pictured)



Formed by two engineers, Atari rose to define the early games industry. However, its rapid expansion hid the looming threat of bankruptcy that defined its early days, right through to the corporate overindulgence and personality clashes that oversaw its ultimate downfall

tari's origins go back to Ampex and a little-remembered division called Videofile. A document storage and retrieval system that used videotape and television displays to search for and reproduce documents, it was capable of recalling a full page out of the phone book and printing it accurately. An analogue engineer who goes by the name of Ted Dabney had been working in the 'Input/Output' group at Videofile, responsible for the cameras and printers used to record and later print out documents, when he found himself with a new office mate. Just out of college, the young Nolan Bushnell had moved out to California from Utah after getting an entrylevel job at Ampex.

Skill and personality-wise the two couldn't have been more different.

According to their boss, Ed DeBenedeti: "Nolan was the dreamer and Ted was the plodder. Ted's engineering work and ideas were conservative perhaps in the extreme. Nolan and later interns Al [Alcorn] and Steve [Bristow] were brilliant, inexperienced enough that they had no idea of what one could not do."

In a sense, Ted's experienced approach to engineering would serve well to give Nolan's inexperience and forward-looking manner a solid foundation as the two embarked on a side project together. Already enjoying daily games of Go in the office on Ted's custom-built board, Nolan talked about wanting to pursue bringing computer games to the arcade environment. Tapping the more experienced Ted, he began partnering with him on trying to make the dream a reality. According to

#### ☐ INSTANT EXPERT

Atari Inc was founded on 28 June 1972 but technically began in 1969 as a partnership between Nolan Bushnell and Ted Dabney called Syzygy Engineering.

Atari's first arcade game was Pong in 1972. Its first consumer product was a home version of Pong for Sears in 1975.

The Video Computer System (VCS), better known as the Atari 2600, began its life in August of 1975 and was released on 14 October 1977.

Warner Communications bought Atari in 1976 for an estimated \$32 million. It gave away half of it in 1984 for no money – just promissory stock

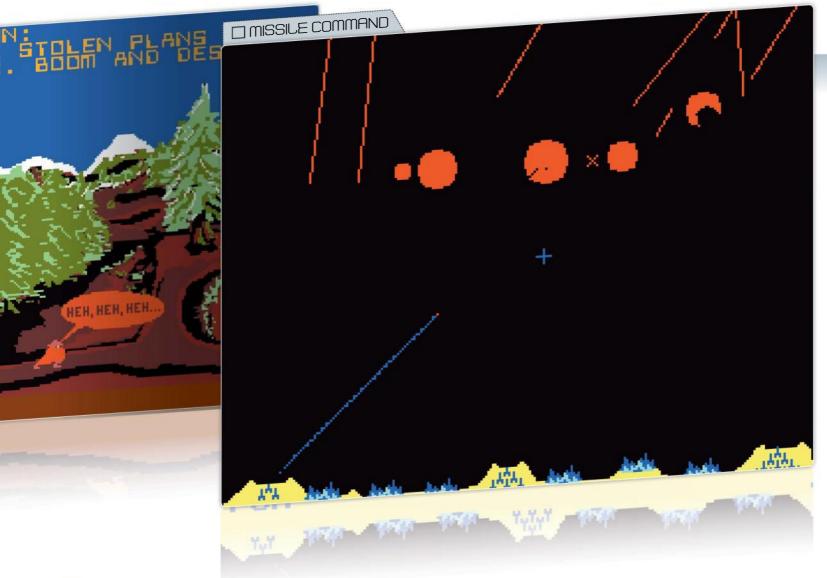
Atari's top game properties are Pong, Breakout, Asteroids, Centipede, Battlezone, Missile Command and Tempest.

Atari affected the popular culture of the early Eighties to such a degree that it became synonymous with high technology. It even affected US politics, as the term 'Atari Democrat' was created to describe Democrats who supported the development of high-tech industries to stimulate the US economy of the time.

Ted: "He took me off to Stanford to see [Spacewar!] so I could help him come up with ways to do such a thing."

The original plan was to bring the experience direct to the arcade via a PDP or comparable minicomputer, and a third partner with programming experience, Larry Bryan, was brought in to that end. It turned out to be a short partnership, however, when this approach was quickly found to be cost prohibitive, but they did get a name for their engineering group out of it – Syzygy Engineering. If this plan for an electronic arcade game worked out, the two planned to have Syzygy be a contract-engineering firm for the arcade industry.

When it was decided to move to a nongeneral purpose format – or 'state machine' where the game is comprised of zero code but rather hardwired through chip logic - it became Ted's turn to do the heavy lifting. He designed all the circuitry to put a spot on a modified television screen and move it around, and Nolan shopped it around for someone who may be interested in funding the development of a final product, as well as manufacturing and distribution. Finding closed doors everywhere he looked, and little interest in the arcade industry mecca of Chicago, he finally found a coin-op company locally that was interested. Nutting Associates had previous successes with electro-mechanical games such as



## He definitely had no ideas about TV games of any sort ""

TED DABNEY ON NOLAN'S VISION WHEN THEY STARTED WORKING TOGETHER



Computer Quiz and saw the potential of this new format. Hiring Nolan as lead engineer to finish adapting Ted's work into a game while performing other duties at the company, Nutting became the future of the industry for a short time.

Having talked Ted into leaving Ampex and joining him at Nutting, by the end of development Nolan was itching to have more input on the business side of things. The two left Nutting by the spring of 1972 and decided to make Syzygy Engineering their main source of income.

Funding the startup with money from Nutting's purchase of *Computer* 

Space, and subsidising daily operations with a coin route, Nolan looked to get their first contract. Their first client was Bally, which contracted them to produce pinball playfields and, more importantly, an electronic driving game. Nolan hired former Ampex intern Al Alcorn to work on the proposed game, and allowed him to get acclimated to their video circuitry from Computer Space. Nolan had seen a demonstration of the first videogame console, the Magnavox Odyssey, that past May, and decided to have Al do an arcade version of its tennis game. By the time Al was done in August of 1972, Nolan was outvoted two to one to make Al's warm-up game, Pong, Syzygy's actual game for Bally.

It was during this time that Atari got its now-legendary name. When looking to formally incorporate Syzygy Engineering, it was found that several other companies were already using the name. Giving the clerk a list of names based on moves from Go, the clerk picked Atari, not knowing that he would be choosing the name of the company that would define electronic entertainment for years to come. On 27 June 1972, Atari Inc was officially born. Nolan and Ted decided to keep the Syzygy name for the engineering portion of their venture, and use Atari for their outward-facing business activities.

#### A surprise hit

After putting several test cabinets of *Pong* out into the wild – most notably one at Andy Capp's Tavern that sat right next to a *Computer Space* unit – a funny thing happened. *Pong* was a big success, drawing in far more money than the *Computer Space* machines were, to the extent that the Atari staff were afraid that when they reported back to Bally on how the test run was doing, Bally wouldn't believe them. Wary of this, they underreported the earnings numbers, and Bally still thought they were exaggerating.

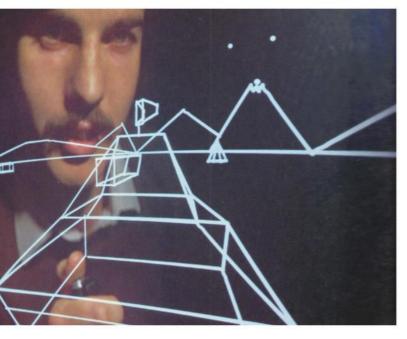
With Bally stalling on accepting the game and looking to possibly pass it off to its subsidiary, Midway Manufacturing, and Atari knowing how well the game was actually doing, Nolan, Ted and Al had a decision to make: either let *Pong* sit in limbo to maybe be rejected altogether, or look to go into manufacturing for themselves. They chose the latter, and Ted concocted a plan that

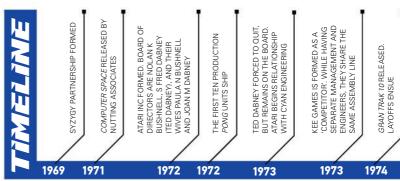
#### BY THE NUMBERS

\$40 million The amount of profit generated by Atari as its golden age began in 1977, the year it released the hugely successful Atari 2600.

**\$539 million** The amount it lost in 1983, as the industry's crash was under way.

- 2 The number of competitors Atari had in video arcade games in 1972.
- 25 The number of competitors by 1974.
- **\$98.95** The cost of Atari's first home console, *Pong*, in 1975
- **\$189** The cost of the Atari 2600 at launch.
- 1 The number of manufacturers making games for the Atari 2600 at its 1977 release. Of course, it was just Atari itself, although thirdparties would quickly appear.
- **145** The number of manufacturers making games for the 2600 worldwide at the time of the crash.
- **5,000** The number of shares allegedly sold by Ray Kassar based on insider knowledge of Atari's performance.







#### I WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



#### **Nolan Bushnell**

After leaving Atari. Nolan headed his Chuck E Cheese Pizza Time Theatre until facing bankruptcy, Funding several start-ups under Catalyst Technologies in the Eighties and briefly returning to video arcade games under Sente. he ran a string of entertainment companies including PlayNet and uWink, which eventually closed due to poor market performance. He is currently partnered in Anti-Aging Games and is an advisor to the current owner of the Atari brand, Atari SA (formerly Infogrames).



#### Ted Dabney

After leaving Atari Inc in 1973, Ted worked for arcade company Meadows for a time as well as several other non-arcade engineering jobs. He even briefly worked for his ex-partner again when he created the pizza number callout system for the early Chuck E Cheese, as well as the Chuck E Cheese-branded Isaac Asimov Presents Super Quiz arcade game in the late Seventies. He's currently enjoying retirement while reacting to the recent interest in his involvement in early videogame history with surprise, wonder and gracious interviews



Al Alcorn
After leaving Atari Inc
in 1983, he became
an Apple Fellow in

1986 before moving through a string of engineering management positions at various entertainment companies in the Nineties and early 2000s. He's currently VP of engineering at uGetit, a mobile social gaming firm that combines gaming with 'social shopping'. Former Atari employee Roger Hector also joins him there.



#### **Steve Bristow**

Since leaving Atari in 1984 after more than a decade, Steve has worked as an engineer at various communications firms. Sadly, the Atari pioneer passed away in early 2015. Nolan send a carefully crafted letter to Bally, suggesting that it officially reject *Pong* so that Atari could develop a new game for it. The letter worked, and Atari became a full design and manufacturing arcade company.

#### **New horizons**

From there the growth was explosive, with Nolan and Ted hiring people off the streets to fill the manufacturing needs, and Nolan hiring more engineers and management to help with the growth. Tension began to develop between Nolan and Ted on how the company should be running, however, and Nolan decided that there wasn't room for two heads - a fact that became obvious to Ted when Nolan hired someone to come in and help restructure the business and employee roles. When they asked Ted what he did at Atari, he knew his time was up; he was forced out of the company, with management firmly in Nolan's hands, as Atari began its 'Innovative Leisure' period,

By continuing to pump out new games based on sports themes while doing engineering research for an eventual move into the consumer market, Nolan looked to stay ahead of the game. As Al Alcorn relates: "Nolan didn't want to define us as the best coin-op game designer and manufacturer; instead he focused broadly on the entertainment business. We were creating new, disruptive products in the leisure industry. Nolan figured people would spend more money on what they want, not what they need." But things soon took their toll on the fledgling company.

Nolan had made some bad hiring decisions for the financial management portion of the company, and it soon needed to lay off employees. To make matters worse, it started facing intense competition from others entering the videogame market,

including old industry hands like Bally and Chicago Coin, and new companies like Allied Leisure. Already competing for a spot at the well-established coin-op distribution table, Nolan came up with the idea to create a 'competitor' to increase the cash flow of the company. It would have its own building, exhibit on its own at the industry shows, and have its own purchasing, sales and engineering group, which would include another former Ampex intern, Steve Bristow, but all its manufacturing would be done on the Atari assembly line. This company, Kee Games, could clone Atari titles, allowing the company to sell them 'exclusively' to two distributors at once.

#### The wheels come off

Financial disaster struck in the form of Gran Trak 10. The game was so badly engineered that they started coming back to Atari in droves, forcing Al Alcorn to come out of his sabbatical and redesign them, and forcing an even more lengthy delay to this already costly game. Then, on top of that, an accounting error set the selling price of each unit to \$995, when it cost \$1,095 to manufacture it in the first place. It resulted in pushing Atari even further towards bankruptcy, and the company ended up losing half a million dollars between 1973 and 1974. By the end of 1974, Atari began to fully merge Kee into its parent and offloaded its Japanese operation to Nakamura Manufacturing Co, better known as Namco

Things started looking a bit better in 1975 as Kee's management entrenched itself at Atari. Kee president and Nolan's next door neighbour Joe Keenan became president of Atari; Gill Williams became VP of manufacturing, helping to smooth out issues there; and Kee's lead engineer, Steve Bristow, became VP of engineering. Along with Steve came top engineering talent and future stars like Lyle Rains, who, together with Steve, had created the blockbuster Tank at Kee. Several arcade classics would be released in 1975 that would go on to become more known for their Atari 2600 versions but served the ultimate goal of helping Atari get back on track: Anti-Aircraft, Jet Fighter, and the multiplayer Indy 800. The biggest development, though, was the fulfilment

#### FROM THE ARCHIUES: ATARI INC

SPACE INVADERS IS RELEASED FOR THE 2600, THE SYSTEM'S FIRST MUST-HAVE GAME. LATER THAT YEAR ATARI RELEASES HE ROLLS INTO TRAMIEL
TECHNOLOGY LTD AND RENAMES
ATARI CORPORATION. WARNER ATARI RELEASES THE ATARI 5200 AS WELL AS THE MUCH-MALIGNED PACMANAND E.T. FOR THE 2600. ATARI HITS RECORD SALES OF \$2 BILLION. BUT ALSO BEGINS ITS DECLINE MAINTAINS THE ARCADE DIVISION AND RENAMES IT ATARI GAMES CORPORATION WHICH SHIP IN NOVEMBER AT THE SAME TIME ASTEROIDS IS RELEASED IN ARCADES. ATARI BEGINS ASKING RETAILERS TO BEGIN SELLING HOME VIDEOGAMES ALL YEAR ROUND ATARI'S CONSUMER DIVISION GOES TO JACK TRAMIEL, WHICH THE VIDEO COMPUTER SYSTEM (ATARI 2600) IS RELEASED HOME CONSOLE, COMPUTERS, THE 400 AND 800. RAY KASSAR RESIGNS, AND IS REPLACED BY JIM MORGAN IN SEPTEMBER ATARI IS BOUGHT BY WARNER COMMUNICATIONS FOR ABOU NOLAN BUSHNELL FORCED TO THE SEARS TELE-GAMES-BRANDED HOME *PONG*, IS RELEASED. ATARI SETS UP A PINBALL DIVISION MISSILE COMMAND AND BATTLEZONE IN THE ARCADES IDEA, WHICH BECAME CHUCK E CHEESE. THE ARCADE GAME NIGHT DRIVER IS RELEASED MILLION, IN ADDITION TO THE FUNDING OF NOLAN'S VIDEOGAME/PIZZA PARLOUR ATARI INC IS SPLIT UP BY WARNER COMMUNICATIONS. OUIT ATARI. TAKES CHUCK E CHEESE WITH HIM AND IS REPLACED BY RAY KASSAR ATARI INTRODUCES ITS FIRST KEE GAMES RELEASES THE BLOCKBUSTER TANK ATARI'S FIRST \$28 1976 1977 1980 1983 1984 1974 1975 1978 1979 1982

of Nolan's wish for Atari to enter the consumer arena

#### **Homecoming**

Al Alcorn and several engineers had been working on bringing Pong to homes. The move to the consumer market meant shrinking the large logic-based arcade board to a small integrated circuit, for which a partnership with chip manufacturer Synertek and its IC designer Jay Miner was formed. The end result was a product that put Atari on the map in the consumer market when it released through Sears in time for Christmas 1975. The research and development firm Cyan was also busy during Pong's home release, working on a microprocessor-based home console that had the potential to more than make up for the Gran Trak 10 fiasco.

Still realising that it wasn't enough to completely save the company and expand operations like he wanted to, Nolan began looking for more investors in Atari, and eventually, an actual buyer. As 1976 began, the buyer appeared in the form of Warner Communications. Warner had been on a buying spree to expand its operations, and the acquisition of an expanding videogame firm like Atari fit nicely into its plans. The deal was signed in October 1976, officially making Atari a Warner subsidiary.

Under Warner, development of Atari's consumer line began to blossom, the most prolific aspect of which was Cyan's

microprocessor-based game console. First codenamed Stella and then officially named the Video Computer System (CX-2600), it was released in 1977 and proved to be the path to true greatness for the company when it became an icon of the videogame industry in the early Eighties. It sold well that first season in 1977 but proved financially harmful to Atari the following year when manufacturing delays caused a shortage of the console for the 1978 Christmas season. As in the arcade industry years before, Atari was soon joined by competitors eating up the new console market - Bally with its Professional Arcade, Magnavox and Philips with the Odyssey<sup>2</sup>, RCA with the Studio II, and programmable console pioneer Fairchild with its Channel F a year before Atari's console. Atari needed to separate the VCS from the pack

Also contributing to Atari's familiar financial problems for 1978 were a lacklustre arcade line-up, such as *Sky Raider, Ultra Tank* and *Smokey Joe.*To make matters worse, there was tension between Nolan and Warner Communications. Nolan had been accused of being a lax CEO since the purchase, almost "checking out" of the muchneeded daily running of the company, and by his own admission that was the case. Consequently, it left more room for Warner and its installed executives to flex their muscles, such as Raymond Kassar,



## It was just business, nothing personal ""

NOLAN BUSHNELL ON FORCING OUT ATARI CO-FOUNDER TED DABNEY

the head of the consumer division. It didn't help matters that Nolan began butting heads with Warner on issues like the future of the pinball division, or even the future of the VCS.

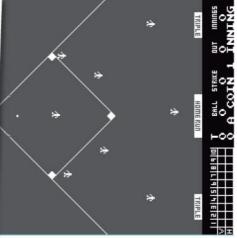
By the autumn of 1978, Nolan had crossed the line by trying to hold meetings in secret without Warner staff. Warner put Nolan out to pasture after a reorganisation plan and, like Ted years before, he was left with no recourse but to quit that December. Ray Kassar was now left in



#### ☐ HOLOGAMES

As the electronic toys craze hit in the late Seventies and early Fighties. Atari had a brief foray into its own handheld electronic devices and board games under its new electronic games division. Starting in 1978, Atari released Touch Me, a handheld game based on its own arcade game of the same name, which competed with and lost against a game from Milton Bradley inspired by Touch Me. Simon. Atari planned to follow up with handheld games based on arcade properties like Breakout and the licensed Space Invaders, and even planned advanced tableton hologram-based products like the Atari Cosmos and Atari Spector. Alas, it was never to be. By the early Fighties, the electronic games market was lagging in the US and Atari shut down the division. Atari not only lost some advanced games in the process, but it lost the company's third employee, Al Alcorn, who had been heading the Cosmos project and quit shortly after





#### 7 SIX OF THE BEST



#### Asteroids [1979]

The classic space shooter that influenced a generation, and it's still fun to play. While most will have to settle for playing this game on pixelated technology, nothing compares to playing in its original crisp vector monitor format



#### Centipede [1980]

Another innovative game, Centipede improves on the bug theme initiated by Galaxian. Set in a dynamically changing garden playfield and complete with vibrant colour scheme, this top-down shooter proved a smash hit for Atari.



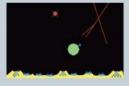
#### Warlords [1980]

Still one of the best multiplayer video arcade games of all time, its home port for the 2600 was just as fun and one of the only times you'll hook up four paddles. The arcade version includes a breathtaking 3D cut-out reflected backfield



#### **Tempest** [1980]

Atari's first colour vector game, this fast-paced shooter that has you rotating around geometric shapes is again one that just looks best on a vector monitor. A capable home version wasn't released until Tempest 2000 for the Jaguar.



#### Missile Command [1980]

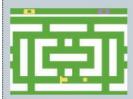
Global thermonuclear war, Atari style. The home ports dumbed down the gameplay for use with a single joystick and button. Accordingly, Atari engineer Dan Kramer was inspired to design a home version of the arcade trackball.



#### **Tank** [1974]

A classic that many will never have a chance to play, as it's a discrete logic game that therefore cannot be emulated. It's satisfying using dual sticks to manoeuvre your tanks through a maze while you attempt to blast your opponent.





#### **Slot Racers (2600)** [1978]

This, Warren Robinett's warm-up game for the much more successful Adventure, is Atari on autopilot. While an original concept, it was done better in later coinops like Spectar and Targ. 2600 games are not known for their inspired graphics, but the cars don't even look like cars.





charge and began heading what many consider the golden age of the company, if not the entire Atari brand. Not without a little speed bump to start out with, though.

#### Under new management

Shortly after coming to the company, Ray had begun bumping heads with some of the Video Computer System programmers, calling them "high-strung prima donnas" in an off-the-record portion of an interview with the San Jose Mercury News that ended up aettina published. A meetina designed to be a pep talk in early 1979 proved to be the last straw for some, as he managed to alienate even more.

VCS and Atari 400/800 engineer Joe Decuir related: "Ray called a meeting of the entire engineering team, coin-op and consumer - a bit of 'blah blah', and then he started talking about what we were going to do. He was excited about the [400 and 8001 computer. He said we were going to sell them in designer colours so that women would buy them, and that we would also have home decorating software. A number of women I knew in engineering decided to resign because of this. One of the VCS programmers asked him how he was going to deal with the creative talent - the game designers. He said he knew about creative types from dealing with towel designers at Burlington Mills, his previous company. A core of programmers were disgusted, and formed Activision."

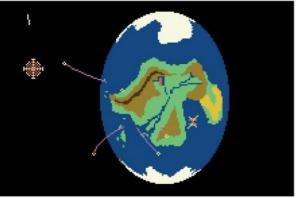
Fortunately, much of the coin-op talent stayed on to thrust Atari to the front just as the market began exploding thanks to Taito's Space Invaders. A string of now-iconic hits were released from 1979 onwards, including Asteroids, Battlezone, Centipede and more. The consumer division and its Video Computer System rode the wave in 1980 after a timely licensing of Space Invaders for the console came to fruition. Giving the lagging console its killer app, it was soon joined by an expanding third-party market thanks to Activision, and sales really took off.

The catalyst for Atari's golden age was Warner Communications itself. As a powerhouse media company, it began leveraging its wide net of subsidiaries to add to Atari's public presence in the videogame craze of the early Eighties that it dominated. What many now take for granted or attribute to Nintendo during its Famicom/ NES heyday was actually pioneered by Warner during this period. Atari-themed magazines, movie placements, toys, clothing, party favours, costumes, jewellery, storybooks, big budget cinematic commercials, collectables and more built the brand into a commercial juggernaut.

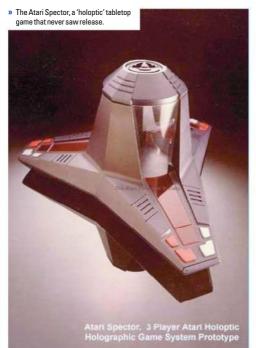
By 1982, Atari had become Warner Communications' golden goose. Comprising 80 per cent of the videogame industry, Atari was doing slightly over \$2 billion in sales and producing more than half of Warner's \$4 billion in revenues, and over 65 per cen of its profits. Warner saw only continued growth, and did what it could to force what should have been considered unmanageable growth, if not a bubble waiting to burst. This included frequent second-quessing of Atari management. creating a dual management. Money-losing deals such as the now-legendary E.T. tie-in were forced on Atari, and a string of ongoing projects that would have put the company far ahead in both consoles and computers were cancelled in favour of more incremental advancements like the Atari 5200 console and the XL series of computers. Not that some of Atari's management, such as Ray Kassar, weren't enjoying their perks; Learjets, limousines, yachts and luxury office remodelling were all on the menu

The signs of the end for the company were beginning as it enjoyed its record profits that year. By August of 1982, warehouses around the US began piling up with unsold inventory thanks to the glut of competing consoles on the market. As Gordon Crawford, a representative of the investment group that brokered the original sale of Atari to Warner related: "At the January '82 Consumer Electronics Show there were three or four new video hardware systems and about 50 new software systems - all the warning lights went on for me. Then, at the June CES, it was worse! There were about 200 software systems. This was a business where the year before it had been

#### FROM THE ARCHIUES: ATARI INC









essentially a monopoly, and now there were literally hundreds of new entrants."

Warner and Atari management became partners in a cover-up of how Atari was starting to suffer. Producing artificial reports and a trumped-up projection of earnings for the final part of 1982, members in both management groups began selling off shares to insulate themselves. The most notorious example was Ray Kassar himself, who did so shortly before the December 1982 announcement that earnings were far short of the previously announced projection. It eventually led to him being forced from his position at Atari by that summer, but the damage was already done to the industry.

#### The bubble bursts

Shock waves spread as investors began to question the viability of the entire videogame industry, and stock prices plummeted. Layoffs began at Atari that January, and throughout the rest of 1983 and 1984 many of these new competitors that Crawford had witnessed began closing. The videogame market crash had begun.

Atari tried to minimise its losses by starting up advanced research divisions in computing and graphics, as well as expanding its areas of consumer reach in markets like next-generation medical devices and telephone research. By September of 1983, Warner brought in James Morgan, VP of tobacco company Philip Morris, to replace Kassar and turn the company around. However, Warner began mounting heavier and heavier earnings and stock losses as Atari lost millions a day, and by winter of 1983 Warner itself was facing a hostile takeover by Australian publishing magnate Rupert Murdoch. In January of



## ☐ THE NAMCO CONNECTION



In 1974, due to mounting losses, Atari decided to sell its fledgling

Japanese operation, run by Hideyuki Nakajima, to Namco Hideyuki agreed to stay on and run Namco's new division, which would initially release licensed Atari games before moving on to producing its own. Thus started a long partnership between the two companies. By the early Fighties it was Atari that was licensing Namco games, and these were such big hits that many are frequently regarded as Atari created titles today, such as Dig Dua, Pole Position and Xevious. By February 1985, Namco purchased the Atari arcade division, by then known as Atari Games. Hideyuki was sent to oversee all of Namco's US operations, and by 1987 had pooled his own money together with other Atari Games employees to buy the company from Namco and make it employee-owned. Shortly after the purchase he created Tengen to allow Atari Games to enter the home console market. In 1994, Hideyuki and the rest of the Atari Games staff sold their company back to Warner, then known as Time Warner. Sadly, Hideyuki's long association with the Atari brand would itself end later that year when he passed away on 11 June 1994 from lung cancer.

1984, Warner brought in a firm to evaluate all its holdings and formulate a plan of action, and Atari was at the top of the list of subsidiaries that it was suggested to dump. The Murdoch takeover was averted that March after Warner bought out his stock, but the writing was already on the wall for Atari. Warner began looking for companies to buy it outright, but when it couldn't, Atari was split into pieces

The consumer division and most of Atari's manufacturing and distribution capabilities were sold to Jack Tramiel in exchange for no money down and the taking on of most of Atari Inc's debt. Folding it into his Tramel Technologies Ltd (TTL), he renamed TTL to Atari Corporation and began a new chapter of the Atari brand in

the consumer arena. The still-profitable coin division, responsible for Atari's incredibly prolific arcade output, was initially kept and reformed as Atari Games, and soon after majority ownership was sold to Namco of *Pac-Man* fame.

Much like a last-second swoop of the paddle in *Pong* to save you from your opponent scoring that winning point, the Atari brand was rescued from being completely wiped out in 1984 and would survive the crash. However, the drama, successes and failures of the well known company were to be far from over...

Special thanks: Curt Vendel, Jerry Jessop, Ted Dabney, Allan Alcorn, Steve Bristow, Owen Rubin, the Smithsonian.



Arise Knight Arthur! The dead are abroad and the princess has been taken. Lances will be lobbed, monster's will be mashed, underpants will be aired. As Martyn Carroll discovers, it's all in a knight's work



[Arcade] Taking the high path is usually the best, if only prevent nasty things dropping on your head.



» [Arcade] The annoying broken bridges in the



Ghouls 'N Ghosts opens on a dark and stormy night. Ominous clouds gather and lightning pierces the gloom, but Arthur fears not. He bounds through the boneyard on his quest to save his loved one and overthrow the forces of darkness.

There's a definite scene of déjà vu hanging over this scene. In Ghosts 'N Goblins, released three years earlier in 1985, Arthur found himself in a similar cemetery, knee-deep in the undead, with the same noble guest ahead of him. Even the soundtrack was the same, albeit in an earlier arrangement. The difference was the visuals. Arthur and the enemy sprites were now larger and more detailed, allowing series director Tokuro Fujiwara to better realise his aim of creating a

game filled with cartoon-quality characters. But it was the background graphics that really made the difference. Gone was the sparse scenery of the original, replaced by beautifully-drawn backdrops that scrolled on a separate layer, creating a convincing parallax effect. Add in the visual tricks, like the first stage's stormy weather, and the result was a platformer filled with atmosphere.

The improved aesthetics were down to Capcom's CPS-1 hardware. Ghouls was the second title to use it - shooter Forgotten Worlds being the first - and the custom 68000-based 16-bit system gave the 2D visuals a clear boost. In contrast the original game ran on a 6809 CPU, the same processor used in the Commodore SuperPET and Tandy CoCo. If the original was a 16mm movie then Ghouls was the 35mm

The improved aesthetics were down to Capcom's CPS-1 hardware. Ghouls was the second title to use it 77



## **DEVELOPER Q&A**

Programmer Ste Ruddy reflects on his cracking Commodore 64 version



#### How did you get to work on the conversion?

Software Creations was doing a fair bit of work for US Gold and it was really just the next game I got following on from LED Storm. It was my last C64 game as I was doing more and more NES work.

#### Had you played much of the game beforehand?

Sadly not. I'd played Ghosts 'N Goblins to death but I hadn't seen Ghouls 'N Ghosts in the wild until well into the development of the game. By which time I was quite good at it, although not keen on paying to play!

#### How much help did you receive from Capcom?

We didn't get any, really. We received a board from US Gold and that was it. Fortunately it was one with a debug mode, so I do remember Andy Threlfall [the graphic artist] spending quite a lot of time staring at the test graphic pages. Apart from that it was just a case of playing the game over and over. It was a hard job but someone had to do it.

#### What were the trickiest parts of the game to replicate?

Well, technically, it was a full-screen colour scroll. Chasing the raster to update the colour was always fun, with an optimised sprite multiplexor supporting some of the massive sprites that the game used. But, to be honest, just fitting the sodding thing into the memory of the C64 was probably the trickiest part of the port.

#### What aspects of the port are you most proud of?

Getting a playable interpretation of the arcade Ghouls 'N Ghosts using a joystick.

#### And which parts do you wish you could improve?

The most annoying thing was the fact that we were rushed right at the end to get it out. This meant some silly bugs slipped through. I'd have loved just a couple more weeks to fix 'em.

#### How do you feel the port holds up today?

I think it's a good interpretation of the arcade game. The graphics are good, it's playable and has awesome music. That said, being a programmer, I look at it and think of all the things I could do better now.



» [Arcade] Arthur goes tongue surfing in the tricky third stage. Try not to get chomped.



» [Arcade] Arthur lights up the screen, and sends the dead scampering, with a charged-up magic attack

remake – Evil Dead versus Evil Dead 2, if you like. Ghouls was also able to maintain its artistic flair throughout the game. The original became quite drab and samey once you ventured underground and into the castle, yet the follow-up continued to delight with its increasingly imaginative stages (the third stage, Baron Rankle's Tower, where Arthur had to traverse wiggly gargoyle tongues, was a highlight). And then there were the bosses. Who could forget Shielder, the first stage's green-skinned guardian who held aloft his own fire-spitting skull? Screenshots of this encounter were common in magazines, showing how the boss dwarfed poor Arthur. In action it was even more impressive as Shielder stomped around the screen, arms waving and tail swishing. The new bosses were so imposing that Astaroth, the chief baddie from the first game, was relegated to mini-boss status. His crown was assumed by Lucifer, a mega-boss who literally filled the screen.

As in the original game, to reach the final boss you had to play through the game twice - only then, providing you collected the powerful Psycho Cannon



#### **SHIELDER**

■ The game's first boss certainly makes an impression. Having defeated dozens of regular-sized foes you're suddenly hounded by this snarling giant who pulls off his own head and spits fireballs at you. He also tries to stomp you with his massive clawed feet.

How to beat it: In classic Monty Python style: run away! Then, as he follows and lowers his head, turn and fire straight into his face. Basically, keep your distance.

#### **CERBERUS**



■ This boss leaps from the flames that engulf the end of the second stage. The 'Hound Of Hades' blazes across the screen, leaving behind a fiery – and deadly – trail. He also conjures up deadly fireballs that rain from the sky. All of this ensures you

How to beat it: The best technique is to crouch in the centre of the screen (to avoid his leap) and then hit him when he lands. Don't forget to dodge the falling fireballs.

#### ULTIMATE GUIDE: GHOULS 'N GHOSTS

weapon on your second run-through, could you finally face Lucifer. For many players the prospect of finishing the game just once was a distant dream - the series is famous for its notorious difficulty level and *Ghouls* only enhanced that reputation. As before, randomly-spawning enemies made life extremely tough and it wasn't possible to change your direction when jumping, so accidentally leaping to your doom was a common occurrence. Perhaps the biggest annoyance was the weapon system which was carried over from the first game. You couldn't drop and swap your weapons, so if you unintentionally picked up one of the lesser weapons you were stuck with it until you found an alternative.

Ghouls did bless Arthur with some new abilities. You could now shoot arrows vertically as well as horizontally – perfect for targeting flying nasties. The game also introduced the magical gold armour, which, once worn, let you unleash special charged-up attacks. These additions did make the game slightly easier, but make no mistake, it was still really bloody hard. Perseverance paid off, however, as the warped stages

The most annoying thing was the fact that we were rushed right at the end to get it out ""

Ste Ruddy

and outlandish bosses that lay ahead were ample reward. Plus, anyone who could one-credit *Ghouls* was instantly crowned King Of The Arcade.

The game debuted in Japan in December 1988 under its original title of *Daimakaimura* (Great Demon World Village). The following month it arrived in the west at London's ATEI show where Newsfield's Robin Hogg played it and considered it to be one of Capcom's finest games. "Ghouls 'N Ghosts is a considerably stronger title than nearly all other Capcom games so far," he reported in *The Games Machine* magazine. "The graphics have to be seen to be believed and the thoroughly addictive gameplay should see the crowds flooding to the arcades."



» [Arcade] Arthur, clad in his Magic Armour, takes on Astaroth and his clone.

#### **G**ASSUTO

As the name suggests this boss is a swirl of hot air. At its core is an evil eye that keeps you forever in sight.

Occasionally the eye will get mad and emit lightning that leads to a brief storm. The boss also swells in size.

making it more difficult to avoid.

How to beat it: This boss will basically circle you so just keep hitting the eye as it goes around. A good projectile weapon, such as the dagger or discus, is required.

#### **ASTAROTH**

■ Regular series boss
Astaroth returns to
bother Arthur towards the end of the fifth stage.
He will try and frazzle you with flames emitted
from either of his grinning mouths. As he's a
master of illusion you also have to beat two
'clones' a little later on in the brawl.

How to beat it: As with Shielder, stay back and just keep jumping up and hitting him in the head. If he gets too close crouch quickly to avoid his flame attack.

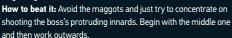
#### LUCIFER

■ The final, final boss of the game can only be confronted if you're carrying the Psycho Cannon (available on your second playthrough). The bad-tempered Lucifer doesn't budge from his throne but he'll attempt to crush you underfoot and zap you with his laser fingers.

**How to beat it:** Don't be deterred by his size. Stand just to the right of his left foot and blast the Psycho Cannon into his face. A dozen or so hits will finish the job.

#### OHME

■ The biggest boss in the game is several screens in length and appears to be some kind of rotting fish beast. Ohme doesn't actually move but its bloated body secretes maggots and worms that try and prevent you from destroying their disgusting host. Eww.





■ Ostensibly the final boss, this giant fly blocks the exit to the fifth and final stage. It continually changes between his true form and a swarm of smaller flies that buzz around the screen. It will also fling green blobs of death at you, plucked straight from its abdomen.

**How to beat it:** Run to avoid the swarm and then hit it hard when it forms into a fly. Using the dagger's doppelganger magic will make quick work of this one.

## CONVERSION CAPERS How the various home versions measured up



#### **COMMODORE 64**

■ This C64 game is held in high regard and it's easy to see why - it's a conversion masterclass. The graphics, the animation, the attention to detail: everything about it is impressive – and, of course, Tim Follin's SID tunes are simply out of this world. It's hard to imagine how Software Creations could have executed this any better. It's real 'lightning in a bottle' stuff.



#### ZX SPECTRUM

■ Topping Elite's Spectrum version of Ghosts 'N Goblins wasn't going to be easy but Software Creations managed it, just. There isn't much colour or background detail on display but all of the stages are here and it plays really well. The 128K version is the one to go for, as there's no annoying multi-load and it features Tim Follin's excellent AY tunes and effects.



■ The CPC version is much more colourful than

its Spectrum counterpart, but it's let down by its

scrolling, being the only home version to 'push

scroll' when you reach the edge of the screen.

Not having Arthur fixed in the centre means it is

easy to run into pasties when the screen scrolls. and it's worse when climbing as the screen

■ It took Software Creations 12 months to create the ST version and it was time well spent. The colours are muted and the scroll isn't as smooth as you'd hope but it's a faithful conversion. Once again Tim Follin worked his audio magic, producing a series of original compositions



#### **MEGA DRIVE**

■ This was one of several early titles that highlighted the Mega Drive as a capable platform for coin-op conversions. It's not arcade perfect – the animation is a little choppy and some visual tricks are missing - but it's nonetheless a very fine version that unsurprisingly became an import favourite. The 'practice' mode is a nice addition, resulting in less hair-tearing.



**AMSTRAD CPC** 

#### ATARI ST

alongside arrangements of the coin-op's tunes.



■ Arriving a few weeks after the ST release, Software Creations went back and enhanced the graphics for the Amiga version. Compare the screenshots: the Amiga version features a taller display and includes more detail, such as the clouds and background trees. The only thing missing is the parallax scrolling effect.



#### MASTER SYSTEM

■ Sega did an admirable job of replicating the game on its 8-bit Master System console. Movement is quite slow but this has the benefit of making the game easier. It also features unique 'shops', accessible via certain chests, that let you upgrade Arthur's helmet, body armour and boots. This adds a splash of strategy and makes up for any technical shortcomings.



#### **SUPERGRAFX**

■ Ghouls 'N Ghosts was one of just seven titles released for the enhanced PC Engine. The sound and graphics don't quite match the Mega Drive version, but the hardware's extra memory is used to improve the animation. In short, the game runs better on the SuperGrafx compared to the Mega Drive. It also includes the full opening scene from the original coin-op.



#### **SHARP X68000**

■ The Japanese computer hosts many arcade-perfect conversions and Ghouls is a great example of this. It may have arrived six years after the coin-op but if you run them side by side you'll not be able to tell them apart. There's also a bunch of options to play around with, including multiple difficulty settings ranging from very easy to, gasp, very difficult.



■ The first three games were brought together for the second Capcom Generations collection which was subtitled Chronicles Of Arthur. In addition to arcade perfect ports there's a fascinating library featuring game history, original artwork and playing tips. Prior to the later Capcom Classics Collection this was the must-have compilation for fans of the series.



## SPOOKY SEQUELS AKA 'The Further Adventures Of Knight Arthur In The Demon Realm'



#### SUPER GHOULS 'N GHOSTS » PLATFORM: SUPER NINTENDO » YEAR: 1991

■ SNES owners rejoiced when Capcom announced that the third game in the series was a Nintendo-exclusive title. It was essentially more of the same, with Arthur blessed with new weapons and abilities, including the all-important double jump. The graphics and animation

were great, although the game suffered from

slowdown when the action intensified.



#### **MAKAIMURA**

» PLATFORM: WONDERSWAN

» YEAR: 1999

■ This often-overlooked fourth entry was released exclusively in Japan for the monochrome WonderSwan. Despite the title, and the return of enemies from the earlier games, this was a distinct entry in the series that featured imaginative stages and bizarre bosses. It was also brutally difficult, as you'd expect, without the double jump to save your skin.



#### **ULTIMATE GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS** » PLATFORM: PLAYSTATION PORTABLE

» YEAR: 2006

■ Following the two Maximo spin-offs Capcom returned to the series roots with a classic 2D entry that benefited from wonderful 3D-style backgrounds. Arthur was now more athletic than ever, being able to block, dash, climb and even fly. His task was no easier, however, as the trademark difficulty returned with a vengeance (though there was a novice mode).



#### **GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS: GOLD KNIGHTS**

» PLATFORM: MOBILE/IOS

» YEAR: 2009

■ Arthur returned for this new two-part challenge – and he wasn't alone, as you could now choose to play as different knights with unique abilities. The gameplay was largely unchanged, though it was more forgiving than before (a good job, given the touchscreen controls). Various 'cheats' could also be purchased for real-world money, Hmm...

Ghouls and other Capcom titles, such as Strider and Final Fight, helped establish the CPS-1 board as an arcade mainstay. As the titles were 2D and spritebased they lent themselves to home conversions and many followed. The first conversion of Ghouls hit the Japanese Mega Drive in August 1989. It was coded by Yuji Naka, who would go on to head up Sonic Team, and was admirably close to the coin-op (Fujiwara once joked that the Mega Drive version even featured the same bugs as the original, suggesting that the 68000 code was ported to some degree).

In Europe US Gold picked up the Ghouls licence, as part of its ongoing deal with Capcom, and commissioned Software Creations to develop it for home computers. The 8-bit releases were generally very good (the C64 version in particular being a highlight), with the only real omission being the final battle with Lucifer (these versions ended when you swatted Beelzebub, the giant fly, although the Spectrum version did throw up an extra platforming section which led you to the princess). The ST and Amiga versions were both solid titles and they did feature the Lucifer fight, with the only difference being that you didn't have to battle through the game again

to challenge him. All of these versions were enhanced by Tim Follin's fantastic audio work.

Versions for the Master System and the PC Engine SuperGrafx followed. There was no version for the Super Nintendo – it instead received Arthur's third outing, Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts, as the series made the jump to home systems (see box out). There was also the Gargoyle's Quest series for Nintendo systems, where one of the flappy little demons that menaced Arthur became the protagonist. The entertaining 3D spin-off Maximo was released for PlayStation 2 in 2001 and this was followed by a sequel.

In 1994, six years after the arcade debut of Ghouls 'N Ghosts, the first arcade-perfect conversion arrived on the Sharp X68000 Japanese computer. Ports for the PlayStation and Saturn arrived in 1998 as part of the Capcom Generations series that also included the first and third games in the series. The games also appeared on Capcom Classics Collection for PS2 and Xbox in 2005, and PSP the following year. Ghouls was absent from the recent Capcom Arcade Cabinet collection, raising the possibility that Capcom has future plans for the game. Hopefully, Arthur's adventure isn't over just yet...



» [Arcade] Excuse me! The party gets out of hand as the



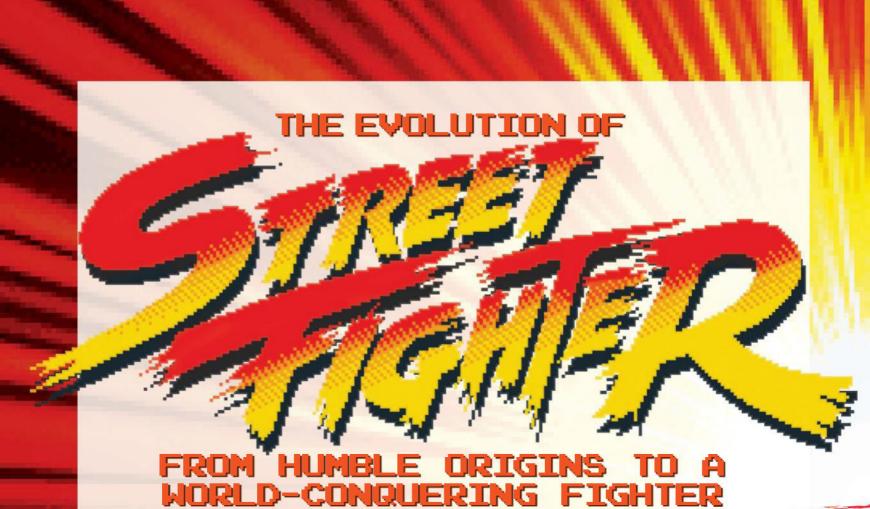
» [Arcade] Watch out for the giant mud hands as you navigate stage four's slimy slopes.



egraph that Arthur's quest isn't over



» [Arcade] This cool doppleganger is one of the better power-ups to



f there's one franchise that has changed the shape of gaming as we know it more than any other, it has to be *Street Fighter*. Having a friend or rival watch over your shoulder as you set a new high score and keenly input your initials (most likely in the form of some kind of shorthand profanity) is great and all, but having them eat humble pie from a plate made of your own skill? Priceless.

Street Fighter may not be solely responsible for the concept of competitive gaming, nor was it the first game to introduce the idea. But by allowing us to select a character we could identify with and make work, the Street Fighter series without doubt forged many of the tenets by which we currently (and probably always will) go head-to-head with each another under the watchful eye of a digital referee.

And Street Fighter has done so much more for us, too. It's given us the perfect way to vent frustration with the real world by wailing on virtual schmucks at the end of a bad day. It's given us a forum in which to chase our ideals of developing gaming skill, while so many other games just want to take us on a nice "experience" holiday or patronise us until we can't see straight. And it has defined, more than any other series, the rules under which modern gaming competition takes place.

It came from nowhere, another also-ran fighter somehow paving the way for a game

and a franchise that would alter the gaming landscape forever, something that would shape us as gamers and change our perceptions of what games could and should be. Call it hyperbole if you want, but we defy anyone to name a more influential or important game than Street Fighter II – some on a par, perhaps, but none that could claim to have had a quantifiably greater and longer-lasting effect on gaming as we know it.

But it's an odd tale all the same, one where an innocuous fighter is somehow the basis for a sequel that takes the world by storm and spawns a million imitators. Later follow-ups proved *SFII*'s quality to be no fluke; Capcom's success story seemingly wrote itself as the franchise evolved. And while *Street Fighter II* might be the one game that stands out as defining the franchise, each chapter has its own story to tell and its own relevance in the grand scheme of things.

The original's sketchy special move commands; the sequel's unexpected brilliance; III's unwavering determination and peerless quality despite a dying market; IV's ballsy rejuvenation of a genre long thought dead. Hell, all this rags-to-riches story is missing is a John Parr soundtrack and a kickass montage. Join us them as we retread the steps that took Capcom to unexpected greatness and established a franchise to be forever remembered as one of the classics. Not many games make it to 28 and still look so spritely, after all...





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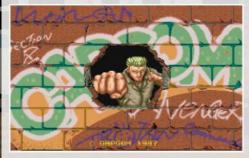


## BEGUNNUNGS

f it's true that the mightiest of oaks can grow from the smallest acorn, it's no great surprise that the unstoppable force that is the Street Fighter franchise came from something so microscopic in importance.

Street Fighter was just one of any number of competitive fighting games to emerge in the mid-tolate Eighties, the only things really separating it from the rest of the pack being little more than gimmicks - a deluxe version of the cabinet featured large pressure-sensitive buttons rather than the simpler version's six-button layout, while electing not to inform the player about the existence of Ryu's special moves gave the game an air of mystery and excitement. The deluxe cabinets were later phased out as, predictably, heavy-handed use in the search for the strongest attack led to damage, though the standard six-button system employed by many modern fighting games started life here.

While the game itself was somewhat unremarkable in many respects, it did help launch the careers of some big names in Japanese



» Joe gets a little extra screen time in the game's intro, punching through a wall to set the scene for the fighting extravaganza. Yo, Joe!



development. The production and direction team of Takashi Nishiyama and Hiroshi Matsumoto would go on to join SNK and work on rival franchises Art Of Fighting and Fatal Fury, while Mega Man legend Keiji Inafune got his break at Capcom drawing up character portraits for Street Fighter.

The game proved fairly popular despite its simple premise, later being ported to just about every major home computer system at the time to mixed effect. Tiertex, the studio responsible for handling the ports. even went so far as to release its own unofficial sequel in the form of Human Killing Machine, a fighter of questionable content based on the same engine as the version it developed for the ports of Capcom's game. Cheeky, perhaps, but the 8-bit era was hardly a hotbed

## Just one of many games looking to further the one-on-one fighter ""

#### Ryu

Always searching for stronger opponents in order to develop his skills, Ryu embodies purity while others seek fame and fortune, he seeks only to better himself. The face of the Street Fighter franchise and present in eve single game to carry the so far

Ryu's sparring partner and friend, Ken Masters started out as an exact copy of the Japanese poster boy (and one that only appeared as player two's character in versus mode) but later developed his own traits. Fear his flaming Dragon Punch. and spamming thereof.

#### Retsu

A disgraced Kenpo instructor, Retsu is the first hurdle on your quest to winning the tournament. It's not hard to see why the bald guy hasn't appeared in another game since - he goes down easy and doesn't have much in the way of special attacks.

#### Geki

The generic ninja will see you now. The expected array of shuriken and teleport attacks are all accounted for in this rather bland character but it takes external influence to flesh him out - according he's an assassin from a rival clan to Ibuki's

#### Joe

A kickboxer and the first of two American opponents in the original, Joe is nothing special. And while he may not have come back to the Street Fighter tournament, he may have been loitering outside - some suggest that he's the blonde dude in the original Street Fighter II intro.

#### Mike

with it.

Legal issues forced Capcom to swap some of the character names in Street Fighter II, leading Capcom to argue that American boxer Mike and SFII's Balrog (originally Mike Bison) are two separate characters. So that's canon now Deal

## 185200

## (T)(T)(T)(T)(T)(T)(T)(T)

THE EUOLUTION OF STREET FIGHTER

## WHAT IT INTRODUCED

Pressure-sensitive buttons to unleash various strengths of attack The now-standard six-button layout for fighting games Some of gaming's most iconic and popular characters





#### WHAT HAPPENED NEXT

Not very much, to be perfectly honest. Street Fighter was just one of many games looking to further develop the concept of the one-on-one fighter, though Capcom's take on the idea wasn't really that much more inventive or professional than any of its peers. Indeed, it was a fairly quiet few years for fight fans, following the release of Street Fighter, with very little on offer. Home computer gamers would enjoy the likes of Palace's far more satisfying Barbarian and EA's somewhat terrible Budokan for competitive fighting, but little did we know that Capcom was hard at work on a game that would change gaming history forever





#### THE COMPETITION

It was an interesting time for the fighter, the genre still very much in its infancy. The few games Street Fighter had in the way of competition all found themselves in the same boat, albeit pushing in different directions, to try and turn an interesting concept into a clearly defined genre. IK+ enjoyed some success, the three-way fights (and ability to drop your trousers) setting it apart from similar games, while various publishers would try other angles -Barbarian toyed with extreme violence, Ninja Hamster with cartoon-style silliness and Galactic Warriors with mech-based combat. Nobody had a clear advantage over the fledgling genre... well, not yet, at least.

#### Heavyweight Champ

While not perhaps a spiritual forerunner to modern one-on-one fighters, Sega's arcade machine is acknowledged as being the first competitive fighting videogame. Side-on boxing isn't the bes representation of the sport, mind.



#### Yie Ar Kung Fu

Konami's fighter paved the way for Street Fighter and the developer must have been kicking itself - Yie Ar Kung Fu is probably the better game, in truth, but Capcom beat Konami to the punch with a stellar sequel.



#### Way Of The Exploding Fist

A far more accurate portraval of martial arts than one that includes blazing fireballs and gravity-defying spins, Beam's game worked on a points system rather than employing energy bars, just like real-life competitions.





#### Lee

Street Fighter's first wall (who you fight on the Great Wall Of China), Lee is about twice as fast as every character previously faced and relentless in his rushdown. Again, he's not come back to the competition, but there are reports that he could he Yun and Yang's uncle

#### Gen

The geriatric Chinese assassin seems simple enough here, but later games reveal the intricacies of his fighting style - he's the only character in the Street Fighter roster that has two separate stances that completely change his arsenal of attacks.

#### Birdie

England's burly punk hits hard, and that's enough it only takes two or three successful hits for him to lay Ryu out. His speed isn't up to much, thankfully so he's not all that much of a challenge, especially when kept at bay with a barrage of fireballs

#### Eagle

Bringing tonfa to a fist fight isn't really on, but the second English fighter (who is also named after a golfing term - read into that what you will) does just that. The extra range serves him well, though the upper-class bouncer has nothing on Dudley's poise

#### Adon

This Muay Thai expert turns the screen into a blur of legs that rips through Ryu's health bar, if you're not careful His attacks favour speed over brute force, as is demonstrated by his Jaguar style to Sagat's more powerful Tiger style.

#### Sagat

You've faced the expert, now here's the master. Brutal damage and moves for all occasions make him a tough adversary, though Ryu will always come out on top eventually - that's why Sagat has that nasty scar on his chest and bears an eternal grudge towards Japan's finest.

# THE GAME THAT CHANGED VERYTHING

shipping such a run-of-the-mill fighter to creating one of the most important games of all time in the space of one seguel is beyond us. But everything about Street Fighter II is just ... right. The cast of characters, spanning a handful of stereotypes and clichés, are easy to identify with. The controls, now tuned to actually keep up with quick player input and properly register special move commands, are fluid and responsive. And the music... Main composer Yoko Shimomura may not have been particularly fond of fighters but she absolutely nailed it with the amazing selection of character-specific themes. You only have to look at all the cover versions, remixes and repurposed theme tunes that litter the Internet to see just how much impact these pieces of music

uite how Capcom went from

## **SFII's influence on the genre and** on gaming cannot be understated >>

Even when it got things wrong, Street Fighter II still ended up being right. The ability to cancel normal moves into specials was, believe it or not, a bug rather than a design choice - a bug that has shaped an entire genre and one that without which the fighting game as we know it would be really quite different. The concept was later embraced by Capcom, who developed it into a fully-fledged feature with hit counters and everything, though it's hard to believe that just a staple of the genre came about by accident



MIM



#### Guile

A US Air Force pilot looking to defeat Bison and avenge his deceased friend and comrade. Charlie While he has only two special moves they work so well in tandem that he doesn't need any more. And yes, Guile's theme does go with everything.

#### Blanka

Gaming's most notable wildman, Jimmy Blanka was raised in the jungle after a plane crash (which gave him control over electricity...). The manual describes his fighting style as Capoeira, which is obviously bollocks He's just

#### E. Honda

Throwing yourself headfirst at opponents and slapping them infinite times aren't exactly traditional Sumo techniques, we feel, though Honda has made them his own. A powerful downright terrifying one in the riaht

#### Dhalsim

Stretch Armstrong's Indian cousin has unparalleled range, due to his mastery of Yoga. He can breathe fire and later teleport too, which aren't things that have been covered in any Yoga DVDs we've seen. Which isn't many. Any. Whatever.

#### Chun-Li

An undercover agent out to avenge her father's death at the hands of M. Bison, Chun-Li is notable as one of the first female competitors to feature in a fighting game. Her nimble style and barrages of kick made her extremely popular.

#### Zangief

The Red Cyclone is Russia's finest wrestler and let's be honest here - who wouldn't be intimidated by a guy that practiced his moves on bears? His 360-degree input command throw Spinning Piledriver is his signature move, though his lariats are equally

#### Balrog

No, it's not Mike from the original game. Remember? Capcom said so, so it must be true. He's still called M. Bison in the Japanese games, so people have taken to simply referring to him as 'Boxer' to avoid any confusion. His hobbies include punching.



Regardless, its influence both on the genre and on gaming in general cannot be understated. This was the game that developed the idea of direct competition rather than asynchronous, back-and-forth score attack. This was the game that cemented the idea of having separate characters with unique move sets as a must-have feature. And this is the game that, for many, represented the first steps into the world of gaming, be it a daunting few plays in a dingy arcade or the thrill of having what seemed like a perfect arcade game in your own home. This was the game that changed everything.

#### **WHAT HAPPENED NEXT**

The insane popularity of the arcade original spawned myriad home conversions and coin-op updates, some less legitimate than others. The SNES port was, for a long time, the most faithful

WHAT IT INTRODUCED

Selectable characters for

unprecedented depth and replayability

■ The fighting genre's first example of a

combo system, albeit by mistake

■ The very notion of competitive gaming

as an alternative to taking turns and

comparing scores

home conversion and remarkably, it's still to this day Capcom's best-selling game. The first official arcade variant came in the form of Champion Edition, letting players use the four boss characters and addressing several issues, while Hyper Fighting was Capcom's way of going toe-to-toe with all the board hacks doing the rounds. Super later added new four characters. with SSFII Turbo finally unleashing Super Combos on

#### THE COMPETITION

The cutthroat arcade scene wasted little time in jumping on Street Fighter II's spectacular success and for several years, the market was awash with fighters looking to pull the rug out from under Capcom's accidental classic. SNK came to the fore during this time, with Fatal Fury, Art Of Fighting, Samurai Shodown and King Of Fighters all emerging in the space of a few years with slightly different takes on the one-on-one brawler. Midway's Mortal Kombat was another key competitor, digitised graphics and controversial levels of gore helping it to mainstream success. Even home platform exclusives started trying to best official ports of the Capcom game; the likes of Team 17's Body Blows, Eternal Champions and Clayfighter were among those that wanted a slice of this booming genre.

# IGHTERS

#### Street Fighter Alpha: Warrior's Dreams

Developed as a prequel series to Street Fighter II, the Alpha games fleshed out the characters and introduced new ones to develop the franchise's universe. Technica elements like the super meter arrived, as did new features like the Alpha Counter.



#### Street Fighter Alpha 2

A continuation of the original Alpha's ideas, Alpha 2 introduced Custom Combos - a system that let players burn super gauge in order to unleash unique strings of moves and specials that might not otherwise combo. Oh and a handful of new characters too



#### Street Fighter Alpha 3

The pinnacle of the sub-series and still one of the greatest fighters ever made. Selectable fighting styles and a wealth of characters offered even greater freedom and depth - hardly surprising, seeing as how this came out after Street Fighter III.



#### Vega

Another name swap victim, the clawed cage fighter's Japanese name of Balrog actually makes far more sense. His arrogance and grace in battle make him a love/hate character, though most that have faced a skilled Vega player will probably lean towards hate

#### M. Bison

The Shadaloo boss and final opponent in SFII (Vega in the Japanese version, to tie up the name-swap silliness), Bison's Psycho Power gives him incredible combat potential. If you've not screamed his name in frustration, you didn't grow up in the Nineties.

#### Cammy

Both British secret service agent and former Shadaloo puppet, Cammy's past is somewhat messy but that's not to say it hasn't made her an exceptiona fighter. Simple to use, quick and relatively powerful, she's probably one of the best allround fighters in the series.

#### T. Hawk

One of SF's worst cases of racial stereotyping, Native American combatant T. Hawk (or Thunder Hawk to his friends) actually fills a gap in the roster pretty well - a large, heavy hitting character that doesn't have to rely on grapples Not that that makes it okay.

#### Dee Jay

The only character in the series designed by Capcom US and among the most hated. Coincidence? Another iffy racial stereotype mainly notable for his 'Maximum' trousers – a word that would read the same vertically on both sides of the screen.

#### Fei Long

Yeah, okay, so the new challengers were all pretty much dodgy stereotypes. Still, Fei Long's kung fu skills offered a far closer representation of a real martial art than anything presented by the series so far, hence him becoming a fairly popular addition to the roster.

#### Akuma

The embodiment of evil and the antithesis of Ryu. He's the younger brother of Ryu and Ken's sensei and has gone totally off the rails in his search for ultimate power. A recurring secret bos in the franchise be on the lookout for his Raging Demon. You might want to jump.



ith the world and its dog having developed a bunch of 2D fighters and saturated the market to the point where not even the hardcore could really bring themselves to care, the late Nineties wasn't a good time to be a beat-'em-up fan. Capcom had been plugging away with the Street Fighter brand through the popular Alpha spin-off franchise but when it came to develop a full sequel, apathy had set in within the fighting community to a dangerous degree. And with 3D fighters starting to really come into their own as well, it seemed like Capcom was fighting a losing battle.

But determined to buck the trend and take back its crown from the genre's new 3D pretenders, Capcom came good with a gorgeous and inventive return to form. A brand new cast (with the exception of returning fighters Ryu and Ken) gave willing players an entire new roster of archetypes to learn and the Parry system - while not exactly embraced at the time of release - would go on to create a moment that will go down in gaming history forever. At the Evo 2003 tournament, the high-level feature seemed like something beyond the grasp of many, but when Daigo parried all 15 hits of Justin Wong's Chun-Li Super Art and responded with a perfect combo to win, the room



## **SFIII** was determined to take back its crown from the new 3D pretenders ""

» Backgrounds and music stack up beautifully with the gorgeous sprites and animation

## WHAT IT INTRODUCED

■ The Parry system, a risk/reward mechanic for advanced players

players to land extra hits on airborne opponents

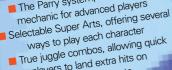
erupted and the entire world stopped to take notice of fighters once more. There could literally have been no better advert for 3rd Strike.

#### WHAT HAPPENED NEXT

With the 3D boom and the almost entirely new cast causing III to be far less of a success story than its predecessor, Capcom pulled its old trick with a pair of updates to the arcade version. 2nd Impact brought several new characters, the ability to escape throws and the first example of EX special moves, while 3rd Strike arrived a good two years later, bringing with it vet more new fighters, a refined input system for advanced abilities and balance tweaks that would make it perhaps the greatest 2D fighter ever made. Stellar Dreamcast ports of the first two games (as the Double Impact collection) and 3rd Strike brought the action home, plus it would later appear alongside Hyper Street Fighter II on the Anniversary Collection, released for PlayStation 2 and Xbox to mark 15 years of the franchise.

#### THE COMPETITION

Capcom's rivals had really started to establish themselves by this point, although the real threat didn't come from Midway or from SNK - it came from polygons. With PlayStation taking then-revolutionary



## CHALLENGERS



The young Japanese Karate expert isn't for everyone, though her rushdown style makes her Street Fighter III's glass cannon land your big combo and you've probably won but sit back and defend and it's as good as

by a lot

Street Fighter's mystery man, little is known about what Q actually is. Favouring brute force over speed and lengthy combos, he's a fierce opponent in the right hands, not least his taunt ups his defence

#### Remy

France's answer to Guile is far more delicate and elegant than his military analog, though he's not much less dangerous. His extra special moves also make him a more interesting character to learn.

#### Twelve

The gooey experiment that is Twelve is probably the worst character in SFIII, though many have learned him for just that reason - nobody expects his bizarre fighting style, and with powers of flight and invisibility, he can be tricky to catch.

#### Alex

Another brawler, albeit one with a few more tricks up his sleeve than usual. Originally intended as a replacement for SFII frontmen Rvu and Ken, his play-style didn't help him fit this role, nor did the fact that they both came

#### **Dudley**

A gentleman boxer is the perfect counterpoint to Balrog's bullish approach to fisticuffs - Dudley's butler is always on hand and the pugilist can even throw roses with his taunt, a makeshift projectile perfect for carving an opening

#### Elena

If you thought Chun-Li was all legs, you ain't seen nothing yet. Elena's stunning animation remains one of the highlights of SFIII. those stupidly long legs flailing around the screen constantly and many of her specials linking together into one fluid

#### **Ibuki**

The original has generic ninja Geki but SFIII gets the far more interesting Ibuki, another fragile character that excels in rushdown play and in confusing the opponent into making mistakes. Her taunt reverses the opponent's controls briefly, if successfu





# » Yun is by far the better of the Lee twins, although Yang's style still won him plenty of fans

strides in 3D home gaming and arcade boards growing more powerful at a shocking rate, 3D fighting games like Virtua Fighter, Tekken and Soul Blade proved far more interesting and novel to gamers than the sprite-based visuals they had been fighting with for a decade. Despite dwindling interest in traditional 2D fighters, the push for quality resulted in some of history's finest fighters – 3rd Strike is without doubt Capcom's best while SNK's answer, Garou: Mark Of The Wolves, is right up there as well. What, no love for Mortal Kombat? No. Move along.

#### Street Fighter EX

With the 3D revolution in full swing, Capcom didn't want to be too late to the party it helped start. It did, however, turn up horrifically dressed and half-cut - Street Fighter, it seemed was not cut out for life in 3D.

#### Street Fighter EX2

But that didn't stop a sequel from surfacing improving matters slightly but still not to an extent where the game has any worth above 2D versions of the game. A side mode did pave the way for SFIV's character-specific Trials, though

#### Street Fighter EX3

A PlayStation 2 launch title, but not one of the better ones. The same dodgy 3D visuals returned, joined this time by a tag mechanic similar to the Versus



series and Tekken Tag Tournament. Not one of the series' high points.



## 1 The real threat didn't come from Midway or SNK, it came from polygons >>

#### Necro

SFIII's version of Blanka, if you will, replete with an electrocution attack and a screen-spanning spin, albeit horizontally rather than vertically. He's not much of a threat, but you can't help but feel for a character who has to apologise every time

#### Oro

Two arms? Sod that, Oro can beat you with just one. Among the franchise's oddest fighters, this old guy's unconventional style won him few fans at launch, but the fact that he's mained by one of the UK's best players, Zak Bennett, shows there's something

#### Sean

If you wake up in a fighting game one day and your Super Art is a one-hit fireball, it shouldn't take too long to work out that you're a joke character. Sean is SFIII's Dan, then no amount of training under that filthy scrub Ken is goir to do anyone any good,

#### Yun

Genei Jin is Yun. His third Super Art lets him stylishly link almost any of his specials into one destructive combo with the right execution, making him a perfect choice for high level players. Doing one damage his hat spin taunt is perfect

#### Yang

The runt of the litter, Yang started life as a palette swap of Yun but later got given his own moves and abilities. Which, sadly, made him worse. He's a decent fighter, though his custom combo Super Art is nothing compared to Genei Jin

The game's every-bitas-cheap-as-expected boss, Gill can either use his super gauge to rain fire down on the screen for insane damage (even if blocked) or conserve it to resurrect when defeated. And if that's not cheap, we don't know what is

#### Urien

A rushdown charge character is a rare beast indeed, and Urien fills the role brilliantly. He could probably do with wearing more than just a pair of pants when going into a fight, though his crazy combo potential makes up for his inability to dress himself

#### Hugo

He's number one, apparently. SFIII's Zangief equivalent as no less than three command grabs (and two more in his Super Arts), but he has more ways to close distance than the Russian eve did. Don't expect that to make him easy to play,





## A LEGEND TS REBURN

he eight years between Street Fighter EX3 and IV represented the longest the series had ever gone without a new game, largely because many senior Capcom figures weren't exactly behind the project. But relatively unknown Capcom producer Yoshinori Ono pushed relentlessly for a new Street Fighter game despite opposition from his peers and superiors.

After the roaring success of the HD remake of Super Street Fighter II, though, the Capcom suits were left little choice but to sit up and pay attention to Ono, who was put in charge of bringing back Street Fighter properly. The thinking behind the belated comeback was simple – set between SFII and SFIII, Street Fighter IV would bring back the entire cast of world warriors from the series' most popular game while mirroring its accessibility.

SFIV was designed to be instantly familiar and that proved to be one of the core strengths of this late return. But as well as ensuring a low entry barrier and a balanced playing field, Capcom also did a great job of making IV a multi-tiered affair that could be employed by players of all skill levels. Take the Focus Attack, for example. Newcomers could use it to stun hesitant opponents for a free combo, intermediate players could use its armour properties to absorb single blows in a similar way to SFIII's Parry (using a dash to cancel recovery or activation of the actual attack) while pros could use it to cancel attacks, leading to some of the game's flashiest combos. The comeback mechanic, Ultra

Combos, offered similar depth – many newcomers could throw out hopeful Ultras, but most characters could combo into their ultimate attacks with the right set-up. *Street Fighter* was back on top.

#### WHAT HAPPENED NEXT

With the current hardware generation poised to overflow with me-too shooters, Capcom's timing in bringing back *Street Fighter* was absolutely perfect. Long-dormant fighting fans rose from their slumber to seek out arcade units, with the improved home version bringing competitive fighting back to the masses just like *SFII* had done 17 years before. The *Super* version added new characters and selectable Ultra Combos, and *Arcade Edition* bringing a further four to bring it in line with the latest coin-op version.



#### Abel

French amnesiac
Abel remembers
nothing of his past...
except for massively
complicated closecombat moves. It's
likely that he
was a discarded
prototype in the
program that led to the
creation
of SFIV's
boss,
Seth.

#### C. Viper

Many claim she looks more like an SNK character than a Capcom one but Viper fits into the SFIV cast just fine. Her combat suit lets her burn and electrocute, with jump jets in her heels making her one of two with a Super Jump.

#### Cody

Final Fight veteran
Cody makes his return
here, after debuting in
the Alpha sub-series.
He's still rocking
the convict look and
chucks stones around
like a child, plus
he's apparently
even left a
knife on the
floor in every
place he
might go.

#### Dan

The series' leading joke character makes his main series debut, having been formally introduced as a parody of the way SNK were thought to be ripping off Capcom's fighters. And the strangest part about him? He's not actually rubbish.

#### El Fuerte

It might have a couple of wrestlers already but Fuerte's spindly form, crazy speed and Lucha Libre skills set him apart from the stocky grapplers. He's an annoyance as much as a usable character, mostly because he never shuts up.

#### Evil Ryu

What would happen if Ryu's search for power took him down a darker path? He'd get a few new moves and be better at fighting, apparently. Makes perfect sense. Another Alpha callback, Evil Ryu entered the fray in Arcade Edition.

#### Gouken

'You must defeat
Sheng Long to stand a
chance', reads Ryu's
original SFII victory
quote. Well, now's
your chance. Gouken
is Sheng Long, Ryu
and Ken's former
master making his first
playable appearance
here. Not just an April
Fool's joke,
then...

#### Guy

Another Final Fight star, leaving Haggar as the only absentee. Still, he's busy fighting Galactus in Marvel Vs Capcom 3. Guy's American ninja awesome-looking combos won him many fans – we like him for his 'Profound... sadness...' win quote.

#### THE FUTURE

Thanks to the success of Street Fighter IV, the franchise is once again big news and it will come as no surprise to learn that Street Fighter V was announced in 2014. What is surprising however is the amount of effort Capcom is putting into the game, and it appears to have been taken on all the feedback from Street Fighter IV.

By far the biggest news about Street Fighter V is that Capcom is revamping many of the classic characters, so they look and play differently. It's a bold move, but one we're confident will be pulled off. It's also bringing back plenty of old stalwarts, including Birdie, Nash and R. Mika, but has introduced plenty of new characters soon. Needless to say, we can't wait until the game hits in 2016.

#### Marvel Super Heroes Vs Street Fighter

Pitting Marvel's finest against a host of Capcom's martial artists may not have seemed fair. But by turning everything up

to 11, Capcom managed to make it a frenetic and exciting crossover

#### Capcom Vs SNK 2: Mark Of The Millennium 2001

Not strictly a Street but Capcom's representatives in CVS2 came predominantly from its leading fighting brand. Of all of the older crossover fighters, this is easily the one that still holds up best.

#### Street Fighter X Tekken

While hardly retro (on account of having come out this year, SFXT gave a mammoth cast of Street Fighter stars the chance to beat down 3D fighting's finest. And



they did - though the SF guys and gals work way better in a 2D game.

■ The Focus Attack: a chargeable used to cancel attacks Full online integration, turning the whole world into your very own arcade

## WHAT IT INTRODUCED

crumple that absorbs blows and can be ■ Trials mode, an inventive way of practically teaching combos and skills

Dan used to be a joke character but in SSFIV, he's not entirely awful. Good, almost. Wow.

## **66** Capcom's timing in bringing back Street Fighter was perfect

#### Hakan

What is Hakan...? He's red, has blue egg cartons on his head and fights by smearing himself in oil then throwing people around.



#### Juri

The hot-headed Korean S.I.N. agent was reportedly added in at the request of Capcom Korea, but her origin doesn't alter that she's an awesome character both to watch and play. She's also Street Fighter's

#### Rose

The Alpha games gave us some great characters, with many of the best returning in IV and its variants She was decent in vanilla IV but really came into her own in Super, with her

#### Rufus

The fat guy hates Ken, so we really identify with him. Like Tekken's Bob, his size belies his speed and with dive kicks and screenspanning assaults aplenty, he's a force to be reckoned with. His moves flow so

#### Sakura

Ryu's protégé and another Alpha alumnus, Sakura returns in IV to offer players her own Hurricane Kicks, Dragon Punches and fireballs. Not the strongest, but tweaks to her abilities in Super made her more viable.

#### Seth

Named after former Capcom community manager and fighting game champ Seth Killian, this blue monster is IV's final boss. And like Gill before him, he's supremely cheap. Not so much when you play as him rather than

#### Oni

Evil Akuma probably wouldn't have made much sense, so Capcom instead settled on Oni. That's what he is, though blazing, even-morepowerful version of the famous hidden boss. He even has a version of the Raging Demon that can be performed in the air



## THE WORLD WARRIORS



#### THE EUOLUTION OF STREET FIGHTER





## Missile Command

Retro Gamer takes a definitive look back at a classic arcade game and unravels its brilliance through those who know it best



DEFEND CITIES

ART CREDITS: 1 ATARI 00 198

hat you're even reading this magazine means that there's a good chance you've played, or at the very least heard of,

Missile Command. One of Atari's most popular titles from the golden age of arcade games, it saw players assume the role of a poor chap working the busiest day of his life inside a missile

defence facility

The brainchild of Atari's Dave Theurer Missile Command tasks you with protecting six cities from airborne missile salvos (vou can read an exclusive interview about the game's creation with Dave and Rich Adam on page 62). In the game you have access to three mounted missile launchers, which each hold ten rounds of ammunition. Activated by three fire buttons - one on the left and right of the screen, with a third in the middle - you must use them tactically and skilfully to shoot down the approaching thermonuclear missiles as precisely as possible, and play continues until the six cities you are defending are destroyed. The game starts off deceptively easy, but as missiles begin splitting into multiple targets and low-flying planes and satellites

enter the picture, the gameplay soon becomes very, very hectic. It's also worth noting that *Missile Command* cannot be finished or won in any traditional sense – it is simply an endurance test between man and machine. 'The End' is therefore inevitable. Deep, man. Very deep.

Missile Command's core concept came about as a result of the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States. Initially there were plans to make the game as realistic as possible, as the cities you had to defend were all based on real-life locations. along the Californian coastline. The cities of San Francisco, Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, San Diego, Eureka and San Luis Obispo were all originally due to appear as the cities for each stage, but the idea to set the game on the real-life Californian coast was eventually dropped due to the potential controversy that it might create. Instead, the player ended up defending six unnamed, unrecognisable locations.

Despite its nameless setting, the game was based on the very real threat of all-out nuclear war, which was considered a distinct possibility at the time of *Missile Command*'s development period. This took its toll

on the development team, though, with Dave in particular being affected by the game's theme and gruelling development schedule and suffering nightmares as a result.

Nuclear nightmares aside, there was no denying that *Missile Command* was an incredibly good game that instantly became a huge success when it was released in arcades. It became a huge money-spinner for Atari, and it has been firmly ingrained in popular culture, with the hulking cabinet appearing in everything from *Chuck* and *Fast Times At Ridgemont High* to, appropriately, *Terminator 2: Judament Day.* 

We'd argue that Missile Command's success was down to a combination of its topical setting, the popularisation of the shoot-'em-up genre that was brought about by the release of Taito's Space Invaders, and for also being an incredibly tight game that requires real skill to play – we've never been able to get anywhere near Tony Temple's impressive world record, no matter how many times we've tried. Undoubtedly another key aspect of Missile Command's popularity was its clever implementation of a trackball. With any other control method at the helm the game just isn't the same – play it on MAME with a joypad or keyboard if you don't believe us - and this is because the ball is perfectly attuned to the game's frenetic and reaction-based gameplay, giving players an unrivalled sense of speed and precision that many other games of the time simply couldn't manage.

You need only look at the few home ports and countless unofficial clones to know that a joypad simply isn't as effective in helping you pull off the superhuman feats of dexterity that are needed to survive on the later stages and reach the highest scores. Despite the stiff challenge it poses, though, Missile Command's sheer simplicity means that anybody can play it, even if few of them will ever be able to truly master it.

It remains a sensational piece of work that once again proves that the simplest of game concepts are nearly always the best.

## the expert



» Age: 42

» Location:

Wiltshire

4.472.570

164,630

» Key Twin Galaxies

World Records

Missile Command [Arcade]

Super Missile Command [Arcade]



#### Tony Temple has secured records with both Twin Galaxies and Guinness on Atari's classic arcade machine, having broken a 20-year-old record to get it. Here's how he did it...

#### ■ When did you first encounter Missile Command?

Well, Missile Command just happened to be the main game that was sited at my local videogame emporium, Rita's Café in Bristol. This would have been in around 1981 or so. It was pure chance more than anything; the fact is that it could have been any arcade game from the golden era, I suppose. It was sat alongside a Gorgar pinball machine and a Moon Cresta upright cabinet. Rita's was a grotty old place, so with hindsight, it was a miracle they had such a prestigious game - and original too. I recall they had a lot of bootleg games over the years. I would go there, and sit with a warm, 20p milky cup of piss-weak tea, and play Missile Command for hours

#### ■ Why did it appeal to you?

I was drawn to it primarily because of the controls - they were pretty unique and complex for the time. I really liked the idea of having total precise control of the game in all directions. It wasn't just a case of moving left, right, up and down and one fire button - you could move the crosshair in all directions, as slow or fast as you liked, and then have to decide which of three fire buttons to of the game, I just saw it as a huge challenge. And, of course, the subject matter resonated with everyone at that time - nuclear war was seen as a real possibility, and Missile Command I think played on many of those fears we had as kids. At 13 years old, we were all quite impressionable, I suppose, and imagining that you were saving the world probably helped my gameplay



and made my desire to conquer the game greater than the older people who played it, perhaps.

#### ■ When did you realise that you had a good shot at the record?

In 2005 when I got my cab, I discovered Twin Galaxies and saw that there were two types of Missile Command score recognised by Guinness. One was the marathon settings world record score, which was, and still is, 81 million points - to beat this would require you to play the game for over two days straight. That wasn't very appealing, to be honest - that's a test of endurance, not skill. But the other score type, known as tournament settings, looked more of a challenge. If you're familiar with Missile Command, you'll know that you normally get a bonus city every 10,000 points. Well, in tournament mode, you get no bonuses at all. Once the six cities are gone, that's it. The high score here was 1.69 million points, held by

which can sneakily change path.

a guy called Roy Shildt. He'd held the score since 1984 and no one had come close since. I thought it was beatable, so changed the settings on my cab to tournament settings, and starting playing. In March 2006, I scored 1.9 million points and got into the 2007 Guinness Book Of Records as a result. I've since increased my world record score. In August 2010 I managed 4,472,570 points and became the first person to get past the 'kill screen' on Missile Command in tournament mode.

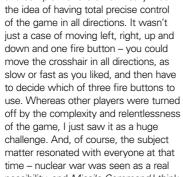
#### How long does it take to set your high score?

The scoring rate on Missile Command tournament settings is about a million points every 40 minutes or so. My current 4.4 million point world record score took just under three hours.

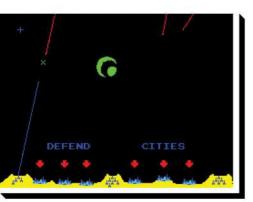
#### ■ What sort of practice would you put in to get your score?

Well, being at the age I am and with a young family, a mortgage to pay and job responsibilities, not as much as I'd like. But I've been able to focus in on the game intently when I've needed to. I play very little now but do put in intensive play before playing live in the US, which a bunch of us do each year. When I went for a new world record in 2010, I played every other night for around two months. It's not a huge sacrifice, to be honest, and I wouldn't really regard it as practice - after all, every time you play, it could be 'the one' where the world record drops! The best way to learn Missile Command is to get in there and play it

■ How did it feel to beat a record that had stood for over 20 years?







» In the event of a nuclear war, we want Tony to be manning the missile shields.

It felt good, of course. It was nice to be recognised for the achievement. I wasn't splashed all over *Time* magazine or anything, but it's nice to be listed in the Guinness book. The most pleasing thing was simply beating a score that many people saw as impossible, and to start flying the flag for us here in the UK. No one had come near to the world record in over 20 years, so it was seen as big news in classic arcade gaming circles. I think it did a lot to resurrect interest in the game — I know of a few guys in the USA who went out and bought a cab as a result of seeing my score.

#### ■ Did Roy Shildt congratulate you for beating his record?

Actually he did. As the previous record holder for over 20 years, he was surprisingly gracious – much to his credit. I don't think he was particularly happy about it – who would be? – but he acknowledged my ability, before going off on one about trackball settings, Twin Galaxies, his comic book, *The King Of Kong*, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Billy Mitchell's hot sauce. Roy tends to get a little worked up about quite mundane things. He has what I think we could call 'passion'. Or maybe he's just 5150; I'm not sure which.

## ■ Is it true that there's a fierce rivalry between you?

Well, I suppose there is, yes. People have built up this King Of Kong scenario around us - but the reality is slightly less gripping. Roy shouts loudly about Missile Command and Tony Temple every now and then to whoever will listen to him, and I just sort of shrug my shoulders and get on with life. Roy is a colourful character and can be pretty difficult to deal with. He'll tell you that he's the true champion, and that he could beat my score any time he likes. I've never met the guy but I suspect I will play him soon, head to head, which will be quite something. Many people want to see that happen, and I'm warming to the idea now. \*\*

## Top tips to help you reach the finish line in record time



#### **DON'T PANIC**

The fundamental rule with this game is not to panic.

There is a lot going on, and players tend to lose control, firing shots off all over the place. This will not help your game at all. There is no need to fire three missiles up to take out just a single one coming down! And if you are playing in marathon mode, remember you get a bonus city every 10,000 points.



#### **■ THE RIGHT BASE**

Try to use the appropriate missile base. If a missile own the right-hand side of

is coming down the right-hand side of your screen, try to use your right-hand base to take it out.



## ■ SAVE THE MIDDLE MISSILES You'll notice that the

missiles from the centre base do travel at a slightly faster speed than those from the side bases. Try to use your two side bases' missiles first, and save your middle ones – they come in handy when shooting down the smart bombs on the later waves. Work on your 'spreads' – a line of missile clouds you can create about halfway up the screen at the start of the later waves. This tactic buys you a bit of thinking time.



#### **■ THE TRACKBALL**

Get used to the speed of the trackball. Every one is

the trackoall. Every one is different – some are really responsive and others you have to fight hard with. Once you've got the feel of it, you can start to play more instinctively. This is key to getting high scores. Things should start to become second nature, and you'll find yourself shooting things down without thinking about it.



## ■ PLANES AND SATELLITES

As a general rule, try to shoot planes and satellites down as soon as they appear. Removing the danger early is a good idea anyway, plus the quicker you remove them, the quicker you'll get an opportunity to shoot more, generating more points.

## the sequets

Despite the lack of a true Missile Command 2, there are several spin-offs



#### Liberator

Released: 1982
Aside from Missile
Command VR – a virtual
reality offering that appeared
in 1994 – there were no
arcade sequels to Missile
Command, which is very
strange considering how
popular it was. Liberator,
then, is like a spiritual

sequel to Missile Command

that was based on the popular *Atari Force* comic series. The game is essentially an inverted take on the *Missile Command* concept in that players must destroy bases rather than defend them. Targets are situated on a rotating planet, and players launch their attack via four immovable spaceships that are positioned in each corner of the screen. Moving a targeting crosshair with a trackball, players must destroy all the targets before their ships are destroyed.



## A

#### Super Missile Command Released: 1994

The Lynx has many underrated gems and this is one of them. This excellent update to *Missile Command* offers all the thrills and spills of the original arcade game, but also a few neat twists too. In addition to introducing new enemies

and updating the graphics rather nicely, by far the best upgrade to the game was a new power-up system whereby players were awarded money at the end of each stage, which could then be put towards specific power-ups that either boosted your missile capabilities or your defences. It's a solid follow-up that also featured a similarly decent update of *Asteroids* on the same cartridge.





## Missile Command VR and 3D

Released: 1995

Missile Command 2 never got beyond the prototype stage as Atari presumably struggled with how best to extend the original concept. It would be 14 years before fans got an arcade followup, and this came by the unusual way of Missile

Command VR, which ambitiously took the core gameplay and, as its title implies, blasted it into the computergenerated world of virtual reality. Split into three stages, this sequel saw players trying to defend bases from hostile alien invaders. Virtuality, the game's developer, released the game for the Atari Jaguar as Missile Command 3D, where it's the only title compatible with the console's VR headset.

## the machine

As well as being the world champion at Missile Command, Tony is the owner of one of the most immaculate examples of the cabinet. And some of you might have even played it in the flesh...



"The machine was obtained from Archer Maclean in 2005. We were talking about what he did for a hobby - restoring and collecting old arcade machines - and this old game I was pretty good at back in the Eighties called Missile Command. Archer took me down into his arcade dungeon and there it was. I hadn't seen a machine in the flesh for over 20 years - I was like a kid in a candy shop. The cab was a mess - it was covered in concrete splashes, insect nests, dust and general debris. The trackball was rusted solid, there were no locks and the side art was torn and scratched. Archer won't thank me for saying this, but he spent an incredible amount of time restoring the thing for me on and off for over a year! It was stripped, cleaned and photographed. New parts were sourced from the US, and the side art was completely rescanned, reprinted and reapplied. The attention to detail is frightening."

#### BUTTONS



Obviously a key element to the game! These are sealed switches that aren't made any more. The start buttons are illuminated in red; the fire buttons are standard. You can also find these buttons on the old Atari *Sprint* and *Asteroids* cabinets. Getting hold of replacements is really difficult, and as they are sealed units, they cannot be fixed. When they go, they go!

#### MONITOR

Standard 19-inch Wells Gardner monitor. Archer put a NOS one in during the restoration process. These raster monitors are becoming very difficult to source now. The bezel is actually smoked glass - again an idea Archer had, just to add his own signature to the restoration and the machine. This was custom made and cut at a glass factory, and had the lettering screen printed on. The bezels on standard machines are Perspex. Again, it just makes the cab a little different, but keeps it true to the original machine.

#### **■** TRACHBALL

The trackball is quite a complex bit of kit and is what makes the game so challenging. The trackball itself is actually a standard candlepin bowling ball, would you believe! I have a brand new one that I must get round to fitting. It sits on two rollers on the X and Y planes. The faster you roll the ball, the faster these spin. Optical sensors track the speeds of the two rollers in relation to each other and the gubbins inside the game translate these movements to the position of your crosshair. They are pretty easy to maintain – two drops of sewing machine oil every couple of months in the bearings keeps things nice and smooth.

#### MARQUEE

Dave Theurer, the guy who wrote the game, is notoriously quiet and reclusive about his time at Atari. Luckily, I managed to get a lead, and via a friend, he agreed to sign some bits and pieces for me. I sent my marquee off in the post to him, and Dave very kindly signed it, as you can see. As far as I know, this is the only signed *Missile Command* marquee in the world, which makes my machine particularly unique.

#### COIN SLOTS

We've kept these to take original quarters – I think they could be adapted to take UK coins. I have 20 quarters dated from 1980 – I know that's pretty nerdy, but they were a gift from Walter Day – and the coin mechanisms do work fine, but I tend to keep the machine on freeplay for ease of use. If you look closely, you'll see that Archer did a particularly personal modification for me on the coin slots themselves...



#### RESTORATION

Archer believes that my cab is probably of better quality than those that rolled off the production line. It wasn't cheap, but then I felt I was investing in something special. He is particularly proud of the job he did - and rightly so. I've had it for six years, and despite being moved around a fair bit and two boys in the house, it's held up well. The community estimate that there are fewer than ten Missile Command uprights in the country right now, so it really is a piece of history. Your readers may have played it at one of the many retro shows it's been to



## developer Q&A

We speak to Rob Fulop, the man behind two of the Atari 2600's best conversions: Space Invaders and, of course, Missile Command



## How were you involved with the 2600 port?

We had a brainstorming session to come up with possible new 2600 games. On the list were two very popular Atari coin-ops, *Missile Command* and *Asteroids*, both of which

were deemed impractical to pull off on the limited 2600 hardware. Over lunch, Brad Stewart started discussing various approaches to each game, and that lunch turned into a whiteboard-filled scribble-fest, after which we pitched the 2600 programming team our ideas about how both games could be done. We each were given 30 days to come up with a live 'kernel', which would display the main game elements on the screen.

#### Did you work with Dave Theurer on the project?

I had gotten to know Dave from the year before. Prior to my work on *Missile Command*, I had delivered a version of *Space Invaders* for the Atari

800 where I had decided to not copy the original, and my ears were ringing from the criticism that I received both from the market and my peers as a result. People just wanted the game they knew from the arcade, end of story. So when I sat down to make *Missile Command*, I decided that I would make as faithful a rendition as I possibly could. As the 2600 version

was coming together, I would drop in and chat with Dave about the finer points of *Missile Command*. I remember looking at the original attack tables and the smart bomb algorithm. And, of course, the scoring system was a straight-out copy.

## Did you ever receive feedback from him about the finished game? How did he feel about it?

The coin-op group was very doubtful that any sort of good game could be made on the Atari 2600. They had built all of their games on custom hardware with whatever amount of memory they needed to get the job done. I remember them being quite impressed when they played the finished game, not as much with my work, but with what was possible with the 2600 hardware. I think *Missile Command* and *Asteroids* changed people's perception of the 2600 as a development platform.

## How long a deadline did you have and did any other staff work on it with you?

There was no official deadline, but it was assumed that a single game should take from 5-9 months. I think *Missile Command* was done in seven months.

## What was the hardest thing about the Atari 2600 project, from a technical viewpoint?

Getting the right feel of the onslaught and figuring out how to balance the game with only one

available base instead of the three in the original coin-op. It is very easy to make a game like *Missile Command* overly difficult, and it is also pretty easy to make the game very easy to beat. The trick is to find the balance between the two and craft a 'difficulty ramp' that kept getting a little harder each time. *Missile Command* taught me all about the importance of creating a dedicated system that allows the programmer to easily tweak a lot of variables. There was actually a development version of the game where I could change values on screen while the game was running. This was invaluable in finding the right combination of speeds and timing variables so that each level could deliver the challenge that was needed.

#### Were you happy with the final result?

Yeah, I remember adding the final explosion at the end, after the player loses, and playing it through and really feeling good about it.

## Can you tell us any interesting anecdotes about your time working on the game?

One Friday, I had gone out to a long Mexican lunch with a bunch of fellow programmers, which included a few rounds of margaritas. This was a typical Friday activity, although it was unusual for me to drink, since I wasn't a big fan of drinking during the day. But for whatever reason this day I had consumed half a pitcher or so of strong margaritas.

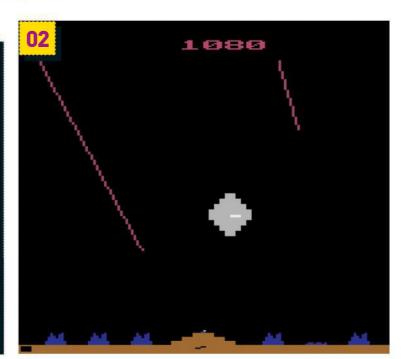
So now I basically stumble back to work at 2:15 in the afternoon, flat-out drunk. I sat down at my workstation and had the presence of mind to decide that, given my condition, it would be a good time to make a backup of my current version, which hadn't been backed up in a few weeks - all of our work was kept on eight-inch floppy disks at the time. So I dug out the Missile Command backup disc and put it in the spare drive next to my original development disk, which I worked off every day. Then I promptly copied my twoweek-old backup version over my current version, effectively throwing away my past two weeks of work in one single drunken keystroke. I was so disgusted! Needless to say, I came in at 7:30am the next morning and worked all day Saturday and Sunday to restore the game to its pre-margarita state. Along the way I swatted a few nasty bugs that had crept into the code somehow, and overall improved a lot of the game's performance. This is typical of what happens whenever I've blown away something in a game and had to revert to an older version. Rewriting the code always improves it.

## Finally, have you played any other conversions of the game? How do you think yours holds up?

I really haven't played many other versions of Missile Command other than my own, and the original obviously.

## the conversions

Appearing at a time when clones were commonplace in the market, there is an absolutely ridiculous number of official and unofficial ports of Missile Command. Join us, then, as we compare all the ports to carry the Atari seal of approval







#### 01. Atari 8-Bit [Best Version]

The version that Atari put out for its 400/800 line of computers was a great effort that featured a few nice improvements over the 2600 port. This included vapour trails being left behind the enemy rockets, and the inclusion of the bombers and satellite enemies. Sadly, like all of Atari's 8-bit Missile

Command ports, this version was missing a full complement of missile silos, limiting the depth of its gameplay. Regardless, this is still an impressivelooking conversion. Incidentally, this version also appeared as a built-in game for Atari's ill-fated XFGS console

**02.** Atari 2600 Even though the Atari 2600 version is missing

two silo bases, it still plays a faithful game of Missile Command, and what it takes with one hand there are no bombers or satellites - it gives back with the other by allowing players to influence the behaviour of the missiles and speed of the target cursor. This port was also the first to do away with the Cold War setting, replacing it with a less contentious alien invasion

scenario, as detailed in the game's manual

**03.** Atari 5200 The 5200 also received a decent conversion of Missile Command that featured a number of improvements over the 2600 port, although that is probably to be expected. As well as a crisper and more colourful nuclear war, this version also included the bombers

and satellite enemies from the arcade game. Sadly players still only had a single base with which to defend their six cities. As such, this version feels more like an enhancement of the Atari 2600 port rather than a more faithful arcade conversion.

#### **04.** PC and PlavStation

This game was an official remake from Hasbro. It

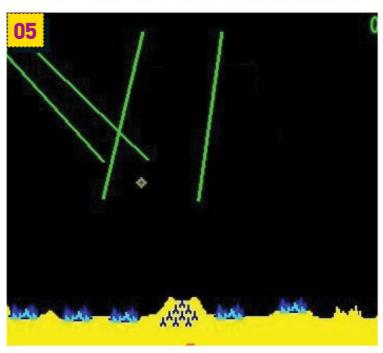
featured both a classic and 'ultimate' mode that swapped out the silos for spaceships and also added alien enemies, CG cut-scenes, bosses, and allowed players to spend points earned on purchasing shields and upgrading their missiles. The PC version is the one to play as it supports mouse controls. Essentially a baby trackball controller that's been

#### COIN-OP CAPERS: MISSILE COMMAND

#### SPECIAL THANKS TO TONY TEMPLE FOR HIS HELP AND ASSISTANCE THROUGHOUT THIS ARTICLE









turned on its head and given buttons for feet, it's a control system that, as you would expect, works quite well for dragging cursors around the screen.

#### **05.** iPhone

Atari also released, but then oddly pulled, a decent iOS version of *Missile Command* for Apple's devices. Due to the immediate nature of touch-screen controls and its automatic silo selection, the game takes a while to get challenging, but it's still a good port. The game featured two modes, classic and ultra, with the latter throwing in new enemies and cleaning up the visuals. Atari recently plugged the gap left by its mysterious disappearance with an update called *Missile Command Ultra*. This

version features redrawn graphics, allows you to dual-wield silos and includes a two-player head-to-head mode. Sadly no classic mode, though.

#### **06.** Xbox 360

As we're clearly happy to fill this page with late adaptations that push the very definition of the word 'conversion', we had to include the Xbox 360 port of Missile Command,

which is official, is simply called *Missile Command*, and also features an obligatory graphically enhanced remake – one that supplants the missile silos with electricity pylons that direct energy into the sky. Sacrilege. The Live Arcade version does feature a classic mode that attempts to replicate the one-button-to-one-silo control system with the face buttons

on the Xbox controller – it's just a crying shame movement with the analogue stick isn't all that fantastic.

#### **07.** Game Boy Color [Worst Version]

After purchasing Atari properties, Hasbro released a portable conversion of *Missile Command* for the Game Boy Color. Sadly, it was a

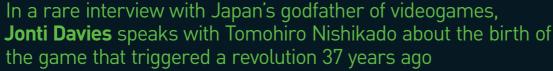
terrible version. Here, you command two missile silos, actuated by the A and B buttons, while the target cursor is steered using the D-pad. Sadly, though, the visuals, animation and gameplay are where the game falls down. The explosions flicker, hang in the sky for ages and are too tiny. It makes the action feel far too imprecise – a big nono for Missile Command.





#### THE MAKING OF: SPACE INVADERS









» Ex-Taito visionary, Tomohiro Nishikado.







or a man who single-handedly turned his country into a nation of videogame junkies, and without whom Shigeru Miyamoto claims he would not even have joined the game industry, Tomohiro Nishikado is a surprisingly unassuming and down-to-earth kind of chap. Since 1996 he's been running his own operation, a 22-strong development studio called Dreams, just down the road from Sega in Tokyo. It's a quiet and unnoticed developer that seems to be deliberately avoiding the limelight - the discography on Dreams' website is nothing more than a list of generic terms: 'Action game for PS2', 'Communication game for DS', and so on. So it's guite odd to think that 37 years ago, when in his tenth year at Taito, Nishikado alone produced a global phenomenon in the mesmerising and boldly innovative Space Invaders.

Let's head back to 1978. "At the time," says Nishikado, "the block destruction [Block Kuzushi] game Breakout was really popular in Japan, and I was hooked on it myself. I'd made a few games up until that point, but when I experienced Breakout it made me want to drive myself to develop a game that would surpass it." But where many developers would have been more than content to code a superior clone of Breakout with a few clever enhancements (which is precisely what another Taito designer, Akira Fujita, would do a decade later), Nishikado took a completely different stance as he sought to surpass the addictive 'bat, ball and block-breaking' system of Atari's 1976 classic. Thanks to his keen perceptive powers, Nishikado was able to see beneath the surface of Breakout and identify the mechanism that was causing him and so many other young Japanese to put their 100-yen coins in the slots of Atari's cabinets.

"For me," Nishikado elaborates, "the really interesting element of Breakout was the art of deciding on a number of targets and that sense of achievement you'd get from destroying a whole group of blocks simultaneously to clear the stage. I analysed the exhilaration players felt when playing Breakout like this, and I eventually decided to capitalise on this [gameplay design] by trying my hand at a shooting game where Breakout's quadrilateral targets would be replaced with targets that had more interesting forms."

Had Taito's top man not told Nishikado to make changes to the design of his project, Space Invaders would have ended up with people taking the roles of those "interesting forms" Nishikado was looking for. "During the development process, I had the

enemy targets set as humans," he reveals, "but Taito's then-president told me to stop using humans in such a way. I initially thought, 'Okay, if I substitute the humans with monster-like creatures, that should work out fine'. But then I saw a newspaper article saying that Star Wars had been extremely well received in America, so I decided on using space aliens instead of monsters. Star Wars had just hit the theatres in America and was about to be premiered in Japan, so there was a bit of a 'space boom' happening. And that's why I opted to make my game's targets aliens from outer space."

With that settled, Nishikado continued with his work as an independent entity within Taito, which is how he liked to operate in those days (even today, he seems to value autonomy: his Dreams outfit works with/for 20 or so Japanese soft cos, maintaining complete independence). Apart from the cabinet design and some sound work, Space Invaders was exclusively Nishikado's baby: "I let a new employee









- » PUBLISHERS: TAITO
- » **DEVELOPER:** TOMOHIRO NISHIKADO
- » RELEASED: 1978
- » SYSTEMS: ARCADE, VARIOUS
- » GENRE: SHOOT-'EM-UP







































America and was about to be premiered in Japan, so there was a bit of a 'space boom' happening ... That's why I decided to make my game's targets aliens from outer space To NISHIKADO REVEALS THAT GEORGE LUCAS'S WORK HAD AN

EFFECT ON SPACE INVADERS, AS DID H.G. WELLS AND MARINE LIFE..

work on the sound source and produce Space Invaders' audio effects, but apart from that, all of the other work - namely the planning, the design, graphics design, coding the software, building the hardware – I did entirely by myself." He managed to turn the game around in remarkably quick time, especially given how his first job was the daunting task of producing his own development tools specifically for this project: "From the initial conception of the idea right through to the completion of the game," Nishikado confirms, "Space *Invaders* took me approximately 12 months to produce." That was the year that was. Having joined Taito with a degree in Engineering from the electrical engineeringfocused Tokyo Denki University, Nishikado was apparently seen within the company as something of a go-to man for any hardwarerelated tasks. His first three games for Taito - 1970's Skyfighter and its sequel the following year, and 1972's Borderline - were all mechanically operated creations; games without screens. Nishikado's great skill was to improvise with existing materials and create something that was entertaining and challenging. With Space Invaders, however,

SCORE(2)

CREDIT

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» Space Invaders spawned many copycats, but far from irritating Nishikado, he takes an 'imitation is the greatest form of flattery' approach.





he realised that his new project was too ambitious for the technology and software he had to hand – new tools would be required, and who better to produce them than the engineer-programmer himself?

"There really was no microcomputer hardware in Japan during the late 1970s," Nishikado laments, "so I used American hardware [including the Intel 8080 CPU] as a reference point and then took it upon myself to remodel it. Also, there was no game development environment to speak of, so I began to create my own development tools from scratch. I drew up a rough specification document and started programming while consulting that paper, but I was thinking about the efficiency of the tools I was making more than anything else, which complicated things. Because of that, I would create and program an original development tool and then realise that I'd soon need another tool as well, so I'd build that from scratch next... in the end, this process took up about half of *Space Invaders*' entire development period."

Those six months of preparatory work were, of course, quite worthwhile. The limitations of 1978 vintage hardware and memory capacities caused Nishikado no end of headaches, though. As he worked towards realising his Star Wars-inspired dreams of a game to tap into the space boom, he was also faced with the realisation that capacity and power were at a strict premium. Still, Nishikado accepted that he had to work with what was available, reconfiguring and reworking until he had the tools and hardware required to get the Space Invaders he could see in his mind's eye onto a monitor. Ever the innovator, he quickly moved on from the most primitive of methodologies to something altogether more forward thinking: "At first," Nishikado says, "I drew a plan for the screen layout on paper and then put that up on the screen, but if I wasn't happy with it because it didn't look good, I would have to start drawing a new frame action and put that up as a replacement, and so on. That was the process I was using – I really wasn't able to draw any good results that way, though. So in view of that, I created something that these days we take for granted: paint

» The 'Nagoya shot' technique in action: finding invulnerability as the Invaders encroach was just one of the tricks discovered by Japan's fanatical players of the game in 1978.







tools, whereby I could use a light pen to easily make corrections to the graphics. This enabled me to complete the graphics with ease and in relative comfort. I think that, at the time, this was a groundbreaking development tool."

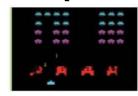
Thanks to his inventive time-saving measures, Nishikado was able to work with greater efficiency once the groundwork had been done and his development environment had been established. And as his processes became smoother and less jarring, it became much easier for him to express influences other than Star Wars. In particular, the enemy forms in Space Invaders began to take on new subtleties and idiosyncrasies. Nishikado explains: "I took the octopus-like aliens from H.G. Wells's War of the Worlds as a starting point, to influence the design of the biggest enemy targets in the game. For the targets in the middle of the screen, I modelled them on the image of a crab, and for the uppermost enemies I was thinking of squids. I was imagining the enemies as marine life. The aliens' movement was basic because of the low memory capacity I had to work with, which meant I could only program two patterns [of movement]. But I felt that in some ways, simple was best."

It's probably just as well that Nishikado was content (to a point) with simple design, because the specs of the Space Invaders hardware would allow nothing greater. Getting the hardware properly and advantageously configured was in itself a great and time-consuming challenge: "For the base CPU board, I remodelled an existing game board," Nishikado recalls. "I replaced the ROM section with RAM and then developed Monitor ROM. This enabled 16 blocks of data to be input using the keyboard, which meant it was possible to use the keyboard to execute programs. I made various functions and features in the Monitor ROM, including an option that would let me save any programs I made to cassette tape. Of course, I also included a function so that I could produce graphics while looking at the monitor. I used the one kilobyte of static RAM available at the time to compose 64 units of eight kilobytes each lined up for the program area, but the performance was very bad and I remember occasions when data would become corrupt because

» The population of Japan took the title screen's encouragement to 'Insert Coins' to excess, children



## **Space Invaders Twelve**



#### SPACE INVADERS PART II [Arcade, 1979]

Tomohiro Nishikado's first direct sequel to Space Invaders was, he admits, not as big a hit as the original. Still, it had some interesting features, including increased complexity to the movement of its enemy targets.



#### INVADERS (Arcade, 1985)

Although Nishikado was no longer at the helm, Taito went ahead with a jazzed-up *Invaders* sequel in 1985. Return of the Invaders again increased the variety of Invaders' movement patterns, as well as brightening things up.



#### **MAJESTIC TWELVE: THE** SPACE INVADERS PART IV (Arcade, 1990)

Known as Super Space Invaders '91 outside of Japan, this introduced scrolling backgrounds, shields and power-ups. It also featured a series of stages in which you needed to protect cattle from UFOs...



#### SPACE INVADERS DX (Arcade, 1993)

Featuring a traditional Space Invader Mode, a two-player splitscreen Battle Mode and a Parody Mode, Space Invaders DX was an experimental game whose best features would be better developed in Space Invaders '95/Akkanbeder.



#### AKKANBEDER / SPACE **INVADERS '95** (Arcade, 1995)

This great Space Invaders parody took a pun to arrive at its title: 'akkanbe' is what kids say as they pull one eyelid down and stick their tongue out to make a funny face at another kid, a teacher or a parent.



#### SPACE RAIDERS / SPACE **INVADERS: INVASION DAY** (PS2, 2002)

This Sammy-developed Space Invaders spin-off brought the series into Earth Defense Force territory, arming a few heroes with big guns and telling them to kill Invaders who have already landed on Earth.



#### **SPACE INVADERS ANNIVERSARY**

Notable for including an original 3D Mode, Space Invaders Anniversary was an unremarkable collection of variations of Space Invaders and Part II. The PSP attempt would prove much more worthwhile...



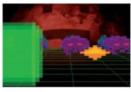
#### **SPACE INVADERS POCKET** (PSP, 2005)

This neat compilation contains four variations of the original Space Invaders (namely black and white, colour, cellophane colour effect and upright cab styles) as well as Part II, Return, Majestic Twelve and Akkanbeder.



#### **SPACE INVADERS REVOLUTION** (DS. 2005)

Nishikado himself developed Revolution, using the opportunity to incorporate touch-screen controls (digital controls remain far superior), 13 Invader types and a variety of new power-ups and settings



#### 3D SPACE INVADERS (Mobile, 2006)

Providing the option to turn Space Invaders into a first-person shooter of sorts, the Taito-developed 3D Space Invaders is surprisingly ambitious given that it is a game you can play on your mobile phone. Defending on the go!



#### **SPACE INVADERS EXTREME** (DS/PSP/XBLA, 2007)

Arguably the best Space Invaders sequel, Extreme is probably what Nishikado has in mind when he says: "I think that shooting games have become too difficult and too centred on catering to enthusiasts."



#### **SPACE INVADERS GET EVEN** (Wii. 2008)

This recently released WiiWare exclusive turns the Space Invaders principle upside-down by putting the player in control of the Invaders, with the objective being to complete a successful invasion of Earth.

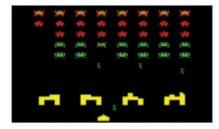




## 

## Attack of the Clones

How many times will we get away with using variations on the same pun?



#### **INVADERS** (BBC MICRO, 1982)

LIK Software's Invaders was one of the earliest computer format clones of Taito's international hit. Monochrome and colour versions were released (the latter only for Model B computers).



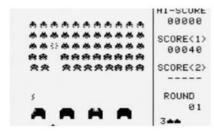
#### **3D INVADERS** (CPC, 1984)

More 'quasi-isometric' than three-dimensional, this effort at replicating/improving the original Space Invaders formula really struggles to imitate the playability of Nishikado's game.



#### SPACE INVADERS: FUKKATSU NO HI (PC **ENGINE**, 1990)

This great PC Engine conversion also includes a 'New Version' of the game, where the protective bases are removed as your ship gains the assistance of a shield.



#### **SPACE INVADERS** (WONDERSWAN.

This port of Space Invaders for Bandai's WonderSwan handheld replicates Nishikado's original work, only inverted as black sprites on a clear background.



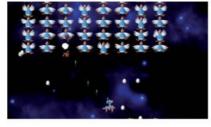
#### **AVENGER** (C64, 1982)

Another early attempt at bringing Space Invaders home was Commodore's Avenger, which managed to reproduce the coin-op's formula with only a minimum of cuts and compromises



#### PEPSI INVADERS (ATARI 2600, 1983)

This limited-run promotional 'advergame', commissioned as you might guess by Coca-Cola, replaces Space Invaders' alien enemies with the letters P, E, P, S and I. Very clever, that.



#### **CHICKEN INVADERS** (PC, 1999)

Chicken Invaders is a 1999 vintage poultry-based clone of Space Invaders, complete with eggs and drumsticks in lieu of laser fire. As it's freeware, you might like to give this game a shot. Don't be a chicken, etc.



#### **SWEET INVADERS** (MOBILE, 2006)

In one of the least imaginative and most shameful conversions of Space Invaders, 2006's Sweet Invaders 'innovates' by displaying bitty 'stunners' in the background of its 'erotic' take on the game.

of static noise. Nowadays, developers have gigabytes of memory to work with, but at the time I only had kilobytes..." In spite of those trying limitations, Nishikado must have realised that he had a hit on his hands when groups of Taito

employees began gathering at his desk for a go on the prototype version. "Once the game was close to being finished, quite a few people from [Taito's] development division were so pleased with it they began to play it regularly," he smiles. "However, because they were playing Space Invaders using my development tools, I wasn't able to get any work done while they were playing, which bothered me a lot. Having said that, although I developed Space Invaders alone, I think that in the end it was improved and perfected thanks to consultation with the people who were playing the game around me."

While the floor-level workers at Taito were rightly impressed with Space Invaders and were the first people in the world to become hooked on it, the 'Suits' were, according to Nishikado, a picture of doubt and scepticism: "In those days I was given complete freedom to work on games as I saw fit, so at the start of the project no one expressed any opposition to the idea. Along the way, though, I had to explain - mostly to businesspeople and salespersons – the game's shooting system and how there was nothing else to compare it with at that point. I had to outline how being invaded by these aliens would result in a game over, how enemies would shoot at the player and so on. That was difficult; they generally didn't give Space Invaders a good evaluation they didn't seem to rate it very highly."

Part of the execs and salespersons' problem with the game was that it did something unusual; something they either couldn't comprehend or simply didn't see as an appealing factor in a project they were backing: "Up until Space Invaders, shooting games didn't feature enemies that would attack the player," Nishikado explains. But that wasn't the only feature that met with doubting voices: "Also, even if you still had missiles remaining, if the Invaders got to the bottom of the screen and successfully carried out their invasion, it would result in a game over. To tell you the truth, both of these features were vehemently opposed by the sales and businesspeople..."

The final build of Space Invaders satisfied its creator to an extent, but Nishikado had some regrets even as soon as the game was in the wilds of Japan's 'game centres' (the places we'd call arcades). "The capabilities of the Space Invaders arcade hardware were really low," Nishikado sighs. "I wanted to produce colourful images, but it just wasn't possible with that hardware - so as soon as the game was complete, I began to develop a plan for new high-level hardware." Initially, that wasn't possible, so the game appeared in monochrome form. Eventually, Taito came up with an ingenious solution that went some way towards placating Nishikado's desire for a colourful game: multicoloured cellophane screen overlays were placed over the displays of existing cabinets. Over in the States, Bally/Midway would pull the same trick with its upright cabinet.

While Space Invaders was by no means a rushed job - in spite of completing work on the game in just 12 months, Nishikado was not working to a set deadline as such - the limitations of the technology at his disposal meant the final build was not quite where he wanted it to be: "For one thing," says Nishikado, "I really wanted to include a feature in the original Space Invaders where the Invaders would split up and form groups... but at least this ended up appearing in Space Invaders Part II."

If Nishikado was slightly unimpressed by his own production, the same could not be said of Japan's population at large. Tapping into the tremendous local interest in science fiction, Space Invaders was very much of its time – a 1978 vintage game



























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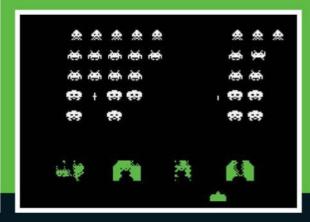
» Space Invaders' clear outline of its high-score system ensured that players would try to play cleverly and keep on returning.

for the inhabitants of Japan in 1978. The coin-op was an instant hit, zapping games right into the core of Japanese culture and even reportedly causing a shortage of 100-yen coins as a byproduct of its phenomenal success. When we mention this myth/legend to Nishikado, he seems like he wants to laugh it off as a fanciful exaggeration, but it definitely holds an element of truth, as he concedes: "The effect of *Space Invaders* was certainly noted among businesses using 100-yen coins a lot, but I don't know whether the coins actually became less common because of the game..."

Nishikado can't take credit for the housing of his PCB, mind, as he had nothing to do with the coin-op cabinet's design: "The cabinet was designed and produced by a separate team," he says. Like the Western versions of Space Invaders manufactured by Bally/Midway, Taito's Japanese Space Invaders cabinets were eventually presented in different flavours - some upright machines, some in a cocktail-table style. After some comparison work, Taito's preference was for the table format, as Nishikado relates: "Originally, the cabinet was intended as an upright design. The table-type cabinet saved a lot of space, though, so that version ended up supplanting the upright model." T.T. Space Invaders, as it was dubbed by Taito in Japan, was a sensationally popular machine. Later on, however, Taito would release an upgraded version of the upright, which would ultimately prove to have a longer life in Japan's quickly changing game centres. The later addition of proper colour graphics (a notable improvement on the 'black-and-white graphics with colour overlay' solution) cemented Space Invaders' place as a 'safe bet' in bars, game centres and other locations.

The legacy left by *Space Invaders* is so immense and multibranched that it's almost impossible to quantify the game's influence on the world. It has appeared in countless TV shows, either by way of a passing reference or as a central theme; it has provided the impetus for numerous musical projects (search Google Images for the sleeve to 1981 dub LP *Scientist Meets the Space Invaders*); it has even inspired artistic movements. Yet in Japan, the game itself was – like most trends here, it has Generally didn't give Space Invaders a good evaluation – they didn't seem to rate it very highly 77 THE SUITS COULDN'T SEE A GLOBAL HIT EVEN IF

TOMOHIRO NISHIKADO DEMONSTRATED AND EXPLAINED IT TO THEM



» Tomohiro Nishikado's work remains relevant 37 years on from its conception, marking the game out to be, what we already knew, one of the greatest ever to grace our planet.

to be said – a relatively short-lived phenomenon. On the one hand, Nishikado reckons: "Sales of *Space Invaders* were really much higher than I had anticipated." But on the other, matter of factly, he tells us: "The following year, once sales of the game had started to decline, I was asked to produce *Part II*, which I developed dutifully, but it wasn't such a big hit [as the original]."

1978 was a hugely significant year for Taito and games in Japan in general, but in terms of the volume of notable games, it would be superseded year on year thereafter. As early as 1979, Nishikado was seeing his compatriots gaining ground, even if much of the basis for their successes had been laid by Space Invaders and what Japan collectively termed the 'invader game' boom: "When I saw how smooth the movement was in Namco's Galaxian – and how colourful it was, too – I remember thinking Space Invaders had lost [the battle]. There were many shooting games that used Space Invaders as a basis after that," Nishikado concludes, although he doesn't sound at all bitter about that situation. Without Space Invaders, there's a chance that Japanese shoot-'em-ups would not have developed, or at least not in the amazing way they did during the 1980s and 1990s. It's not merely Taito that owes Nishikado a (metaphorical) debt, but also the other Japanese developers (Namco with Galaxian included) who took inspiration from Space Invaders and, on a global scale, the millions of people whose first experience of the power of videogames was the heroic act of saving the Earth from invasion by pesky aliens who were wont to scuttle their way towards the planet's surface.

Nishikado isn't keen on the latest examples of shooting games – "In recent years, I think that such games have become too difficult and too centred on catering to enthusiasts," he tells us – but he remains committed to the enduring phenomenon that began in his office at Taito in early 1978: "I still want to make simple shooting games," he smiles.

#### DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS



#### » SPEED RACE DX

SYSTEM: ARCADE YEAR: 1975

#### » SPACE INVADERS PART II

RCADE CLASSICS | 119

(PICTURED)

SYSTEM: ARCADE YEAR: 1979

#### » LUNAR RESCUE

SYSTEM: ARCADE YEAR: 1979







Cinematronic's Dragon's
Lair remains one of the
most iconic arcade games
of all time and has been
released for almost every
computer and console
platform under the sun.
As the classic arcade
game enters its third
decade, Martyn Carroll
unravels the tangled
history of Dirk's daring
adventure



ragon's Lair is the most divisive of games. For some, it doesn't even deserve to be called a game, as it's seen essentially as an interactive movie where the player does little more than prod Dirk away from danger. For others, the title alone is simply enough to excite the synapses and whisk them back to 1983 when

synapses and whisk them back to 1983 when goggle-eyed gamers bumped and jostled to get a glimpse of this extravagant new game that featured cartoon-quality sound and animation. For those amazed by the attract mode, amused by Dirk's screams and confused by Daphne's one-piece when the game first arrived in arcades over 32 years ago, there will always be something special – magical, even – about *Dragon's Lair*.

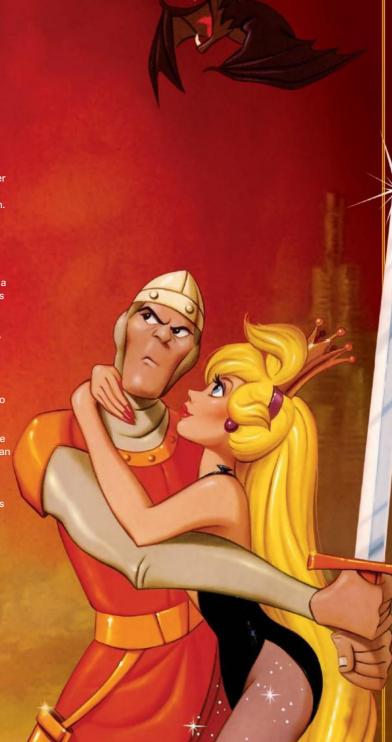
While fans are always incredibly quick to argue that *Dragon's Lair* is more than just a movie, the title has certainly benefited from the type of bonus material you'd find attached to treasured films. Releases on CD, DVD and more recently HD-DVD and Blu-ray have featured mini-documentaries and interviews with the creators along with deleted scenes and other extras. As such, the story of how *Dragon's Lair* came together is rather well known, but it's always worth recapping simply because the game's origins are actually so surprisingly primitive.

The concept was first developed by Rick Dyer in 1979. Having quit his job at

Mattel, where he developed handheld LCD games, Rick set up Advanced Micro Computers in San Diego. Working out of his garage, he created a fantasy-themed adventure game that used a roll of cash register paper as its 'display'. On the paper Rick added various scenes, each with a hand-drawn picture and a text description. The player would choose their desired multiple-choice option and the computer would quickly spin the roll to display the required scene.

Rick went on to replace the paper roll with a strip of film, then added sound via a tape recorder, and later still transferred his adventure game to a LaserDisc. This new technology allowed him to randomly and almost seamlessly jump between scenes, but he was still using static images. The whole thing was a bit flat. He needed to breathe life into it, and having seen the animated feature *The Secret Of NIMH* at the cinema, he knew who he wanted to do just that.

The Secret Of NIMH was the first film from LA-based Don Bluth Productions, the studio formed by Don Bluth, Gary Goldman and John Pomeroy following their well-publicised resignation from Walt Disney Productions. Life as an indie was hard however. NIMH opened to limited success in June 1982 and production of the second film was derailed by industrywide strike action.



ARCADE CLASSICS

THE LEGACY OF DRAGON'S LAIR

icking up the story, Gary Goldman says: "We suffered a union strike at the end of July. Our crew of about 110 artists and technicians were reluctantly escorted from the studio. That strike lasted 73 days and during that time, our investors, concerned about the ramifications to the budget, decided to back out. Don, John, our production manager, our receptionist and I were the only ones left in the building. We thought our company was done. Two months into the strike we were contacted by Rick Dyer. He came to the studio and pitched his idea of us partnering with him to make an animated LaserDisc arcade game. He had seen *The* Secret Of NIMH with his wife and told her that we had to be the ones to produce the animation. So, even though we didn't really know anything about games, we agreed to join him in the adventure - videogames were not in union contract at that time. There was a sigh of relief among us regarding our destiny as a company."

Relief quickly turned to panic as team Bluth had just 16 weeks to create something that could be demonstrated at the Amusement Operators Expo being held in Chicago in March 1983. Rick Dyer knew that other companies were developing LaserDisc games so they needed to be first to market, in the US at least. That frantic four month period witnessed the creation of Dirk the bumbler, Daphne the beauty, the castle, the quest, the pitfalls and pratfalls. Hundreds of ideas were turned into thousands of drawings as *Dragon's Lair* came to life.

March arrived and the team had three scenes (or 'rooms') ready to show off at the expo. And show off they did. "We couldn't believe it," says Gary. "Dragon's



E EVOLUTION OF A LEGEND

■ "I first saw it in the arcade that was tacked onto the side of my local Odeon cinema. I was utterly blown away by it. I must have stood there and watched that attract sequence about 20 times and knew the voiceover off by heart. I didn't play it because it was expensive and I wanted to buy sweets, so at that point it was the best game ever too me. Obviously when I did eventually play it I realised otherwise, but for a while that game was just magical."

THE LAIRD

Lair became a national name. All the news stations across the nation reported on the convention, showing colour footage of the gameplay. The distributor, Cinematronics, was able to pre-sell more than 3,500 units of the unfinished game. All of the costs for production, programming and game cabinet construction and shipping were paid for with advances on those sales."

Reaction to the game was unanimously positive. A typical viewpoint appeared in the July 1983 issue of *Video Games Magazine*. "The 1983 AOE offered very

little we haven't all seen before," reported John Holmstom on the expo. "Most of the new games were variations on recognisable and overused themes which aren't going to shake up many arcades. Only one game stood out from the rest – *Dragon's Lair.* It's such a revolutionary concept that it will undoubtedly cause a great deal of excitement in the arcades. It could ultimately make the other games at the show seem like mere antiques."

Buoyed by the success and with completion costs covered, the team returned to California to finish work on the game. In total the project would feature around 20 minutes of hand-drawn animation. "We completed it in May," continues Gary. "Rick Dyer started testing it in arcade situations, making changes and excluding rooms that didn't entertain or confused the players. He also tweaked the programming 'event' windows – the amount of time allowed to make your move. The game started shipping to arcades in early July, selling in excess of 8,000 machines."







## DRAGON'S SPR

Seguels to - and spin-offs from - the original arcade game

#### SPACE ACE (Arcade)

■ This delightful follow-up to *Dragon's Lair* is faster (it's relentless) and funnier (thanks to the introduction of dialogue). Branching paths and varying skill levels increase replay value. It's regularly bundled with the Dragon's Lair arcade games, creating a loose trilogy.



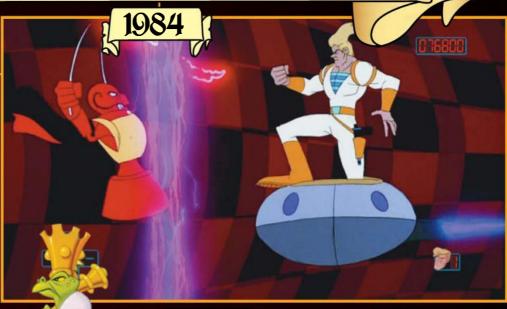
#### DRAGON'S LAIR (nes)

■ Elite's first attempt at dropping Dirk into a platform game was a disaster. The character graphics are detailed and large, but the animation is sluggish and the controls are clunky. The difficulty level is crazy; you deserve a medal for finishing the first screen.



#### DRAGONS LAIR (63)

■ Subtitled *The Legend*, this handheld spin-off is a straight rip of Spectrum platformer Roller Coaster, also by Elite. It helps that the source is a brilliant little game, but no real effort has been made to link the game to the *Dragon's Lair* world. Bizarre.



DRAGON'S LAIR (snes)

■ Third time lucky for Elite. This platformer is hardly groundbreaking, particularly within the SNES library, but it's polished and engaging and lots of fun. It's challenging too, though fair, and there are plenty of nods to the original arcade game to spot.



#### DRAGONS LAIR 3D (1) ulti)

■ Part sequel, part update, this return to the world of *Dragon's Lair* is not unwelcome. It plays it safe, adopting the typical action-adventure-platformer approach, but the cel-shaded visuals are spot-on and the animation is authentic. A 'nice' game.



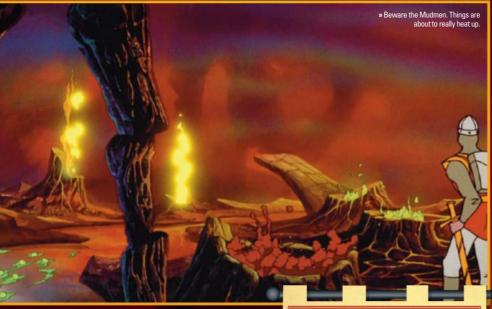
#### DRAGON'S LAIR 11 (Arcade)

■ This belated sequel arrived in arcades seven years late – and it was probably seven years too late. For fans though there's real magic at work here. The animation is top drawer, with proceedings taking a surreal turn as Dirk is whisked through time.



#### DRAGONS LAIR III (pc)

■ Mark this as a failed experiment. It's basically Dragon's Lair 3D turned into an interactive movie so that the gameplay matches that of the original. A definite whiff of 'Why bother?' makes this one for completionists, or possibly masochists.



uring that summer of '83 it seemed that everyone was playing – or at least standing in line waiting to play – *Dragon's*Lair. It was massively popular. Operators plonked TVs on top of machines so that punters could more easily watch the game being played. The fact that it cost twice as much to play as other machines (fifty cents per credit in the US, rather than the usual quarter, to cover the increased outlay for the LaserDisc technology) didn't dampen the enthusiasm.

"We were awestruck," admits Gary.
"Not only by the results of the Chicago convention preview, but by visiting the arcades in the LA area. It was kind of crazy, seeing the crowds around the machine. We were invited to come to The Largest Arcade in the World in Denver, Colorado, where they had the game, spot lit, all alone, separated from the other games with a red carpet and gold-coloured ropes for the players to line up to play. They had put three TV monitors on the top of the arcade allowing the crowds of kids to watch the action from several directions. There were at least 75 to 100 players standing in line

#### READERS REMEMBER

"I remember seeing it when I was but a youngster and being amazed at the graphics (compared to anything else in the arcade at the time). The kid I was watching must have played it to death, as it seemed I was watching a full cartoon. I thought it was easy. I popped my coins in and lasted about ten seconds... Didn't play it much after that."

#### NOKGOD

waiting to play. It was like the lines to see Raiders Of The Lost Ark."

One of those waiting impatiently in the line for *Dragon's Lair* was Jeff Kinder. "I was on vacation with my family in Wildwood, New Jersey," says Jeff, who years later would establish a *Dragon's Lair* website. "As I walked around an arcade I noticed a huge crowd around one of the games. A TV that was sitting on top of

the machine and when I saw the screen I said to myself 'That's nice, they're showing cartoons on the TV'. When I finally edged through the crowd and saw that those cartoons were actually part of the game I just couldn't believe it. My jaw hit the floor. After waiting 15 minutes for my turn, my game lasted about 15 seconds. But I was hooked."

Someone else clamouring to play

Someone else clamouring to play was Martin Touhey. Spellbound by the



» Despite the limitations of the platform, this remained an imponversion that captured the spirit of the original game.

## CARTOON TIME

■ Cartoon serials based on hit videogames have occupied Saturday morning TV schedules for years, stretching right back to the early Eighties. *Dragon's Lair* was a better fit than most, being based on a game that actually boasted traditional animation itself. Ruby-Spears Productions developed 13 episodes that were initially broadcast on the American ABC network between September 1984 and April 1985.



In each 30-minute show, Dirk (who now spoke rather than just shrieked) would rescue Daphne or protect the kingdom from Singe the dragon and his conniving cronies. The animation was adequate, the stories were diverting and the whole thing was good fun – providing you were eight years old.

Co-creator Gary Goldman singles out the series as the one the main reasons why *Dragon's Lair* remained in the public consciousness long after the game's popularity had cooled in the arcades.

The show has been re-run several times on US television over the years and in 2011 Warner Bros released the complete series on Region 1 DVD.



game as a wide-eyed nine-year-old, he's currently putting together a feature-length documentary entitled Inside The Dragon's Lair. "I walked into the arcade one day and a crowd of people were all huddled around this one game," he says. "My young brain could barely even comprehend what was going on. Two of my favourite things, animation and videogames, coming together in such harmony that it felt like a wish come true. I was in a state of euphoria and I hadn't even played the game yet. Once I did get to play the game, however, it did to me what it did to many other gamers - it took my fifty cents and killed me quickly. My attraction wasn't diminished though. It was such a different concept at the time that there was no way I could ever forget it.'

The game was a success for all parties involved. Don Bluth Productions, who initially viewed *Dragon's Lair* as a stop gap between movie projects, ploughed the



» At least when you die you're rewarded with a funny fatality scene. Get used to it as you'll see it often.

» Coleco's original *Dragon's Lair* adaptation for its Adam home computer.



profits into videogame development. Its second LaserDisc game, the sci-fi romp *Space Ace*, arrived in 1984 and this was followed by a *Dragon's Lair* sequel. Gary says: "The money flowed and the profits funded *Space Ace* and 70 per cent of *Dragon's Lair II.*" 70 per cent? In March 1984, distributor Cinematronics pulled the plug on the sequel despite it being close to completion. It appeared that the novelty of LaserDisc games had rapidly worn off and their popularity was on the wane. The craze was short-lived and it pretty much began and ended with *Dragon's Lair*. Yet the game's legacy was to live on.

it coin-ops end up in the home and *Dragon's Lair* was no different, despite it being impossible to convert the game to the computers and consoles of the time with any degree of accuracy.

Mere insurmountable tasks weren't about to stop Coleco however. The manufacturer was planning an add-on module for its ColecoVision console that would play CED discs (effectively vinyl records that stored video). Dragon's Lair was the perfect killer app for this new kit and Coleco reportedly stumped up \$2m to licence the game. Unsurprisingly, plans for this ambitious add-on were soon scrapped and Coleco was forced to adapt rather than convert the game. The result was a multi-load affair for its Adam computer that featured scaled-down versions or rather interpretations of popular scenes from the original. The game was released in 1984 and available on both cassette (that cleverly pre-loaded the next level while you were playing the current one) and floppy disk.

The Adam was not a popular computer, so it was left to UK firm Software Projects to give Coleco's version greater exposure. Software Projects boss Alan Maton picked up the Adam version while on holiday in France and brought it back to show his team in Liverpool. "Software Projects had the Adam version and we were all looking at it," recalls in-house programmer John Darnell. "I had written a Commodore 64 turbo loader and saw that just as the Adam loaded the next level from tape whilst playing the game, the C64 could potentially do the same. 'Go for it,' said Alan. 'We will sort out the copyright issues.' And so that's

 Against the odds, the Commodore Amiga version delivered are authentic Dragon's Lair experience.





READERS REMEMBER

■ "When this came out, I couldn't believe my eyes. It was expensive but I had to have a go. I died almost instantly and never played it again having felt utterly cheated out of my pocket money. I just watched everyone else waste their money instead!"

**FREDGHOSTMASTER** 

"WE FIRST RELEASED
THE AMMOA VERSION
AC THE WORLD OF
COMMINIODORE EVENT
AND WE HAD TO KEEP
RUNNING BACK TO
THE OFFICE TO GET
MYORE STOCK"

READYSOFT'S DAVID FOSTER

what we did! Writing *Dragon's Lair* for the C64 was an absolute blast."

John's C64 version was released in late 1986, with Spectrum and Amstrad CPC versions following a few months later. Review scores were so-so, with many critics bemoaning the game's tough-asboots difficulty level, but the allure of Dragon's Lair was still strong and the game was a solid chart hit. In 1987 Software Projects created a fresh set of levels based on arcade scenes not featured in the Adam original and released it on C64, Spectrum and CPC as Dragon's Lair Part II: Escape From Singe's Castle. A 'new' plot involved Dirk venturing back into the castle to steal some of Singe's gold - presumably to keep Princess Daphne in the pre-kidnap lifestyle she was accustomed to.

In 1988, Randy Linden and David Foster of US publisher ReadySoft acquired the rights. Their plan was admirably bold – to release a faithful version of *Dragon's Lair* for the Amiga computer. The lengthy process involved separating the foreground elements from scenes with static backgrounds and then reducing the colours used in these elements (to 16) and compressing them. Having minimised the data, they tackled the





challenge of optimising processor usage and maximising disk space. The finished product shipped on six full-to-the-brim floppy disks and yet featured just 15 per cent of the arcade game.

It was a huge hit regardless. "We couldn't produce them fast enough to meet the demand," says David. "We first released the Amiga version at the World of Commodore event in Toronto in December 1988 and we had to keep running back to the office to get more stock. We ended up selling more than 1,000 units at the show alone. In the first three months we produced 60,000 units, times six disks each. We had a custom disk format designed to fit more data on each disk and also thwart piracy, so we were going flat out copying disks on reworked Amiga external drives with the rotation speed tuned down. The drives kept breaking down and we would have to keep buying new ones."

#### READERS REMEMBER

■ "I was completely mesmerised by *Dragon's*Lair and loved the intro, but then again I was only around six or seven years old when I first saw it and never had the chance to play it. Back then I thought what I was seeing was actual game graphics rather than just stock footage running off a LaserDisc."

**TOXIEDOGG** 

Following its successful debut on the Amiga, versions for the ST, PC and Mac were released. ReadySoft then converted a second set of scenes and, like Software Projects, released them with the subtitle Escape From Singe's Castle. For Dirk's return, ReadySoft introduced some player aids in the form of three difficulty levels, save game slots and clearer on-screen hints. "I think the helpers make the game much more accessible to casual gamers," says David. "We have found that most of our customers are interested in getting through the game and seeing all of the animation, bringing back the memories,



and not so much having to memorise all the exact moves and timings. We make sure that the helpers can be turned off for those interested in the true *Dragon's Lair* experience." The game also included several new scenes designed in-house at ReadySoft.

he brisk sales of these home versions demonstrated that Dragon's Lair still resonated with gamers. It wasn't too surprising then when interest was shown in the partially completed sequel. Leland Corporation approached the Bluth team and offered to finance the completion, and in 1991 Dragon's Lair II: Time Warp finally arrived in arcades. "I'm not sure

"The phenomenon is that it was a historic and memorable moment in the lives of those who saw it when it first appeared in the arcades"

CO-CREATOR GARY GOLDMAN

## DRAGON'S LEGACY

Seven games that owe a debt of gratitude to Dragon's Lair





#### SUPER DON QUIX-OCE

■ Following the success of *Dragon's Lair*, a number of coin-op manufacturers flirted with LaserDisc tech. This was the first – and only – release from Japanese developer Universal. While the animation is far from Bluth standard, it's very similar to *Dragon's Lair* in story and execution. There's one difference however – the video display is overlaid with graphics showing your score, lives etc. Hints are also displayed, reducing instances of trial and error.

#### COBRA COMMAND

Perhaps best known as an early Mega-CD FMV game, Data East's Cobra Command was actually released in arcades in 1984. Gameplay is a mix of shooting enemy craft and rapidly following directional commands which are relayed over the chopper's radio by your officer. The animation from the Toei studio is great and the action barely lets up for a second. Forms a fantastic double-bill with the 1985 car chase epic Road Blaster (Road Avenger).





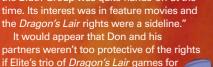
#### MAD DOG MCREE

■ This light-gun game sees you shooting no-good troublemakers in a Wild West town. Featuring video footage of real actors delivering terrible lines in hackneyed situations, the actual gameplay boils down to the reflexive type first introduced in *Dragon's Lair*. Enemies appear on the screen and if you're fast with your aim, they hit the dust. Too hesitant and it's a trip to Boot Hill for you. Very silly but fun nonetheless, particularly in the arcade with a crowd of mates rooting for you.

what went into Leland's decision," says David, "but I would imagine that the home market success of Dragon's Lair played into it." Interestingly, the trailer to Time Warp displays the note 'Licensed exclusively to Nintendo', yet Gary cannot recall the Japanese firm being involved.

ReadySoft converted the arcade sequel to home computers, and was once again forced to leave many scenes out. Some of these unused scenes were picked up and used in a new release confusingly titled Dragon's Lair III: The Curse Of Mordread. As with Escape From Singe's Castle, this 'third' title included some exclusive new scenes to help make sense of the story. David says: "We needed a new beginning and ending when we went back and made subsequent versions based on the same material, so we made our own. I suspect that technically we did need approval for this and I'm not sure if that was ever requested or received, but I do recall that the Bluth Group was quite hands-off at the time. Its interest was in feature movies and

partners weren't too protective of the rights if Elite's trio of Dragon's Lair games for Nintendo consoles are anything to





#### READERS REMEMBER

"I saw it in Porthcawl and there were always big queues around it. There were two guys who were always on it and could complete it on one credit and it was probably the best game ever to a young me. Because of that, I've got a weird fondness for Dragon's Lair and have picked up quite a lot of the home versions over the years. I actually quite like the SNES platformer, the original GB version is a decent version of Roller Coaster and I also really enjoyed Dragon's Lair 3D (which is what the original game should have been and might have been if they'd had the technology at the time) on the PS2."

SHINOBI





#### Another world

■ Eric Chahi's 16-bit classic has more in common with *Dragon's Lair* than you may at first think. How do you escape the tentacles at the beginning of the game? You push up. How do you reach the teleporter at the end of the game? You push left. In addition, both games dwell rather lovingly on death, and perversely it's often fun to get killed in a variety of ways just so you can witness the inventive fatality sequences





#### BRAIN DEAD 13

■ Having spent a number of years successfully converting the *Dragon's Lair* games to home formats, ReadySoft put the ports on hold and developed this original interactive movie for home systems. Predictably the game borrows very heavily from Dragon's Lair, with the usual button prompts advancing the story, but the quirky animation and delightfully dark plot help the game stand on its own two feet. Also, as a bonus, some of the death scenes are bleakly hilarious

#### Shenmue

■ It would be rather foolish to call Sega's Shenmue derivative outright, yet one of its key features – Quick-Time Events – can be traced directly back to Dragon's Lair and the other interactive movies of the era (via 1996's Die Hard Arcade which dabbled with timed button prompts during cutscenes). While Shenmue's QTEs are just a small part of an innovative masterwork, some would argue that this 'feature' has been a blight on gaming ever since.





#### heavy rain

■ Beautiful, tragic, compelling, exhilarating. It's easy to go overboard with the adjectives when discussing Heavy Rain, the stunning noir-inspired PS3 game from Quantic Dream. What's really amazing though is that the game, in which the player has no direct control over characters and the action is affected by timed events, shouldn't really work in this day in age. Yet it does, brilliantly, as proved by the game's wide critical claim and strong commercial success.

go by. The NES (1990), Game Boy (1991) and SNES (1993) releases were all platform games far removed from the arcade original. Much more faithful were the CD-ROM versions which ReadySoft rolled out from 1993 onwards. These finally provided PC and Mac users, as well as owners of jazzy CD-equipped consoles like the Mega-CD, CDi and 3DO, with the closest thing yet to the full arcade experience at home (if you excused the slightly ropey Cinepak-era video quality).

n 1997, Digital Leisure (the new name for ReadySoft) released versions of Dragon's Lair with vastly improved video for CD and DVD. This year also saw the launch of Jeff Kinder's LaserDisc gaming website, which he initially created to document the restoration of a battered Dragon's Lair arcade machine that he'd bought. "I was so excited to finally be able to own one of my all-time favourite games," says Jeff about the machine. "Since the cabinet was in really bad shape, I figured I could rebuild the cabinet with new wood and restore it back to its original condition. As I worked on this project, I took pictures and put them on the internet to show others my progress. After a month or so, I started getting tons of emails from people commending my work and asking if I knew where they could find a *Dragon's Lair* machine or if I had any other information about the game or other LaserDisc games. Back in 1997 there was very little information about LaserDisc game on the internet, so I started doing research and making connections with people who had other games. Over a short period of time, many of these people started helping me and the popularity of the site really exploded."

Dragon's Lair was very much a product of the Eighties, yet its mysterious indefinable showed no sign of waning with the arrival of the new millennium. In

» This version was started by Derrick Rowson and finished by Paul Hodgson and Andy Walker

TEADERS RETIONSER

■ "One of the video rental shops in town had a bunch of arcade machines, and one day I was there I saw this amazing game people were crowding around. It was truly a thing of beauty, and I dearly want that Dragon's Lair film to happen."

NORTHWAY

2001, Capcom published a surprisingly faithful version for the Game Boy Color, and then in 2002 Ubisoft readied an all-new Dirk adventure for PC and home consoles. Titled *Dragon's Lair 3D*, the gameplay was updated to give players direct control over Dirk, while the distinctive look of the original was replicated.

"We used source material from the original Dragon's Lair to help us apply the look to the 3D version," says project director and lead animator Thomas Konkol. "We were very lucky to have access to the original backgrounds and some animation cells." These were provided by the original co-creators who had a hand in the development. "They were very helpful in providing original art assets, giving us creative art direction, and on occasion, visiting the studio to assist and answer questions. I remember Don Bluth came by my office and looked at the 3D Daphne model I was creating and gave me very helpful advice on how to adjust her proportions to make the model look more like the 2D animated version."

In 2006 the focus returned to the original game with the first HD release from Digital Leisure. This proved to be painstaking work for David Foster and his team. He says: "We went back to the original film that had been in a vault for 20 years and had it transferred to a digital format in

"There were at least 75 to 100 players standing in line waiting to play. It was like the lines to see raiders of





» Constant conversions over the years has ensured *Dragon's Lain* continues to strike a chord with gamers.

HD. Although it was great resolution it showed up all kinds of dust, hair and other artefacts that weren't particularly visible in SD but were glaring in HD. So we ended up spending six month doing hand touch-up on a frame-by-frame basis to tidy up the video, but we ultimately had a much cleaner version which looked great in HD."

his HD print has been used in subsequent releases for many platforms including Wii, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, iOS and Android. So what next for the original Dragon's Lair? A 3D version? A 4K version? "We always have Dragon's Lair plans in the pipeline," says David. "However, we're sticking with the core game. We've discovered that this is what fans want the most. If a Dragon's Lair feature film was ever produced then there might be interest in a movie-themed version of the game."

Talk of a *Dragon's Lair* movie has circulated for many years. Over to Gary Goldman: "It's still on our list of feature films we want to make. We've probably done twelve rewrites on the script. It isn't about the game. It's the backstory about Dirk, Daphne, their history. It's a prequel to the game."

#### READERS REMEMBER

"I saw a massive crowd around a machine, and once I fought my way to the front I saw the most spectacular game I'd ever seen! Literally a cartoon! If only it wasn't so ruthlessly difficult I'd have played it. I also think it was the first ever game that cost 50p a credit. Shocking in the days of 10p machines!"

**FREESTYLER** 

The polarising effect of *Dragon's Lair* might be the reason why a question mark hangs over the movie. But then, even those that hate the game and wish they'd never wasted a single credit on it must surely appreciate its groundbreaking impact and admire its 32 year legacy.

"It's the animation," says Gary, when asked about the game's timeless appeal. "It's well executed and still entertaining, even to the children of those who played it during the Eighties. It's not a great game, it's a memory game. I think the phenomenon is that it was a historic and memorable moment in the lives of those who saw it when it first appeared in the arcades. It's one of those firsttime experiences that takes place at an impressionable age, like going to see your first animated film in a theatre. It scars the brain and you remember it forever, especially if you were entertained by it and everyone your age was talking about it.

"We know that there are still plenty of fans out there. We continue to receive mail from fans expressing their gratitude and inspiration to seek a career in animation. That's pretty amazing."



## INSIDE THE DRAGON'S LAIR

We chat to director Martin Touhey about his upcoming Dragon's Lair documentary

#### Why did you decide to document Dragon's Lair?

Dragon's Lair had a significant impact on my life. It's stuck with me like glue for decades. I felt that by having a subject that I was personally attached to would benefit a documentary. Not only was Dragon's Lair a personal favourite of mine, but it was also a very interesting subject to tackle. There are very few games out there that have had the same kind of longevity. Dragon's Lair was also a game that had many 'firsts'. The animation angle alone was really enough to warrant a documentary about the game.

#### How is the project progressing?

The project is coming along quite nicely. We've interviewed about 20 people so far including animators Don Bluth and Gary Goldman. We're still in production and will be launching a Kickstarter campaign to help with the additional production costs as well as post-production. As it stands right now the release date of the film is up in the air, but we're shooting for the first part of 2014.

The various home releases over the years have included documentaries and interviews with the creators. Why should fans check out your documentary?

I've seen the mini-docs and interviews, but what I find missing from them is a solid compelling narrative. We want to create a film that tells a story that everyone can appreciate and enjoy, not just *Dragon's Lair* fans. It's all about creating a film with a narrative and if you have all the right elements in place and they're hitting on all cylinders then you'll end up with a film that's greater than the sum of its parts. So far all I've seen out there is parts.

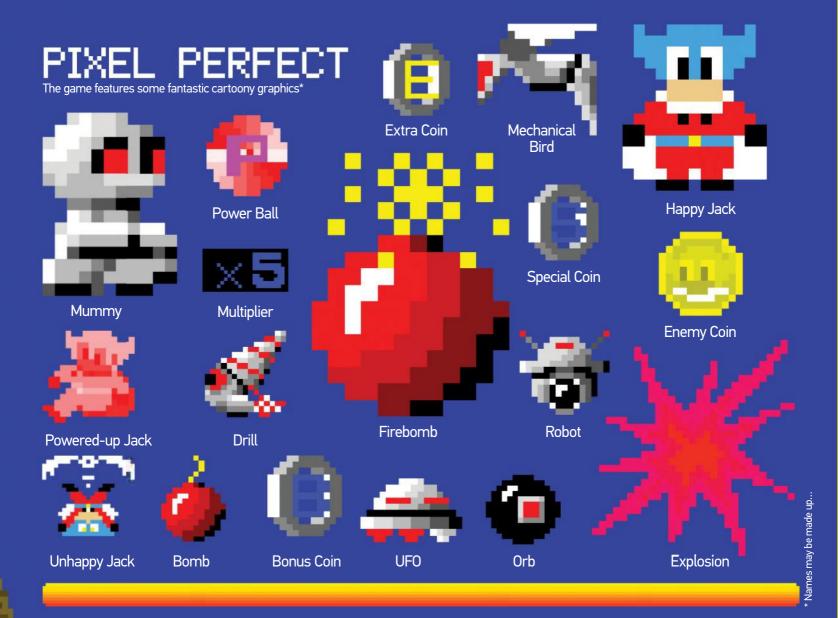
You can follow the documentary's progress on Twitter (@dragonslairdoc) and Facebook (facebook.com/dragonslairdoc).





» Documentary director Martin Touhey, at Don Bluth's house (photo by Justin Maine).





Jack was developed by Tehkan, the Japanese videogame company that would later change its name to the more familiar Tecmo. Bomb Jack was something of a departure for the firm, as most of its earlier titles were far more elaborate in execution. Its 1981 debut, Pleiads, was a multi-stage shooter in the style of Phoenix, while 1983's Senjyo utilised a smart 3D trick to simulate advancing alien ships. Star Force, released the following

ebuting in arcades in 1984, Bomb

in the style of *Phoenix*, while 1983's *Senjyo* utilised a smart 3D trick to simulate advancing alien ships. *Star Force*, released the following year, was a super-slick vertical shooter of some repute. So *Bomb Jack*, with its single-screen platforming antics, certainly wasn't pushing any boundaries.

Yet it has become a title that's instantly recognisable. At a time when new coin-ops were released at a rate of knots, and were often similar in style and appearance, Bomb Jack stood out in even the gloomiest arcades thanks to its colourful, cartoon

sprites and brilliant backdrops. Anyone with a passing interest in gaming can easily identify the game, in particular the opening round with its iconic pyramid and sphinx background. It has become a classic videogame image.

There's also the audio. Jack zips along to various tunes (including, in a bizarre bit of music licensing, The Beatles' Lady Madonna), but it's the shrill sound effects that are most memorable. There are bleeps and chimes that are impossible to adequately communicate in print – no combination of ASCII characters can illustrate them. And who can forget the tense alarm sound that accompanies the occasional presence of the 'Power Ball' – a special pick-up that allows Jack to thwack enemies for a short amount of time.

The Power Ball is probably why the game is often likened to *Pac-Man*, as the two titles really have little else in common.

Yes you can position yourself to lure enemies, and use platforms as barriers to block their movement, but in Bomb Jack you have much more freedom of movement and control over your character. Rapidly tapping the jump button to hover is a key skill, as is pulling down to descend more quickly or up to ascend higher.

Bomb Jack is also a high-score junkie's dream. Quickly gathering up all the bombs and moving onto the next round is fine, but to do it in style you must follow the ignition sequence and only collect bombs with sparking fuses ('firebombs'). On top of this, you need to build up the score multiplier by grabbing the bonus coins that appear on-screen. For such a 'simple' coin-op, the scoring system is really clever and one of the keys to the game's lasting appeal.

Of course, when we talk *Bomb Jack* we're not just contemplating the coin-op. The game was converted to many home



computers and consoles, officially in the Eighties and Nineties and more recently by homebrew teams who have ported the game to fill a gap in a system's software library. The small sprites and single-screen view made the game particularly suitable for conversion and the majority of home versions are admirably close to the arcade coin-op original.

One system that surprisingly didn't receive *Bomb Jack* was the Nintendo Famicom/NES, but that's because it got something more – or at least something different. Released in 1986, *Mighty Bomb Jack* is Tecmo's expansive, adventure-themed follow-up. There are static screens in which you simply need to collect all the bombs, just like in the original, but these are connected via scrolling sections where you plunder pick-ups from chests and explore secret rooms. Confusingly, this fun reworking was also adapted for Nintendo's arcade VS System, but its origins are on the Nintendo console.

Even more confusingly, UK-based Elite Systems, which converted the original Bomb Jack to home computers, released its own follow-up for the Commodore 64. Commodore 16, ZX Spectrum and Amstrad CPC in 1987. Simply titled Bomb Jack II, the game retained the original's single-screen approach and collect-'em-up objective, but unwisely fiddled with the gameplay. Jack could no longer fly freely around the screen; instead he could only leap from platform to platform. The initial full-price release included a copy of the original game as a bonus (or perhaps a peace offering). Elite had more success with its third Bomb Jack game, which was actually



a conversion of *Mighty Bomb Jack* for the Commodore 64, Amiga, Atari ST and PC.

Following these computer and console sequels, Jack made a belated return to the arcade in 1993 – and he wasn't alone. Developed by Nippon Microcomputer Kaihatsu (NMK), Bomb Jack Twin was a direct update to the original game that paired Jack with a red-caped partner (Jill?). Now, two players could work together to defuse all the bombs, while at the same time competing against each other to secure the highest score after each round. In addition there were more locations (you moved around a world map, like in Pang) and the speed of the game was ratcheted up a notch.

Bomb Jack Twin was never converted to home systems, although Elite planned to bring it to the Game Boy Advance in 2002 as part of a compilation called Bomb Jack World. The pack, which was to include Bomb Jack and Mighty Bomb Jack as Elite's Steve Wilcox has revealed that two of the three games were complete but the company "lost focus" on *Bomb Jack World* as its mobile phone business began to take off. Indeed, Elite did release the original game for mobiles in 2003.

Versions of *Bomb Jack* for sixth-

well, sadly never materialised.

Versions of *Bomb Jack* for sixth-generation consoles arrived shortly after. The game was included as part of *Tecmo Hit Parade*, a PlayStation 2 collection that featured six other Tehkan-era titles. It was released exclusively in Japan in 2004. The following year *Tecmo Classic Arcade* arrived on Xbox. Happily, this improved compilation, which featured *Bomb Jack* and ten additional arcade titles, was released outside of Japan.

Second-hand copies of *Tecmo Classic Arcade* can be picked up fairly cheaply and it plays perfectly on the Xbox 360 – ideal if you're looking for a quick 'blast' of *Bomb Jack* on a more modern system.

» Mighty Bomb Jack took place in a treasure-filled bomb-packed pyramid.



»A glimpse of the unreleased Mighty Bomb Jack for the Game Boy Advance.

## TEHKAN THE ARCADE BY STORM

Bomb Jack was brilliant, but let's not forget about the firm's other classic coin-ops



#### Star Force (1984)

Known as *Mega Force* in some regions, this vertical shooter is so good that it almost belies its age, but it really was released in 1984. It's a relentless blaster that looks as good as it plays. It was later converted to several home systems including the NES and MSX.



## Tehkan World Cup (1986)

Released to capitalise on the 1986 World Cup, this fantastic football game would be enjoyed long after the competition ended. It popularised the topdown viewpoint used in later football games and featured a trackball controller.



## Solomon's Key

Created by Michitaka Tsuruta, Solomon's Key mixes puzzle and platforming elements. It's perhaps better known outside of the arcade thanks to the many home conversions, but the original remains one of the jewels in the company's crown.



#### **Rygar** (1986)

Not to be confused with Taito's Rastan. While they're similar games, Rygar is faster-paced and more fun. Our hero romps through mythical lands, carving up beasts with his spiky weapon. A belated 3D sequel was released for PS2 and Wii years later.



#### Silk Worm (1988)

A side-scrolling shooter with a neat gimmick. In co-op mode (which is the only way to play really), one player pilots a chopper while the other drives a jeep, working together to destroy enemy forces. Like a lot of Tecmo games, this was a hit in the arcades and at home.



#### Ninja Gaiden (1988)

Tecmo's most enduring franchise, which has graced many home systems over the years, actually began life in the arcades as a scrolling beat-'emup. Overlooked but not forgotten – the coin-op version was included as an unlockable bonus in Ninja Gaiden Black on Xbox.



## CONSUMER SEQUELS

Bomb Jack wasn't the only coin-op with sequels developed especially for home systems

#### Donkey Kong II (1983)

In the arcade *Donkey Kong* was followed by *Donkey Kong Jr*. Yet Game & Watch got both a version of that game and a numbered sequel in which Junior rescued Kong by unlocking four chains. With no sign of the moustachioed one, this was a real (monkey) barrel of fun.



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#### Frogger II: Threeedeep! (1984)

With a sub editor's nightmare of a subtitle, Frogger leapt from coin-ops to consoles and computers for the second game in the series. The perilous action now played out over multiple screens, and from this point on Frogger would enjoy a long career outside of the arcade.

#### Hunchback II: Quasimodo's Revenge (1985)

Ocean hit the jackpot with its first arcade licence and wasted little time in cranking out a sequel for 8-bit computers. It featured new screens, varied challenges and a punishing difficulty level. Further Hunchback games followed from Ocean.



#### Yie Ar Kung-Fu 2 (1985)

The classic fighting game never received a coin-op sequel, but the head-bashing continued unabated on the MSX. The sequel, which introduced new adversaries and, yes, flying ninja babies, was then ported to other home computers by Ocean for its Imagine label.



The Ocean boys were at it again with this home-only follow-up to Taito's street brawler. It introduced weapons, bigger areas and co-op play, and the result was easily better than most of the *Double Dragon* conversions. But don't mention *Renegade III.* Just don't go there.



#### Space Harrier II (1989)

Forget Planet Harriers. The first Space Harrier sequel arrived on the Mega Drive as one of the console's launch titles. Sega released console sequels and updates to many of its most popular coin-ops including OutRun, After Burner, Wonder Boy, Shinobi and Golden Axe.



Before Street Fighter II, US Gold (who handled the Street Fighter computer conversions) pushed this as the follow-up. The same game engine was used, Ryu became Kwon and it was more of the same. US Gold also released its own Strider seguel in 1991.



MISSILES

EVEL

## Gauntlet: The Third Encounter (1990)

Following the *Deeper Dungeons* expansion pack, this sequel to the first two *Gauntlet* arcade games was released for the Atari Lynx. In a (daft) departure from the original, new character classes included Nerd and Android! *Gauntlet III* and *IV* laterappeared on home systems too.



While not an official sequel, this shooter was clearly more than a spiritual successor to Tecmo's Silk Worm. SWIV (which stood for Silk Worm IV, amongst other things) retained the original's jeep and helicopter pairing but flipped the view to become a smart vertical shooter.



#### Parasol Stars (1992)

The further, brolly-bashing adventures of Bub and Bob were developed by Taito for the PC Engine rather than arcades. Ocean then picked up the rights and converted the game to computers and consoles.



## COIN-OP CONVERSIONS



How Jack fared when he made the jump to computers and consoles



#### Atari XL/XE

Like the MSX-2 version, this homebrew (Issue 58) and awarded 90 per cent – a fair score for this impressive Atari 8-bit conversion. A guick glance at those chubby sprites reveals that this is based on the divisive Commodore 64. It's an improvement though, with extra space to manoeuvre and more responsive controls. The game requires a hefty 320Kb of RAM, so running it on real

hardware may be tricky. But it's worth emulating to see how the C64 version could have turned out with some extra work.



#### **ZX Spectrum**

This is one of the most celebrated arcade conversions on the Speccy and it's not hard to see why. It features nicely detailed graphics, decent sound effects (the old beeper putting in a lively performance) and quick, responsive controls. It's basically as close to the coin-op as Speccy owners could genuinely expect. Perhaps the only problem is the backdrops which, while well drawn, are slightly too prominent, causing Jack and his enemies to sometimes get 'lost'. A minor issue though, and it certainly doesn't take the shine off this great game.



Released in 2004 by the Kralizec team, this heady homebrew port was reviewed in an early issue of Retro Gamer (Issue 13, back issue fans) and awarded 90 per cent. The high score was definitely deserved as this is a sterling piece of work. The graphics and sound are authentic (the in-game music from the coin-op is carried over, unlike other home versions) and the

gameplay is equally true to the original. If you discount the PS2/Xbox versions, which are arcade perfect, this is the best, most faithful Bomb Jack conversion available.





#### SG-1000

The Master System never received a version of Bomb Jack yet the game did appear on the earlier Sega console, the SG-1000. And it's a fine attempt, courtesy of Sega itself, who obviously knew how to get the best out of the modest hardware. The character graphics are crude and the bombs look like boxed pumpkins, but the gameplay is fast, tight and admirably close to the coin-op original. Years later Bomb Jack was unofficially released for the MSX-1 and it was this version that was ported rather than any of the other Z80 releases.



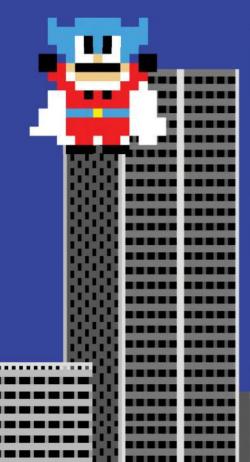
#### **Game Boy**

Released in 1992, this version might have been late to the party but it was well worth the wait. The Game Boy was often burdened with overly-ambitious conversions, so it's pleasing to find that Bomb Jack's single-screen play is a perfect fit for the Nintendo handheld. The graphics are crisp and show up well on the tiny display

and the game zips along at a nice speed. The sound is great too, featuring a couple of compositions that play the Game Over screen. A top job all round.

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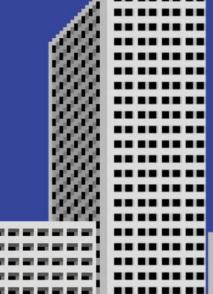






#### PC-8801

The NEC computer, obscure outside of Japan, was home to a surprisingly large videogame library that included a reasonable conversion of Bomb Jack. Graphically it has to be the most ghastly version ever released! The colours are garish beyond belief and to top it off, the platforms and borders are all rainbow-coloured. Character movement is a bit choppy and prone to flickering, but the game plays well enough. The PC-8801 featured a capable sound chip that's put to good use, rattling out some



#### **ULTIMATE GUIDE: BOMB JACK**



#### Commodore 16

The C16 was often home to horrible coin-op ports, and in that dubious regard this doesn't disappoint. The graphics are messy, movement is jerky, sound is spasmodic – and that's being kind. Due to lack of memory, there are only two backdrops, and to view the second you have to load the other side of the tape! The real killer though is the difficulty level which is ridiculous. It's possible to get chomped by a bird within two seconds of starting a game. This is one platform where Bomb Jack II was better.

# PLAVER2 PLAVER2 ROUND 91 FIGHSCORE 5100 Slits

#### ST/Amiga

Arriving several years after Elite's 8-bit attempts, you'd expect the ST and Amiga versions to be pretty much arcade perfect. Visually they're not far off, but both suffer from sluggish and twitchy character movement. Being able to zoom smoothly around the screen is one of the coin-op's key assets but it's just not represented here and it really spoils things. There's a curious STOS/AMOS feel to the whole game. Both versions are more or less identical, which explains them being grouped together, although the sound on the Amiga sound is slightly better.

#### Amstrad CPC

No sign of a lazy Spectrum port here, thankfully. This dedicated CPC version is genuinely delightful – there's a copious amount of colour splashed around and plenty of authentic arcade sounds accompanying play (it's just a shame there's no option for in-game music). While colourful, the characters do lack detail. Jack's face, for example, is just a white blob, so some of the fun expressions seen in other versions are missing. Overall though, this is (just about) the best of Elite's Bomb Jack conversions for 8-bit computers.





#### Commodore 64

The SID chip is given a good run-out here, with catchy tunes (care of Mark Cooksey) popping up at every opportunity. This is not to the detriment of other areas as this is a decent enough conversion featuring the fast, fluid gameplay of the original. But visually something is a little off, at least when compared to the coin-op. The sprites are too chunky so the action plays out in somewhat cramped conditions. On the upside this enhances the game's cute, cartoon feel. The C64 version is not poor or wrong, just different.



The versions for the PlayStation 2 and Xbox are identical to each other so can be spoken about in the same breath. Both are included in Tecmo arcade compilations and are essentially arcade perfect – the emulation really is spot on. A few additional game options would have been welcome, as those that are included are just the coin-op's dip switch difficulty settings (you can alter the speed of the birds, the number of enemies and so on). Screen settings are limited to zooming in and out.



## MONOCHROME MAKEOVER

How Alberto Gonzalez and Ricardo Fernandez ported Bomb Jack to the Game Boy

How did you land the *Bomb Jack* job initially?

Alberto Gonzalez: At the time our employers, New Frontier, were working very closely with the European publisher Infogrames. We did many 8-bit versions of its 16-bit games. Infogrames got the licence and entrusted the conversion to us.

Did you have access to the arcade version during development?

AG: Yes, they sent us the arcade board but we had no place to plug it in! So in the end we used the Spectrum version as a reference. We did have some input from Tecmo to polish it, mainly relating to the control of the character like pressing down on the pad while falling to fall faster.

Tell us a little about the music.

AG: I composed and programmed all the sounds and music in the

game. I didn't know much about the sound of original arcade so I composed new music, although for the in-game music I used the Atari ST version as a reference. There's a video of me on Facebook playing a prototype ROM with the very same Game Boy I used for composing the music (tinyurl.com/nle67p4).

Because the Game Boy screen was small, did you ever consider making the display scroll like Taito did with the Game Boy version of *Bubble Bobble*?

Ricardo Fernandez: No not really. For us it was very important to see all the action at once, so we immediately ruled out any kind of scroll.

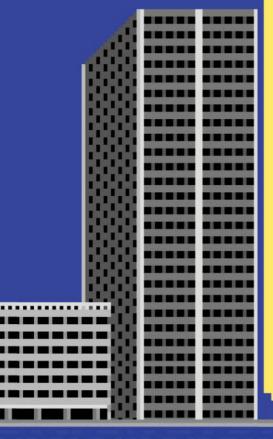
How did you find coding for the Game Boy?

RF: It was not hard, it was actually pretty fun. I learned to

» Ricardo (left) coded the conversion while



program on the Spectrum and the assembler code is very similar between both machines so it wasn't hard to adapt. It took us approximately four months to finish the game. For a conversion of this kind you can't use too much from other versions, so the graphics, code and music all had to be created.



## Arcade games that never made it home UNCONVERTED

## **MACH BREAKERS**

■ Developer: Namco ■ Year: 1994 ■ Genre: Sports

■ By the mid-Nineties, regular athletics games were no longer enough for gamers - or at least, that was Namco's perspective. Eschewing the charms of real-world athletes like Daley Thompson, Numan Athletics was a cult hit featuring superhuman athletes. Namco was pleased enough with its performance that it quickly put a sequel into production, and Mach Breakers arrived the next year.

Mach Breakers offers players a choice of seven extraordinary individuals with ordinary names, like the American all-rounder Johnny and the Japanese speedster Makoto. They're pitted against each other in a variety of events, and while the opening sprint is just extraordinarily fast, things quickly turn bizarre. There's no 110-metre hurdles event here – instead your chosen superhuman needs to kick their way through thick walls of ice. Even stranger events await, from monster-hauling to missile-chucking, and even miniature shoot-'em-up sections that resemble a light version of Atari's classic Tempest.

It's a rather excellent multiplayer game, with up to four players able to join in and simple controls

to allow even first-timers a fair chance of success. This is aided by the game's structural improvements over the original Numan Athletics - events are now easier to pass and players are offered a choice of events after the initial sprint is complete. The game is visually appealing too, with the kind of gigantic sprites and scaling effects that had become commonplace in 2D games by the mid-Nineties. In fact, much of the game's appeal lies in the sense of humour conveyed by the visuals, as it conjures up some ridiculous sights. Our favourite is the Godzilla stomp that follows a failed monster-hauling session.

It's not hard to see why Mach Breakers didn't make it home, as it's one of those titles which clearly illustrates the differing expectations of the home and arcade markets - there's simply not enough content here to justify a home release, especially given the multitude of conversions that would have been needed in the generational transition of the mid-Nineties. It's a multiplayer classic that is at its best when swallowing coins, and we're glad that Namco recognised that.



Mach Breaker's predecessor Numan Athletics is similarly awesome and features events including train-pushing and building-jumping. If you're looking to pick up the home release though, you might be in for a bit of a struggle - it was released exclusively in Japan.



>> Hauling a Godzilla-style monster along is one of the most impressive sites the game has to offer, but it's no pushover - precise timing is needed to succeed.

"> There's no joystick usage at all in Mach Breakers – every action takes place across the three buttons, with those on the left and right filling in for directions.

)) Characters are varied and play uniquely, with participants rated on their performance in speed and strength. Choose wisely to compensate for the events you're not so hot at!

)) It's clear that the athletes in Mach Breakers are more than just human, with manga-style superhero flourishes accompanying many of the most impressive in-game actions.



# BEST LEFT IN THE ARCADE LORD OF GUN

Developer: IGS Year: 1994 Genre: Lightgun shoot-'em-up

■ Lord Of Gun aims to offer variety to players, with each stage offering a different setting and new weaponry. However, almost every aspect of the game is laughably bad. The visuals are awful, featuring unattractive sprites with some of the most atrocious animations to have appeared in a Nineties arcade game. This would be forgivable if the game played well, but there is no semblance of a difficulty curve on show. Hostages are often identical to enemies, meaning that players will be relying on shouts of "I'm a hostage" to identify them – always a solid design choice in noisy arcades.

While Virtua Cop arrived in the same year as Lord Of Gun, it's a little unfair to draw a comparison between the two – they were developed for very different markets by companies in wildly different positions. However, it's harder to forgive the fact that Lord Of Gun struggles in comparison with Operation Wolf, a game released seven years earlier. By failing to recognise the advances made in the intervening years by games like Alien 3: The Gun and Steel Gunner, IGS doomed Lord Of Gun to irrelevance. Thankfully, the developer left the genre alone entirely in the following years.



## **HOT SHOCKER**

Developer: E G Felaco Year: 1982 Genre: Maze



» Each stage has a distinct colour scheme, including one

Hot Shocker is one of the stranger releases of the early arcade market. The game resembles Konami's early release Amidar, but has moved from a grid format to an octagonal maze that resembles a spider's web. You're tasked with avoiding enemies, while visiting every part of the maze with wire in order to connect phone lines and move onto the next level. Most of them move around the web and only serve to slow you down in order for the more lethal enemies to catch up to you, but a lightbulb appearing at the fringes will zap careless players.

The main addition to the *Amidar* formula is that of a power-up, which gives your hero a temporary boost

in the form of speed and invincibility. It resembles an enemy with different colouring though, so it's easy to miss. *Hot Shocker*'s failure to leave the arcade is easy enough to explain – as the only game manufactured by E G Felaco and a pretty derivative one, there was no mileage in licensing the game for home systems. And if you were a clone programmer, was there any sense in skipping the innovator to clone the imitator? No, there was not.

#### **CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE**

#### **AMIDAR** 1981

Amidar was the obvious inspiration for Hot Shocker, and is easily the more famous game. Konami's game was only converted to the Atari 2600 officially, but a large number of unofficial clones exist for a variety of formats including Cuthbert Goes Walkabout, Traxx, Crazy Tracer and Crazy Painter.



#### **CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE**

#### **MIDNIGHT RUN** 1995

As we mentioned, Winding Heat's predecessor did manage to make it home. A PlayStation version was released in 1997, exclusively in Japan. Be warned, though – before you rush to import it, know that the conversion is no classic, thanks to some jerky visuals and sloppy handling.



## WINDING HEAT

■ Developer: Konami ■ Year: 1996 ■ Genre: Racing

■ Konami certainly waited a long time to follow up on Road Fighter – despite making its debut in 1984, a sequel didn't appear until the mid-Nineties. Luckily for fans of that sequel, the 1995 release Midnight Run, a new game was much quicker to arrive as Konami released Winding Heat just a year later.

Winding Heat offers a surprisingly large number of cars, with 14 available – each of which also has multiple tuning options. The excess continues in the on-track action, as while only four drivers take part in each race, they've got to contend with heavy traffic as the races take place on public roads, which bring to mind the mountain passes of the Initial D series. Races are fun and frantic thanks to some track design that holds up well, but the handling is disconcertingly loose.



» There might only be four racers, but the battles are always intense on *Winding Heat*'s mountain passes.

With market preferences shifting towards more realistic racers like *Gran Turismo*, arcade racing games were having a hard time attracting attention in the console market. It's likely that *Winding Heat* didn't make it home for that reason – its predecessor, which did manage to reach the PlayStation in 1997, never gained much of a reputation.

# PAPERBOY

When Paperboy rode in to arcades in 1984 he brought with him colourful cartoon visuals, a unique control method and fun gameplay. Darran Jones speaks to creators John Salwitz and Dave Ralston and finds out how they managed to create the ultimate busman's holiday



#### THE MAKING OF: PAPERBOY

t's amazing what effect alcohol can have on you once it's swilling around your innards. Some people get an increased sense of confidence, while others suffer from a lack of judgement that sees them making decisions they'd otherwise normally never consider. In the case of John Salwitz (currently senior development director at Electronic Arts) and Dave Ralston (a designer for Locomotive Games) the aforementioned alcohol consumption allowed them to overcome a stumbling block on one of the most popular games of 1984: Atari's Paperboy.

"Back in those days Atari was famous for having Beer Fridays," laughs Dave Ralston who, along with Will Noble, was Paperboy's designer and lead artist. "We had a tapper there on the premises and one particular Friday there had been a party; when John and I came in the next day there was still plenty of beer in the keg. Anyway, we dragged it outside onto this atrium and did some brainstorming."

"I think that was the magic moment when everything clicked," agrees John, Paperboy's lead programmer. "Dave had these wonderful storyboards that showed a projection of the entire street and we literally populated it that very day. We probably knocked out around 60-70 percent of where all the characters in the game would finally end up."

"We were probably stupid for never doing that sooner," laughs Dave. The laughter continues throughout our



» As the week progressed, the obstacles got harder and harder to negotiate

40-minute interview and it soon becomes obvious that the two friends both have a huge amount of respect for each other and the game that they brought kicking and screaming into the arcades after a 24-month gestation period. But where did the original concept first come from?

"There had been a game that had just come out in the arcades called Zaxxon which had this really cool isometric perspective and it felt really fresh," recalls Dave. "We saw it and realised that the isometric perspective would offer

a very good view of the action in our game and that it would work far better than a side scroller or a top-down. As for the game itself it grew out of the fact that there were five boys in my family and I was the last one and we were all paperboys, so I just took it from there. I think I was a really good paperboy. In fact, I seem to remember that I was a great paperboy," he continues. "The one thing I can remember about those days is driving around as a family and seeing newspapers on roofs and in bushes and stuff. Not everyone was a good paperboy in real life and I think that was at the heart of the idea. I just thought it would be an interesting twist for a game."

Interesting Paperboy most certainly was. Most games of the time saw you shooting down wave upon wave of vicious aliens, negotiating mazes or jumping across simplistic platforms; they certainly didn't allow you to participate in your part-time job.

Set over seven days, your task was to deliver papers to subscribers, while causing as much damage as possible to the homes of non-subscribers. Papers could be replenished en route and once vou'd completed vour daily round vou could take part in a short but exhilarating obstacle course. It may have sounded simplistic, but with each street being littered with obstacles it took real skill to negotiate them, especially if you tackled 'Hard Way', *Paperboy*'s final street.

Paperboy may have been exciting and fresh back in the early Eighties, but those beautiful visuals, state-of-the-art controller and slick gameplay did come at a price: the aforementioned 24-month

"It took two years mainly due to some of the changes we had to make along the way," explains Dave. "It was pretty much

Don Traeger may have l instrumental to Paperboy's final success, but that didn't mean that Dave and the rest of the team liked to make things easy for him (all in the name of a good joke, you understand). "I remember that we made this bogus earnings report for him," recalls Dave, which instantly jogs John's memory and sends him into guffaws of merriment.

"It was our first field test when you'd put the game out in an arcade, and I think Don must have gone on vacation right after it happened. Anyway, he went away for a whole week and while he was absent we got somebody in marketing (probably Jackie Sherman) to type up an earnings report so that it looked like all the others, except of course, the earnings were horrible. It just showed that the game had absolutely tanked and then I just wrote across the front of it 'Project Cancelled'. We just left it on Don's desk and waited for him to come back from vacation. It was far from the truth as it actually tested very well."





- » PUBLISHER: ATARI
- » **DEVELOPERS:** JOHN SALWITZ
- » RFI FASED: 1984
- » PLATFORMS: ARCADE, VARIOUS
- » GENRE: ACTION







everything really, from changes in the schematic style, to alterations to the actual controller. It certainly took us a while to figure all those things out."

Fortunately, it wasn't all bad news, as one of the main differences – and for the two men, the most satisfying - was the change in hardware, which gave

John, in particular, far more freedom than when the project had first started. "Originally Paperboy started off life as a low-resolution game (about 320 x 240 pixels) before Doug Snyder created the new medium-resolution System II board for it," begins John. Which explains why it looks very different to earlier

games of the same period. "The hardware changed substantially and schematically, it basically went through a radical shift."

As well as having to deal with the change in hardware, the cost of the machines meant that the game had to be created as efficiently as possible, which in turn added to Paperboy's development time. "That game is literally made up of little 8x8 blocks," continues John. "The backgrounds were painstakingly created one by one; it's a lot like building with bricks, except the bricks have already been painted. The animations and characters were built using some pretty primitive tools, and so due to the cost of putting all that together, we couldn't really do a lot of extra things and we were very deliberate when putting it all together."

Paperboy's conception may have been long and arduous, but one thing that did make a difference was the sheer amount of playtesting that the game went through. Over the course of its two-year development time, Paperboy went through numerous focus groups



e) C64, (Below left to right)



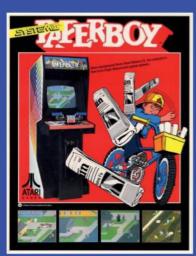








# "WE DID HAVE A JOYSTICH ORIGINALLY, BUT WHEN WE FOCUSED THE GAME WITH (IT) IN PLACE, IT JUST DIDN'T GO DOWN WELL AT ALL... WE WANTED TO TRY SOMETHING A LITTLE MORE UNIQUE" DAVE RALSTON



» The original arcade flyer. Note the machine shot showing those famous handlebars

and playtests before it was eventually released to a more than satisfied public.

When Atari had a new game in development it would simply take a prototype down to a local arcade, leave it in there for the day and judge its success on the amount of quarters that rolled in. It was a concept that wasn't lost on John and it also allowed one of the other key players in *Paperboy* to come to the foreground: marketing rep Don Traeger.

"Atari's playtesting process was the most beautiful test there was; it really doesn't get any better," gushes John. "We did a lot of focus group testing as well and that was where Don Traeger really started to get involved. In fact, Don is a very big part of the reason why *Paperboy* ever got finished, because he was not only the original marketing partner on it, but he also came in at a point in the game where we were really struggling.

"We'd just had this really horrific focus group, and it was just heartbreaking and frustrating for the team because we really cared about the product we had created. So anyway, he came in, ran that focus group, came out and everyone – I mean everyone – was saying horrible things about the game. Afterwards he comes out with this really big smile and says, 'That was great, we learned a lot from that.' After that he proceeded to help us really understand what was going on."

Traeger played another important role in *Paperboy*: that of the actual Paperboy himself. Asking about the origins of *Paperboy*'s speech brought many a laugh from John until he admitted that the main character's voice belonged to none other than Traeger, who's now CEO of Locomotive Games. But how does being the voice of a videogame character stack up to being a CEO? "To this day he takes a lot of pride in the fact that he was the voice of the Paperboy and people still remember him for that," laughs John. "It was no actor we used; it was just the marketing guy."

While Traeger started taking control of *Paperboy*'s focus groups, Dave and John quickly found out that one of the easiest ways of getting feedback for the game was to simply carry on working on it. "One of the other key ways that you did testing at Atari was that if anyone was going to walk over to your lab or cubicle you would just let them play the game, which is amazingly dissimilar to the way things happen these days," says John. "There was just so much casual play from

other people in the building that I think it was one of the best ways that you could ever understand what really did and didn't work. You could tell when your game was good because people were coming over at lunch and plenty of other times and were literally interrupting your work just so they could have one more go. We'd just sit there and watch them play."

While plenty of playtesting ensured that *Paperboy* was a hit with its target audience once it was eventually released, there were still plenty of other problems that the team needed to solve. While the most recognisable aspect of the arcade machine is the shining chrome handlebars that adorn the front of it, they weren't in place at the beginning of *Paperboy*'s conception.

"We did have a joystick originally," begins Dave, "but when we focused the game with the joystick in place, it just didn't go down well at all.

"I think the joystick was confusing at the time because of the perspective that we were using," he continues. "We had always had something at the back of our minds that we wanted to try something a little more unique and the joystick feedback that we received kind of confirmed that." Leaving the joystick idea behind, John and Dave left the unique control mechanism — "it was basically a Star Wars flight controller that was just modified for Paperboy" — in the more than capable hands of Milt Loper.

"Atari at that time had a very active mechanical shop," begins John, when we ask him about the creation of those iconic handlebars. "It was amazing; those guys could pretty much build anything and it was part of Dave's philosophy that we should always try and innovate in all things. In the end we decided that the controls were just another area that we had a chance to innovate in. You also have to keep in mind that back in the early Eighties, we didn't know for sure



» Get hit by a car and you certainly knew about it.

#### DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

720

SYSTEM: ARCADE YEAR: 1986

KLAX

SYSTEM: ARCADE

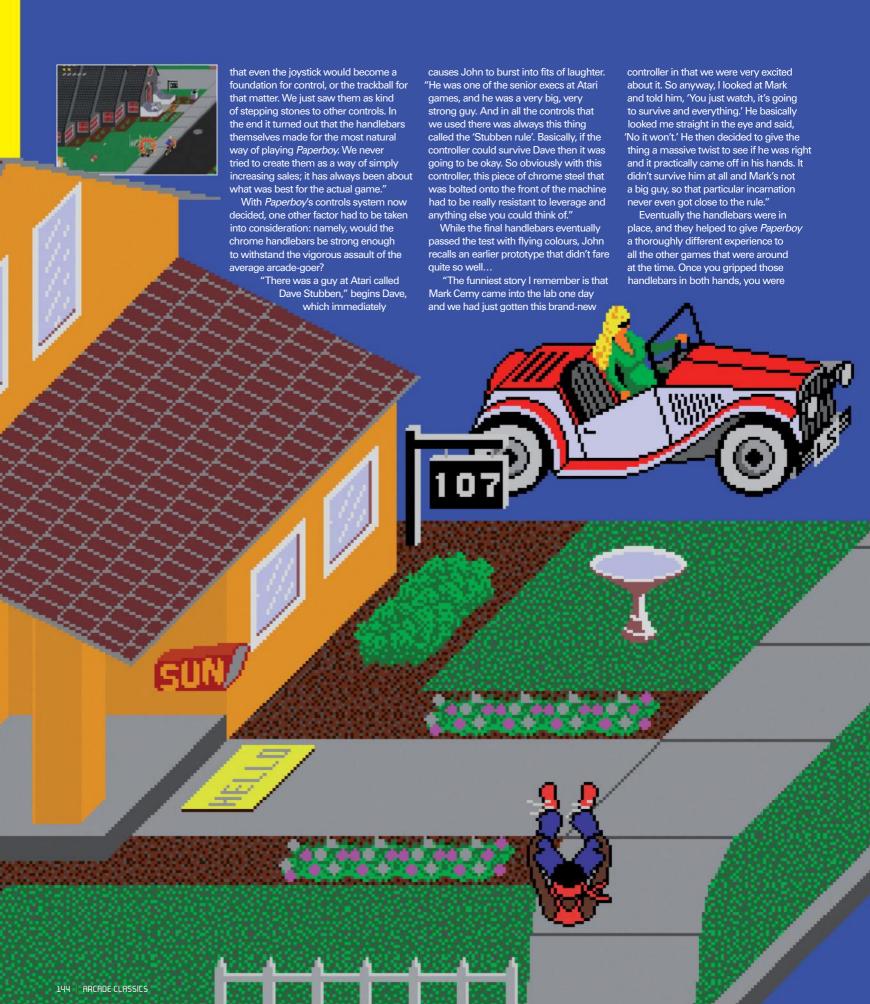
RAMPART (PICTURED) SYSTEM: ARCADE



## CONVERSION CAPERS

With the arcade game proving to be so popular, Paperboy quickly started appearing on various home consoles and computers. Indeed, it was recently released on the 360's Xbox Live Arcade, but neither Dave nor John have had a chance to play it yet.
"I remember the NES version, for me at least, being a huge surprise," recalls John. "Right after we did *Paperboy*, we dove into 720° and right after that it was Cyberball and right after that it was Rampart - we were just so focused on our own work. We never thought about how we could continue marketing a product, we were all about what can we do next, and it always had to be completely different. If I'm truthful we were coin-op purists and for us, coin-op hardware was so much more powerful than anything that was in the home. So I think the real truth is that we probably looked down our noses at anything that wasn't coin-op at the time, purely because of the difference in hardware and what you could do with it. At the time I don't think we understood the potential of home sales - this was Atari after all – and we had just got through the VCS nightmares and so we didn't really have an appreciation of what Nintendo was doing at the time at all until it really took off."





### THE MAKING OF: PAPERBOY

ready to set off on your delivery route through suburban America. With its brightly coloured houses, traditional mail boxes and copious amounts of speech, you could almost imagine that you were actually riding down a sidewalk and delivering papers. To further add to the realism, John and Dave ensured that the majority of obstacles you encountered also added to the authenticity. Therefore, dangerous dogs would chase you up the street, huge cars and motorcycles would zip across each road's junctions, and there were even remote controlled cars and self-aware lawn mowers to avoid. While the hazards would get stranger the further you progressed, they were nothing like the obstacles that John and Dave had originally intended to use...

"Initially, we wanted Paperboy to have a surreal feel to it," explains John, about the game's distinctive look. "We went crazy for a while and the focus groups that saw it just didn't get it," says Dave. "We had things like speedboats going down the middle of the street, giant snails at the various junctions and even ducks in business suits that would walk up and down the sidewalk. Just really bizarre stuff like that," he chuckles. "The actual perspective was the same, the look of the art style was the same, and it was just all these wacky characters that weren't received very well.

"For some reason when people rode down the street they just didn't expect to see them," continues John. "Which is strange," interjects Dave who, like John, is once again fighting back laughter. "I see these things all the time."

Dave may well be used to seeing the grim reaper and unicycle-riding punks whenever he goes for a Sunday drive, but one thing that is noticeably absent from Paperboy is the ability to play as an actual girl. As John explains, the absence of a female delivery girl was down to memory restrictions and not for any other reason.

"Physically, our ability to put more than one character into that hardware would have been very expensive at the time," he tells us. "The system constraints just stopped you from doing a lot of things and you were literally counting every byte you were putting into things. The central character of the game used an enormous amount of memory, particularly graphics memory (EEPROM) so the storage of that would have been very prohibitive. So we were really stuck with a single character no matter what we did. As for the choice

have had the safety commission coming down on us even more.'

Despite numerous playtests, stressful focus groups and snapped handlebars at various points in its creation, Paperboy was a huge success for Atari and remains a beloved classic to many gamers today. With the benefit of 30 years of hindsight we are eager to know what changes John and Dave would have made to the game if they'd had the time and opportunity.

"One thing we did think about at the time was to ship Paperboy as a serialised game," reveals John. "At the time everything in arcades was based on how much replay you would get out of it, so we did once consider shipping out just Easy Street and then releasing the other two roads three to six months later. I think if we'd gone with this serialised release we would have sold more units."

"Man, that's greed, pure greed," laughs Dave. "If I was to return to Paperboy today the only element I can think of expanding would be the whole BMX biking side of the game and maybe working a trick-based scoring system



» At the beginning of each day you'd be immediately told how many subscribers you had left



» As a reward after finishing your paper round, you got to ride along an obstacle course

### "OUR ABILITY TO PUT MORE THAN ONE CHARACTER INTO THAT HARDWARE WOULD HAVE BEEN VERY EXPENSIVE AT THE TIME... YOU WERE LITERALLY COUNTING EVERY BYTE" JOHN SALWITZ



» Mindscape's sequel was so bad, this is the only mention we're going to give it. The N64 version wasn't much better.

between whether it should have been a paperboy or a papergirl, you just kind of go with the thing that's the most obvious, except of course for the giant snails and all those other things... I'm sure we talked about it at the time, but there would have been no practical way for us to get more than one character in the original game."

With the thought of what didn't make it into the game still fresh in their minds, we are keen to ask the pair what other aspects of Paperboy ended up on the cutting room floor.

"Well, I remember just how much trouble we went to in trying to give the Paperboy a throwing animation," muses Dave as he ponders the question. "In the end though it was proving to be such a nightmare we just decided that he shoots them out of his head." Other missing features included proper physics and motion that would see newspapers bounce off walls or get caught in hedges; a larger obstacle course, which at one stage was even going to be the basis for a sequel; and the ability to ride down the other side of the street. "I particularly liked this one," admits Dave, "and we talked about how we would implement it for ages. We initially talked about going down the other side of the street and having it go in the reverse direction and bringing more traffic into play, but then we would

into it. You could have style points for throwing papers while in a jump, or doing a flip or whatever. I think that would have worked really well...

While Dave muses about his super-athletic Paperboy that was never to be, we were keen to ask John why he thinks their creation remains so enjoyable to so many of today's gamers. "We had a wonderful team," he concludes after a brief pause, "and the people involved are still my very dear friends. We had a really good time working together, and to be able to work with four or five people and have each of them focused on a completely different part of the game and still be able to talk about it afterwards is a really rare and wonderful experience. I feel Paperboy was successful because the team was successful."



» Successfully finishing the obstacle course saw you being treated with a pleasant congratulations screer

### STILL GOING

Amazingly, Atari's Paperboy is still wowing gamers, and it's on Microsoft's 360 of all things. Converted by Digital Eclipse, the Xbox Live version of Paperboy features online leader boards, a variety of achievements (some of which are incredibly hard to earn) and an assortment of online two-player games. Sadly, while the game is as enjoyable as ever - although if we're brutally honest, the 360's D-pad isn't a match for the arcade machine's handlebars taking the title online wasn't perhaps the smartest move that Digital Eclipse has ever made, mainly because it's just so damned laggy. Still, it's certainly not bad for 400 points (around £3.50) and while an updated look would have been nice it certainly beats being a paperboy for real





### **Asteroids**

SHOOT, SHOOT AND SHOOT AGAIN

# Centipede. this incredib Rains and D As with r of Asteroids Of Fourse w

» ATARI, INC » ARCADE » 1979

**Ed Logg is a genius.** When he worked at Atari he was involved in a large number of hit games for the company, from *Super Breakout* to *Gauntlet* and

.

Centipede. One of his most memorable achievements, however, is this incredible shooter from 1979, which he designed alongside Lyle Rains and Dominic Walsh.

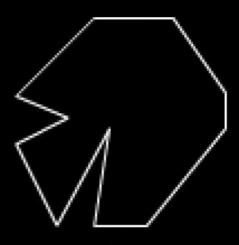
As with many arcade games of the golden period, the concept of *Asteroids* is simple: shoot down as many asteroids as possible. Of course, while the idea is simplistic, the gameplay is anything but. Asteroids appear on screen and you shoot them down. As they are shot, they break into smaller pieces, meaning there's a higher chance of colliding with smaller debris.

Your ship is far from defenceless, equipped with a thruster, but this must be managed carefully as it takes a while to slow down, meaning it's all too easy to fly into an errant asteroid. As more pieces fill the screen, the game gets incredibly tense as you try to find a safe place. You can send your ship into hyperspace, which may get you out of the way of an incoming rock, but the more you use it, the more time you'll have added somewhere you don't want it.

Add a couple of highly accurate flying saucers that appear at certain stages to hurry you along, and *Asteroids* is a game like no other. Every game plays out differently, meaning it is always fresh and exciting. Although it received several ports and sequels in the years that followed, nothing is as good as the original. A true arcade classic.













"Operation initiated! Rescue hostages!" On hearing this command, gun in hand, players engaged in Operation Wolf, the first in Taito's influential series of military shooters. Martyn Carroll lobs a grenade and blows the lid off the complete series

s you play Operation Wolf and the bodies pile up you wonder if it's even possible to fail. Enemy soldiers perish in an instant as the screen is sprayed with gunfire and rocked by explosions. It really is difficult to miss and success seems guaranteed.

Taito must have been thinking much the same when it readied the game for its Japanese debut in November 1987. The developer didn't need to plant the game in test locations to know that it had created a sure-fire hit. Operation Wolf was one of those rare titles where all of the key elements were just right. First off, the concept was brilliant. Taito took the shooting gallery games from time immemorial and created a slick new version for the Eighties arcade. It wasn't the firm's first gun game - New York Captor (1985) and Cycle Shooter (1986) predated it - but these were simplistic and cartoony. Operation Wolf was far more contemporary, running

on 68000-powered hardware, as opposed to Z80 setups. The visuals were cutting edge for their time, with differently-sized enemies providing a sense of perspective, capped by the supersized soldiers who'd pop-up in your face and open fire.

The POW rescue theme added a huge amount to the game's appeal. This was no carnival shootout with tin cans; this was an intense battle where you were up against enemy militia armed to the teeth. Taito clearly tapped into that jingoistic vein of Eighties American cinema where movies like *Missing In Action, Rambo* 



and Commando became hits around the world. You played an anonymous Green Beret but his name might well have been James Braddock, John Rambo or John Matrix.

Then there was the gun. Mounted on the front of the game's hulking great cab was a mock submachine gun. Sticking guns onto cabs wasn't a new thing – Midway has been doing it since the Sixties, first on mechanical games and later on videogames, and Taito itself released a gun game called Attack in 1976. The trend continued into the early Eighties with titles such as Mazer Blazer from Stern and Turkey Shoot from Williams. But the Operation Wolf gun was a doozy, being based on an Uzi 9mm. It was no plastic prop – it was finished

» [Arcade] Enemies come thick and fast, even on the opening Communication



in metal and incorporated a geared motor so you felt the kick when you pulled the trigger. The gun was a gimmick, yes, but it didn't look and feel like a gimmick. The finishing touch was a red button next to the barrel which you used to fire grenade rockets.

The operation of the gun has been a source of confusion over the years. Is it a lightgun or is it a gun that works like a joystick? The presence of an optic sensor inside the gun proves that it is a lightgun. You can also tell by the way the screen flashes white each time a shot if fired - this is to brighten to screen so that the gun's position can be registered. And if vou're still not convinced, try playing the game with your hand covering the end of the gun. No light no firefight.



» [Arcade] Grenades are a great option when armoured

There's also some confusion over the level structure and whether stages must be played in order or not. The answer to that lies in a dipswitch setting. When 'Language' is set to 'English' you play the game's six stages in order, beginning with the Communication Setup and ending with the Airport. Yet when the switch is set to 'Japanese' more than just the language changes. Instead you can choose which of the first four stages you wish to play from Communication Setup, Village, Power Magazine and Jungle. By completing Jungle you will open up Concentration Camp which leads to the Airport, so in the Japanese version it's possible to finish the game by completing just three stages. However such hastiness is penalised. If you don't complete Communication Setup, for example, the number of enemies increases in each stage (because, as the story goes, the enemy is able to radio in reinforcements). Similarly, the Village stage rewards you with a health boost while Power Magazine tops up vour ammo. As such the Japanese version includes an element of strategy as you can choose which of the initial stages are worth the effort.



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n addition to the English and Japanese versions there's a further intriguing variation: original and emulated. If

you've played Operation Wolf using MAME, or on the 'arcade perfect' Taito Legends collection released in 2005, you may have noticed that a few things don't tally with your memories of playing the game in the arcades. The most obvious omission is a 'boss' encounter at the end of the Jungle stage where you have to shoot an army general who's holding a female hostage. Also missing are

» [Arcade] When using MAME the bonus 'Warning!' screens can be accessed by using a cheat.



### 

### Former Ocean France programmer Christophe Gomez reveals the story behind the 16-bit versions of Operation Wolf



#### Did you have access to the coin-op during the development?

Not at the beginning. We got it very late, toward the end of the project, and it

helped me tune the game. But we did receive all the art assets from the arcade. I remember that they came in a bunch of 16x16 blocks, each using its own palette of 16 colours. It was a real work of patience to recreate everything.

### Which was the lead platform? The Atari ST or Amiga?

Atari ST was the lead. I chose it because I was more familiar with it. Midway through development, once the main technical hurdles had been resolved, we started porting my code to the

Commodore Amiga in order to make sure we were maintaining compatibility.

#### What would you say was the biggest technical challenge you faced?

The arcade game was famous for its smooth horizontal scrolling and huge sprites - two things that the Atari ST wasn't very good at! So this was the main challenge. And then the more features I added the more I needed to optimise the code so it would run smoothly. I had to rewrite some significant parts of the code several times in order to deliver an enjoyable experience to players.

#### How long did the development take? Were you pressured to get the game out before Christmas?

I believe it took six to eight months to complete it. And yes, there was a lot of pressure to release before Christmas. This industry will never change. Luckily we did not have to cut corners in order to release on time. I was young and stubborn so I wouldn't have let the game go if it wasn't finished.

#### There's an open-top tank that's specifically unique to your version. Did you add this?

I don't recall creating new vehicles. If my memory is correct I think there were some vehicles in the assets we received that were not used in the arcade game.

#### Were you pleased with the finished game, and would you have done anything different given the chance?

I was very happy with the reviews. My goal was to be as close to the arcade as possible and I believe I managed to do this, considering the limitations of

the machines then. I wish I could have implemented support for a lightgun. After leaving Ocean I joined Loriciels and helped with the Atari ST version of its West Phaser game, which was shipping with a lightgun. I even created a version of Operation Wolf which worked with the gun but, unfortunately, Ocean and Loriciels never reached an agreement about it. This would have been the ultimate version of Operation Wolf.



» [Amiga] The unique open-top tank makes an appearance in Ocean's 68000 version.



## There was no blood on show but the body count was off the scale and the soundtrack was a chorus of screams 33

» [Arcade] Shoot the soldier! Shoot the coconut! DON'T shoot

the intermission scenes that pop up between stages. These see you shooting soldiers and/or helicopters on a static screen. It's possible to access these intermissions using a cheat in MAME, and the Jungle boss graphics are present in the ROM, so it's a mystery as to why they don't appear under emulation.

Operation Wolf made its UK debut at London's Associated Leisure Preview show in October 1987 and staff from the Emap stable of magazines were there to see Taito's latest offering. Commodore User's Mike Pattenden was bowled over. "Forget After Burner." he reported. brushing aside Sega's big release, "I have just played the Game Of The Year and much of next year too. Operation Wolf is a brilliant game." Clare Edgeley from Computer & Video Games was also impressed. "The game is extremely playable," she wrote. "The action's non-stop and doesn't let up for a second."

The reaction was generally excellent, although most reviewers did comment on the game's level

of violence. There was no blood on show but the body count was off the scale and the soundtrack was a chorus of screams. At the time it was quite contentious, particularly in the UK, post-Hungerford massacre. Chris Jenkins of ACE magazine claimed that playing the game filled him with "bloodlust". He wrote: "Operation Wolf takes realism a little too far and raises questions as to whether these games ought not to be subject to some form of monitoring."

Perhaps more concerning for the game's target audience was the price of entry. In the UK at the time games cost 20 pence a credit, but *Operation Wolf* was one of the first where operators were encouraged to up it to 30p! This premium didn't affect the game's popularity. An *ACE* journo



» [FM Towns] The Jungle boss hostage scene, as seen in the impressive FM Towns

### THE HISTORY OF OPERATION WOLF

### **OPERATION COPYCAT**

The coin-ops that followed in the wake of Operation Wolf

#### **MECHANIZED ATTACK 1989**

■ SNK's answer to Operation Thunderbolt was released just a few months after its inspiration and actually managed to top it in the pure action stakes. And if shooting thousands of enemy soldiers wasn't enough the game also threw Terminatorstyle robots and oversized end-of-level bosses into the mix.



### LINE OF FIRE 1989

■ Sega had dabbled with gun games since its early history so it was hardly surprising to see it weigh in with its very own Operation Wolf clone. The familiar behindenemy-lines scenario was well presented, thanks to Sega's Super Scaler tech, and the game provided adequate thrills for fans of Taito's games.



#### **SPACE GUN** 1990

■ Rather than release another rat-a-tat-tat war game Taito shifted the setting to outer space for its next shooter. Inspired by Aliens, you had to rid a space station of bizarre creatures while rescuing colonists. Stages were a mix of side-scrolling and into-the-screen sections, and a special foot panel let you reverse direction.



### **BEAST BUSTERS** 1990

■ SNK upped the ante with this outrageous shooter that made *Mechanized Attack* look like a corporate paintball event. Zombies had overrun the city and the job of cleaning up was down to you and two pals. That's right – *Beast Busters* had three guns bolted to the front of the cab for triple the amount of bloody fun.



#### **STEEL GUNNER** 1991

■ Before the likes of *Point Blank* and *Time Crisis* were huge arcade hits, Namco released this fast-paced two-player shooter where you were tasked with taking down an army of manic cyborg terrorists. A souped-up sequel arrived the following year that was widely sold as a conversion kit for *Operation Thunderbolt*.



### TERMINATOR 2 1991

■ Of all the tie-ins to try and capitalise on the mega success of James Cameron's movie, this slick shooter from Midway was probably the best. The digitised graphics appear comical now but at the time they really did impress and gave the game a real movie feel. An overuse of Arnie sound bites improved things further.





How the many home versions of Operation Wolf compared to the original – and each other





### **ZX SPECTRUM**

■ The Spectrum wasn't the best at fullscreen scrolling but the team at Ocean managed to produce a surprisingly smooth and playable effort. Colour was obviously scarified to make it work, but the well-drawn graphics prevented it from becoming a monochrome mess. The preferable 128K version featured no multi-load.



### **AMSTRAD CPC**

■ The same team responsible for the Spectrum release produced this even better version for the CPC, thanks chiefly to the liberal use of vibrant colour. The only slight criticism is that the game scrolls too fast – it's like you're shooting out of the window of a speeding vehicle! It's still a very good coin-op conversion, though.



### **FM TOWNS**

■ The enigmatic Japanese computer received a fantastic version that was unique in a number of ways: there was a laser sight option, a '3D Scope' mode (that supported 3D glasses) and a full CD-audio soundtrack, making it the only version of Operation Wolf to feature in-game music. There are no half measures here.



### **AMIGA**

■ There was essentially zero difference between the Amiga and Atari ST versions, with Amiga expert Benoit Aron deftly converting the ST source. The sound was slightly better on the Amiga, as was usually the case, and it came on two disks rather than three, but owners of either machine would be happy.



### PC-DOS

■ The PC often lagged behind when it came to coin-op conversions but not here. The colours were slightly off and the sound was lacking but overall this looked and played very much like the 68000 versions. In terms of content the only real absence was the 'Warning!' scene that appeared in some other versions.



### **NES**

■ The first version of the game to hit console was something of a misfire. The graphics were too small and only a limited number of sprites appeared on the screen so it often felt a bit sparse. It did deserve points for supporting the NES Zapper, although it's debatable whether using the gun improved things much.

### THE HISTORY OF OPERATION WOLF



### **PC ENGINE**

■ Arriving at the tail end of 1990, three years after the coin-op's debut, this version was belated but brilliant nonetheless. It was based on the Japanese language version, so you were able to select your starting stage, and as a special bonus it aped the sequel by adding a two-player co-op mode.



#### **COMMODORE 64**

■ Another excellent 8-bit version from the boys at Ocean. The pace was slower, being closer to the coin-op than the Z80 versions, and most of the main features were included - in fact, all six stages were crammed into a single load. The icing of the cake was support for the third-party NEOS mouse.



### ATARI ST

Ocean France did a fine job here. The game featured all of the stages - the bonus 'Warning!' scene was slotted between stages one and two, and the Jungle boss made an appearance - and visually the game was close to the coin-op. There were just some frame-rate issues that dragged it down a notch.



### MSX

As you can tell from the screenshot this was a quick port of the Spectrum version. What you can't tell is that is runs quite a bit slower, affecting the playability a little. A homebrew version for the MSX-2 was released in 2006 that was quite similar to the NES release, but it suffered from jerky character scrolling



### **MASTER SYSTEM**

■ Visually the Master System version was quite close to the NES game, with perhaps better use of colour and more graphical detail. But the playability was vastly improved and the game stood out as the best and most complete 8-bit version available. Support for the Light Phaser sealed the deal



### PC/PS2/XB0X

■ Operation Wolf was one of 29 games included on Taito Legends, released in 2005. However, as mentioned in the main article, the game wasn't 'arcade perfect' as advertised as it was missing both the 'Warning!' scene and Jungle boss. The games also, sadly, lacked lightgun support.

recalls stepping into a London arcade and seeing seven Operation Wolf machines lined up - and he still had difficulty getting a game. Such scenes ensured that Operation Wolf would go on to become the top earning coin-op of 1988.

The game's success in the arcades attracted Ocean Software who licensed the game for conversion to home computers. The 8-bit versions were handled by Ocean's in-house team: Andrew Deakin programmed the Z80 versions (ZX Spectrum, Amstrad CPC and MSX), while Colin Porch handled coding duties on the C64. The results were generally very good, with the original's gameplay accurately replicated, and the Spectrum, CPC and C64 releases were further improved with a second version that included support for the Magnum Light Phaser lightgun. The 8-bit games did jettison a few 'bits' from the original - there was no Jungle boss, no intermission scenes and, most noticeably, no showdown against the enemy gunship. In contrast, the Atari ST and Amiga versions, which were developed by Ocean France, included all of these elements and the finished games were generally very good.

The licence paid off for Ocean. In the **UK** Operation Wolf was crowned bestselling title of Christmas 1988 – and it stayed at the top of the all-formats

chart for a further three months. It was a fan favourite too, winning three awards at the 1989 Golden Joysticks (as voted for by C&VG readers): Best 8-bit Coin-op Conversion, Best 16-bit Coin-op Conversion and Overall 8-bit Game Of The Year.

More home versions followed over the next two years. Taito itself developed the PC, NES and Master System versions, while Ving produced a deluxe disc edition for the FM Towns computer that featured an exclusive CD soundtrack. Perhaps even more interesting was NEC's PC Engine port which was the first and only version of Operation Wolfto team up two players for some co-op action. There's no prize for guessing where NEC got that idea.

s Ocean readied its home versions for release in November 1988, Taito was already about to debut

the coin-op sequel. It may have been developed in haste, to capitalise on the hit original and counter the inevitable clones that were gearing up, but Operation Thunderbolt was in many ways the perfect follow-up. It was basically a frenetic rehash of the original with an even bigger body count and enough new features to hook expectant gamers.

The basic rescue scenario returned, but there were now a total 18 hostages to liberate (up from six) and the number of stages increased from six to eight. Crucially, the stages alternated between the familiar sidescrolling view and a new quasi-3D approach where enemies rushed towards you. This scaling effect required some extra hardware grunt and the standard 68000 set-up was supplemented by the same 'sprite zooming' feature that was used in Taito's Full Throttle.

The most obvious addition, however, was the second gun. The nameless hero from the original was revealed as Roy Adams and he was partnered with the no-nonsense-

sounding **66** To beat the Hardy Jones. Taking on the game you basically enemy with a pal was undeniably fun, even if the population of a sheer number of on-screen small nation "" enemies was absurd. To

had to kill the

beat the game you basically had to kill the population of a small nation.

Rather than using lightguns the sequel utilised a pair of positional guns that directly controlled invisible cursors on the screen (although they could be made visible by collecting the new laser sight upgrade). It's not clear why Taito didn't use



» [Arcade] The sequel features three separate boss



### TIGER TAMED AND MAMED

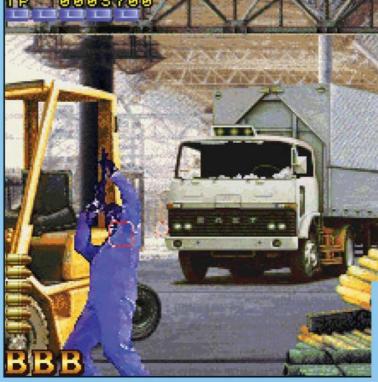
You may soon be able to emulate the final game in the series

Operation Tiger is the least well-known entry in the series and that's largely because it's unsupported by MAME. However MAME developer Ville Linde is currently looking to change that. He says: "The game seems somewhat rare and forgotten so there's definitely value in getting it running. It runs on a PowerPC-based hardware and I tend to handle most of the PowerPC systems in MAME. It also shares many hardware features with other Taito systems of the time which makes it interesting to work on."

To date Ville has managed to get the attract mode running but there's still some obstacles to overcome. "There's an emulation bug that causes the game to lock up more or less randomly. Once that's fixed the game should be close to a playable state. Sound emulation also need implementing. As with all emulation things it's hard to predict when it all comes together. Often a small discovery can lead to rapid progress over just a couple of weeks. Hopefully we'll see more improvements later this year."

For progress updates follow @VilleDevs on Twitter.





» [Arcade] Operation Wolf 3 opens with a surprisingly sedate shoot-out in a factory.

Hornet and Queen Bee. It wasn't the usual do-or-die mission behind enemy lines either, as this time a radical group was holding the world to ransom – or as the attract mode put it: "Huge force of terrorists 'Skull' occupied some island they are armed with nuclear weapon." Righto.

The game itself took place over six static scenes where guys in brightlycoloured garb would pop into view and open fire. The reason for their gaudy attire was due to the graphics - ves, they were digitised, and the colours helped them stand out from the backgrounds. Digitised graphics don't age well, as we know, but even back in 1994 Operation Wolf 3 looked ropey. Midway's Terminator 2 gun game did it before and did it better. Two positional guns were once again used, but they were now plastic and similar to those seen on Space Gun. One nice touch was the red slider on the barrel which you used to fire grenades, pump-action fashion. In another change players were given unlimited ammo, meaning you could hold down the trigger and unleash a hail of bullets, only pausing to reload.

peration Wolf 3 was like a return to the staid shooting gallery games of old. Indeed, it even featured a bonus scene where you had to shoot glass bottles and clay pigeons. It was a case of wolf by name not by nature, and it fell far below the ranks of the

magnificent original and its worthy sequel. The game wasn't ported to a single home system, which isn't surprising, really.

At this time gun games were becoming more popular than ever, with franchises like Virtua Cop (1994), Point Blank (1994), Time Crisis (1995) and House Of The Dead (1996) becoming mainstays in the arcades. Taito wasn't going to be left out and in 1998 released the fourth game in the series, Operation Tiger. Aiming to stand out, the deluxe version featured a massive 50in screen and the Uzistyle guns made a welcome return. The game also ran on Taito's new PowerPC hardware so the visuals were given a welcome boost. This time you played captured soldiers tasked with escaping from enemy territory while busting out the rest of your team. The action unfolded over the usual six stages.

Although more enjoyable that the third game, *Operation Tiger* didn't



» [Arcade] *Operation Tiger*, the fourth and final game in the series, debuted in arcades in 1998.

make a huge impact and these days it's undoubtedly the least well-known game in the series. Unlike the rival shooters mentioned above it received no home conversions and it isn't even possible to emulate it in MAME at present. Hopefully that will soon change and more people will at least be able to revisit *Operation Tiger*.

Nothing of real note has happened to the series since 1998. In 2005 Operation Wolf and Operation Thunderbolt were added to the Taito Legends collection that appeared on PlayStation 2, Xbox and PC. Then in 2008 the NES version of Operation Wolf was added to the Wii Virtual Console, but it was disappointment all round as this already average version didn't even support the Wii Remote - despite the original game supporting the NES Zapper. But, let's be honest, even if it did work with the Wii Remote, waving a plastic stick around would be no way to play Operation Wolf. Indeed, you could argue that all of the home versions are pretty pointless because, regardless of quality, none can ever replicate the feeling of playing the coin-op with its authentic-feeling aun controller.

That desire for the true arcade experience has led to *Operation Wolf* (and to a lesser extend its sequel) becoming very popular with coin-op collectors, joining such wish list favourites as the Atari *Star Wars* games, Cinematronics LaserDisc titles and Sega sit-down cabs. If you've got your own personal arcade then it surely needs a gun game, and few gun games are as imposing or as iconic as *Operation Wolf*.



HABLAMMO! Point Blank burst into arcades in 1994, determined to inject them with some quirky gameplay that was both family friendly and trigger happy. Sorrel Tilley apprehended designer Yutaka Hounoe to find out more. . .

nexplicably titled *Gun Bullet* in Japan, *Point Blank* offered the unexpected. While most companies were building towards realism, Namco had other ideas. Yutaka Kounoe himself isn't a fan of gore. "I'm not sure it's morally right to make a living through ultraviolent games, but the development department were a little more flexible about designing them," he explains. "However, to make this game appeal to a wider demographic, we held back on the onscreen blood. I wanted to make Point Blank attractive to couples on dates, so I made sure there wasn't a drop of blood in any of the debris flying about. Even in *Tekken*, a game we created that allowed you to savour the exhilaration and satisfaction of decimating your opponent, we used CG effects that look like blood, but upon closer inspection, there really isn't any. Actually, the Point Blank prototype was a serious game with digitised





### IN THE HNOW

- » PUBLISHER: NAMCO
- DEVELOPED IN LIGH
- » RELEASED: 199/
- » PLATFORM: ARCADE, PLAYSTATION
- » GENRE: LIGHT GUN SHOOTER



photo graphics, in the style of *Lethal Enforcers*, but with Konami and Taito already having hits on the market, it was Namco's preference (and mine) to take on a new challenge. We decided to make a wacky, comical mini-game collection. The finance department didn't see the value in it and said it was no good, but we were determined to work day and night to create a fun game."

Kounoe had just finished working on the rail shooter *Lucky & Wild*, which used a fixed-position light gun. The first challenge in *Point Blank*'s development therefore would be the creation of an all-new, wired gun. "The recoil was the biggest problem in the gun's development. The concept was born out of an obsession of my boss, Shigek Tohyama, who was Namco's resident Doc Brown character. Tohyama was a very unique individual, always beavering away on a strange invention.

"The electronics team carried out repeated experiments with the recoil gun under Tohyama's direction, but these guys were nearly in tears with frustration – 'We can't get the recoil

### THE MAKING OF: POINT BLANK



knowledge and construction skills, and inventing was his forte, so he said 'Why solenoid?" For readers without degrees in electronic engineering, a solenoid is a coil of wire which converts electrical energy into hydraulic motion - in other words, the perfect component for a gun

recoil mechanism. "With Tohyama's hint, the team succeeded in achieving the powerful kick we were looking for." Kounoe also let slip that during his time at on an innovative reloading mechanism using the base of the un. If you've ever seen an action movie, you will surely be

of Namco's employees. With such perfect accuracy, we were able to about to be shipped from the factory, they discovered a minute error in the guns' initial settings. So right at the recalibrate the gun sights! When you're working on a groundbreaking new product, things can happen that no one

Kounoe was no stranger to hard work. Most projects he was involved with at Namco required long hours and sleepless nights. "When I was making Point Blank, I entered the data for every stage all alone and by myself. This data minute now?' I jumped out of my skin when the bosses arrived at 7am and into creating one game."

Despite his own herculean efforts,

Kounoe still attributes much of Point Blank's success to teamwork. "One of the reasons it's so perfectly tuned and patiently made is that when it was in production, all kinds of people on breaks from other projects would drop by to try it out. Even now I feel overjoyed that I finished development of a hit game safely - and no ghosts appeared!"



### EVELOPER 16HU6HTS

DIG DUG SYSTEM: ARCADE

**YEAR:** 1982

**LUCKY & WILD (PICTURED)** SYSTEM: ARCADE YEAR: 1992

**TEKKEN** SYSTEM: ARCADE

**YEAR:** 1994

### DOCTOR, DOCTOR...

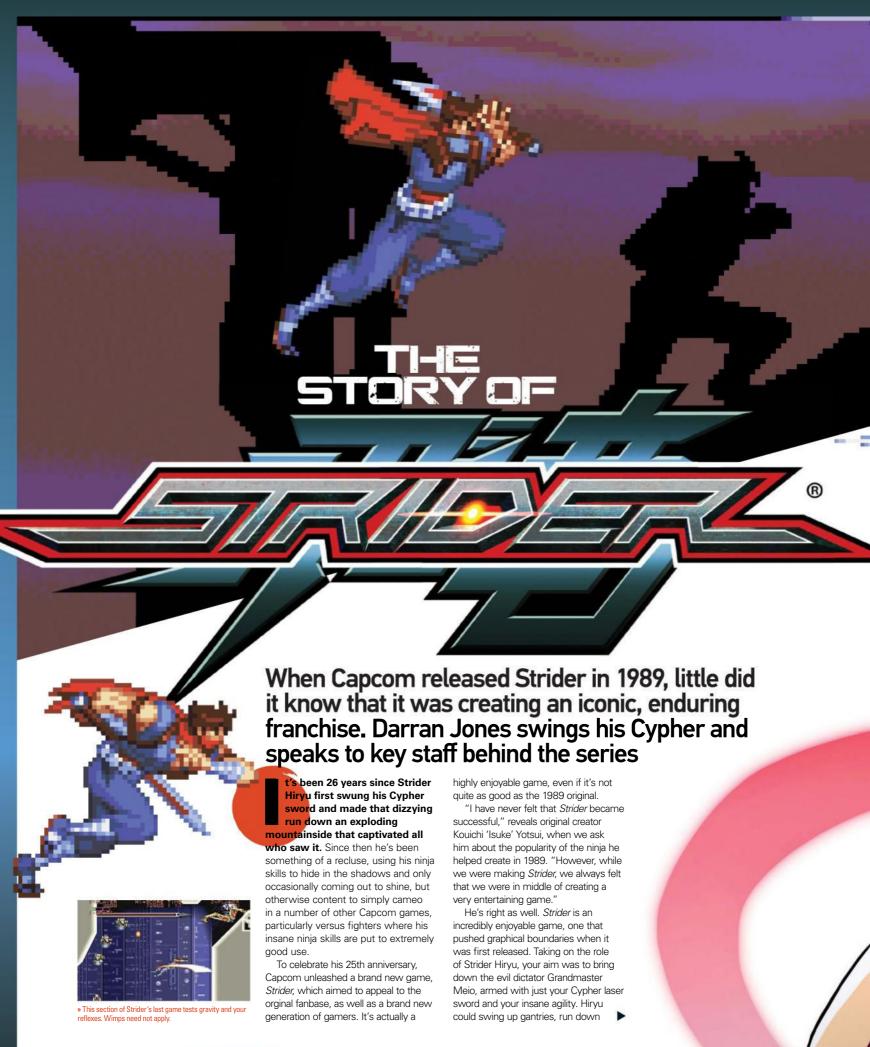
"AT THE BEGINNING of the project we planned ideas by making simple one-page pencil drawings. We had about 60 of these idea sheets lined up so we could consider the variety. On one of them I had written 'Save the old geezer', and that was the start of Dr Don and Dr Dan. They became mascot characters and ended up being painted on the side of the cabinets. The characters' look was decided by gathering ideas from all the designers on the project and holding a contest. I made a rough sketch just to show them my initial ideas for the characters – one round, the other tall and thin. It must have made quite an impression on them, because all of the submitted mascot candidates were almost identical to my original sketch! I wanted them to look like sombrero-wearing Mexican brothers, but the final design was kind of 'safe' – a *Sesame Street*-type odd couple.















We had trouble keeping the amount of data under what was available 77



▶ mountainsides, leap huge chasms and even operate in zero gravity. He was quite simply magnificent, but he also caused issues for Yotsui, who struggled with the technology limitations of the time. "We had trouble keeping the amount of data under what was available," he admits. "Hiryu's various action movement data had taken up more than half of the whole graphic data amount space."

And yet many would argue that it's worth it. Watching Hiryu in motion as he climbed walls, sliced his way through enemies and nimbly avoided enemies was mesmerising, and it's pleasing to see that new developer Double Helix Games has managed to retain his deadly grace for its reboot. As far as Yotsui was concerned, Strider's graceful animation was always the thing that drove his game. "It was the most important thing," he explains to us. "This is an action game, therefore the player should be able to enjoy it by just controlling Hiryu. We tried to make players be entertained by just making Hiryu run, jump or go through unknown environments. By adding movement such as jumping, running, sliding, clinging and climbing it will be even more entertaining. We felt that defeating unexpected enemies that appear in front of you by using all those movements would give the players extreme pleasure. To enable all these cornerstones, Hiryu's agility had to be the most important [thing] of all."

In addition to Hiryu's impressive athleticism, it was the game world itself and its weird and wonderful bosses that really helped separate it from its arcade peers. *Strider* had dramatic set pieces that ranged from running down an

 $\ensuremath{\text{\textbf{w}}}$  While the NES game is an enjoyable adventure it's not a patch on the superb arcade game.

exploding mountainside to hitching rides on the backs of various dinosaurs, while his travels took him from the snowy slopes of Siberia to the heart of a floating battleship. Variety was the spice of life in *Strider*, and this was none more apparent than when facing off against its insanely nutty bosses. "We created multi-cultural and unfamiliar looking enemies to surprise players," continues Yotsui when quizzed about *Strider*'s exotic art design. "Creating these enemies was also important to expand the world within the game."

And what magnificent creations those enemies were. Robotic gorillas, brash Amazonians, metallic dinosaurs and an airborne pirate all vied for your attention, while even the lowliest of enemies felt » Hiryu even manages to look cool when he dies. Bless him

» He might be a sub-boss, but he's still created with lots of care and attention.



alien and unique. You never forget the time you flew around the anti-gravity boss, desperately pummelling the fire button before you're flung into a nearby wall, or watching a group of Russian dignitaries transform into the hammer

and sickle-wielding Ouroboros. It's a testament to their timeless design that so many have been included in Double Helix Games's reboot, but which is Yotsui's favourite? "I like the visual style of Lago Mechanic, the abilities of Anti-Gravity Device, Mecha Pon's charm and the clever functions which Ouroboros has," he tells us, clearly warming to the subject. "I like Solo's coolness, Kuniang MA Team's beauty and the dignity which Grandmaster Meio has. Yes, it's safe to say I like all of them."

### THE MISSING STRIDER The game that STRIDER Grin was making

It's widely known that Capcom had commissioned Grin to make a game about Strider as far back as 2008. What isn't known is what type of game it was going to be. After extensive digging an anonymous source was able to confirm a few things about the title.

"Grin made the deal with Strider overlapping Bionic Commando before anyone knew how Bionic Commando would be received. At that time I think that relations with Capcom were good. I guess they started to outline a new project thinking Bionic Commando would be a hit." We've thought this ever since Grin was revealed as the developer, as Strider would have fit perfectly into its two-game template.

Our source goes on to reveal the following about *Strider*'s gameplay. "It took many different turns. First we did a super abstract design that was completely unique. That was the first take. Then the project landed in the hands of Grin Barcelona. From that point I have absolutely no idea."

Capcom went on to approach Grin with other smaller titles, including mentioning *Mega Man*, but the ideas were eventually dropped, the *Bionic Commando Rearmed* team was separated and Grin itself closed down a year later.



amers agreed, and Strider became a big success for Capcom, no doubt helped by the Manga comic that had been released in 1988 (in collaboration with Moto Kikaku) and the 1989 NES game that followed a few months after Yotsui's arcade game. The NES game is quite interesting because it's a completely different beast to Yotsui's effort, playing to the strengths of the host hardware but clearly losing out as a result.

You still play as Strider Hiryu, but the pace of the game is greatly diminished, making him feel slightly less effective as a result. The story is also different to the arcade game, and a little more detailed due to the nature of the platform it's on, making it more in line with the story told in Tatsumi Wada's original manga anthology. There are Metroidvania-like design aspects to the game as well, with the ability to return to previous levels once new power-ups have been acquired. While it's a fun addition to the *Strider* canon, it lacks the grace and fluidity of Yotsui's





THE STORY OF STRIDER

### STRIDER: THE MAKENTARY

Kouichi Yotsui tells us the story and gameplay mechanics behind Strider's iconic second level



The entire Eurasian continent is under Grandmaster Meio's control.

After completing the mission at Kazah Federation's capital city, Hiryu is trying to escape from the continent by running through the whole of Siberia while Siberian wolves attack him.

 $2^{\rm Hiryu}$  manages to escape the wolves by running into an underground tunnel. Hiryu discovers this tunnel is in fact Grandmaster Meio's secret base. Most of the weapon manufacturers who brought Meio's anger down on them and were sent to Siberia are transported here to be engaged in developing new types of weapons. Mecha Pon is one of their test weapons.



This is the bounty hunter Solo. His powered armor is designed on the mosquito. Mosquitos existed on earth long before human beings were born. Back then they were already the most developed and completed (perfected) creatures. As long as they do not get swatted with a big clap! [Makes clapping noise]







I am sure you have noticed that the Flying
Mosqueman is the one who delivers items to the
traitor Hiryu. This was a small harassment towards Meio
by the manufacturers that were sent to Siberia.



In arcade games, the second level carries a very important rule. We have to make players who have learned the game's controls on the first level think, 'we want to see more of this game!' For that purpose, we added speedier-developed scenarios and more venturesome changes. The match between the players and us always gets settled on the second level.





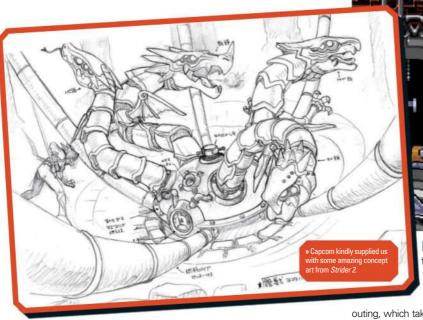


Hiryu is now at a super-high altitude and being pushed to his limits. He is invading the enemy's ship and taking it over. This was a real pleasure of mine, as this action scene originated from an old pirate movie!



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pame, a thing that becomes far more noticeable when using wall jumps or climbing. You never feel quite as in control of Hirvu as you do in the arcade

outing, which takes away from the game. It's still a robust action game – something Capcom could turn out in its sleep during its NES period – but it pales in comparison to Yotsui's interpretation of the ninja.

Home conversions of the arcade game soon followed, with the majority of home computer versions being handled by US Gold, which passed coding duties to Tiertex. Sega did its own conversion of *Strider* for its Mega Drive and Master System, while the long-gestating PC Engine game (it was first announced in 1990 but released in 1994) featured animated cut-scenes, Red Book audio and a brand new level. Tiertex's conversions were hit and miss for the most part, with its 16-bit conversions fairing better, although it's impressive just how much of the original arcade game the various conversions could fit

in. The Sharp X68000 is the clear winner, but was hardly a fair comparison due to its sheer amount of power and its actual cost (around £1,000).

Tiertex nevertheless managed to impress Capcom, and soon secured the rights to make a console and computer sequel, 1990's rather disappointing Strider II. Interestingly, it starred a brand new Strider, called Strider Hinjo, who now sported a gun in addition to his Cypher but could also turn into a laser-spewing robot when engaging bosses. He was otherwise identical to Strider Hirvu, with his own one-man crusade against a new superb villain. Chris Brunning, who worked on the home computer versions, did tell us the reason for the similarities between the two Striders. "The character was the same in the versions we did, just re-coloured," referring to the sprite used in Tiertex's arcade conversions. "That was an internal decision as far as I am aware." He goes on to reveal that there was no involvement from Capcom from a developer point of view, which may explain why it's just not in the same league as the arcade game that inspired it.

This wasn't the first time that Tiertex had made a non-computer sequel to a popular coin-op – *HKM: Human Killing Machine* was a sequel to *Street Fighter* – so we were keen to know if Chris and the rest of the team felt any pressure

while working on the home sequel. "Not a great deal," he honestly tells us. "I believe it was only 'cult' popular really."

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Strider II went on to receive decent scores on home computers, with the Spectrum version being particularly popular. It's not a good game though, failing to capture the sheer atmosphere that the original game oozed from every pixel. Despite this, Chris feels that Tiertex did get some things right, revealing, "I think it captured the main gameplay elements of Strider, the agility."

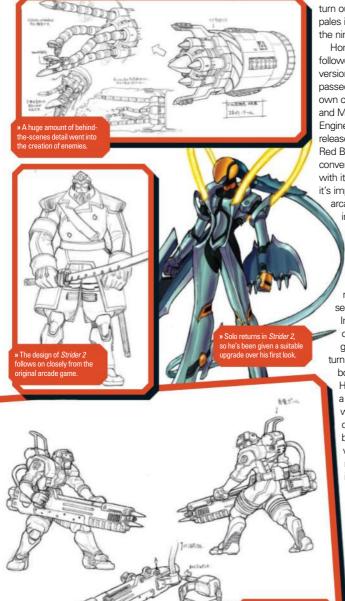
The Mega Drive, Master System and Game Gear versions came out a little later and were known as Journey From Darkness: Strider Returns in the US. Considering the power of the host machines they were all far weaker than the home computer counterparts, let down by clunky controls, drab-looking levels and poor stage design. While Strider Hinjo no longer transforms into a robot, his new shurikenthrowing shenanigans add little to the game and it's little wonder that Capcom conveniently ignores all versions of Strider II.

It may have ignored the dull platformer it had allowed US Gold to licence, but Capcom certainly wasn't ignoring the fact that *Strider* still appeared to be popular with gamers. In fact, Capcom was planning a sequel of its own...

Capcom had released *Marvel Vs Capcom:*Clash Of Super Heroes in 1998 and tested the waters by including Strider Hiryu as a prominent playable fighter. Gamers were instantly drawn to the acrobatic ninja, giving Capcom the confidence to continue with its own sequel. It wouldn't be easy however, as Yotsui had long since left Capcom. In fact he'd already made his own spiritual successor to *Strider* in the form of Mitchell Corp's delightfully nutty *Osman*.

Step forward Sho Sakai, who found himself as art director on the highly anticipated sequel, which was first released in arcades in 1999 before being ported to Sony's PlayStation in 2000. Strider may have seemingly lost its heart with the departure of Yotsui, but just one play of Capcom's sequel was enough to know that the developer knew exactly what it was doing. "There was naturally lots of pressure," begins Sakai about the challenging sequel, "but I was also deeply honoured to be able to work on the design of the sequel to the legendary Strider, which more than compensated for the pressure I felt."

And that pressure was palpable because Strider's fan base is small but incredibly loyal. Sakai definitely felt it, finding himself in the same situation as current developer Double Helix Games. "The [hardest thing was] the need to





satisfy the diehard," Sakai continues. "It was tough to strike the right balance: if you keep things too similar to *Strider* then the sequel wouldn't be interesting, but if you change too much then fans would not accept it."

he solution was to effectively remake Strider, with the final game featuring two of Strider's original stages and many other elements, including retreads of memorable set pieces and notable bosses such as the bounty hunter Solo and the Kuniang MA Team. The first three levels of Capcom's explosive sequel could be tackled in any order, finishing off with a return to the floating battleship Balrog and another trip to The Third Moon, the base of Grandmaster Meio.

It was all topped off by some amazing new visuals that perfectly captured the spirit of the 1989 original. Although the gaming world was actively embracing 3D technology, Capcom wisely decided to make *Strider* 2.5D, with neat 3D backgrounds giving the game some impressive depth and slick rotation effects. "With the move to 3D backgrounds, we were able to make the levels more than just basic horizontal traversal against a backdrop," explains Sakai about *Strider* 2's distinctive look. "Some of the enemies were created in 3D as well, so the confluence of 2D and 3D was one of the key aspects of the title."

Another key aspect was ensuring that Strider 2's bosses were just as over-the-top as those found in the arcade original. Capcom's team happily obliged, delivering an impressive menagerie of foes in addition to those returning from Strider. Each of Strider 2's

The moment Double Helix knew it had to up its game

We'll admit to be a little concerned after hearing that Double Helix Games would be handling *Strider*'s reboot (although we're happy to be proved wrong). Even we didn't go to the following lengths though...

"Right after the game was announced at Comic-Con, we got an email from a *Strider* fan who had dissected the footage of the game found on the web," recalls a bemused Jorge Osequera. "He sent screenshots of every location in the footage that had the Kazakh star flipped. He included shots from the original game and did side by side comparisons to point out where we went wrong. We always knew that the old-school fans would be the most critical, but that email was a huge reality check for us. Just thinking about the process that this fan went through to make sure we got the details right really inspired us to double down on the details." If you're reading this article *Strider* fan, we'd love to hear what you think of the finished game.





stages were divided into smaller sections that typically ended in a boss battle. Memorable encounters include a skirmish with a robotic wooly mammoth, riding along the back of the gigantic Emperor Dragon (an encounter that's replicated in the new *Strider*) and taking out a huge Kraken. "Bosses are an important part of *Strider* for sure, and I think the highly original designs are what makes them so memorable," explains Sakai. "Although many bosses are quickly defeated, they still make a

lasting impression, which is quite an amazing accomplishment."

One of the most impressive bosses is Strider Hien, who acts as a suitable nemesis for Hiryu and is unlockable on the PlayStation version. He's the entire creation of Sakai, who revealed the following interesting revelation about him. "In my original design, he wore a long-sleeved top. When I checked the pixel art, though, for some reason he had been drawn without any sleeves at all! Meanwhile, the cut-scene illustrations stayed true to my original design, so his sleeves are intact. Hien is the only character who sports summer and winter wear!"

Hiryu himself arguably remained the star of the show, with Capcom boosting his already powerful moves to make him more like the oneman army that appears in Double Helix Games's sequel and Capcom's Vs games. Infinitely faster than his 1989 counterpart, he's now got a variety of useful jumps – including a double jump – for quickly changing direction or propelling himself off walls and a useful boost attack that enables him to launch plasma waves from his Cypher, giving him a fighting chance against Grandmaster Meio's many generals.

Despite being a genuinely thrilling arcade game, *Strider 2* wasn't a success for Capcom, and while it was released across all regions it remains a surprisingly low-key game, which

designs are what makes them so memorable 77











RAIDEN

MOST LIKELY TO:

Whinge about his

personal life

**LEAST LIKELY TO:** 

Star in a proper Metal

Gear game

### NINJA

HAMSTER MOST LIKELY TO: Beat up anthropomorphic rats LEAST LIKELY TO: Win this ninja showdown



### **ZOOL** MOST LIKELY TO:

Have an identity crisis **LEAST LIKELY TO:** Get sponsored by Iron Bru



### **JOE** MUSASHI

MOST LIKELY TO: Own a pet dog **LEAST LIKELY TO:** Properly train it



#### **SCORPION STRIDER** MOST LIKELY TO: HIRYU

Look like a

palette swap

**LEAST LIKELY TO:** 

Get his own game

ROUND

MOST LIKELY TO: Ride on the back of a brontosaurus LEAST LIKELY TO: Get another Tiertex sequel



### **LEONARDO**

MOST LIKELY TO: Say something turtley irritating **LEAST LIKELY TO:** Become a ninja

heirloom

**LEONARDO VS RYU HAYABUSA** 

■ Ryu immediately leaps into action, grabbing

Leonardo and pulling off his deadly Izuna Drop.

Unfortunately for Hayabusa, cheeky Leonardo

simply retracts his head into his shell, leaving

Hayabusa with a broken neck. WINNER: LEONARDO



RYU

**HAYABUSA** 

MOST LIKELY TO:

Lose his family

### hamster

LEAST LIKELY TO: Appear in any more good Ninja Gaiden games

### RAIDEN VS NINJA HAMSTER

■ Ninja hamster or not he's still just a hamster, and Raiden cuts Metal Gears in half before breakfast. Raiden ends the battle by stepping on the hapless hamster before he's even had a

chance to squeak



### **ZOOL VS JOE MUSASHI**

■ Although he's from the Nth Dimension, Zool is actually a pretty rubbish ninja. Joe Musashi easily jumps over the Chupa Chups Zool throws at him, returning fire with deadly lethal shurikens.



Silly Zool.



### **SCORPION VS STRIDER HIRYU**

■ "Get over here!" screams Scorpion as he flings his trusty tethered spear in Hiryu's direction. Hiryu effortlessly slides under the incoming weapon and proceeds to slash at Scorpion with his Cypher. Win.



### **RAIDEN VS JOE MUSASHI**

■ Realising the power of his opponent, sneaky Joe Musashi (from the Mega Drive version of Shadow Dancer) sets his pet dog on him. Raiden proceeds to bitch about his personal life, causing Joe and his faithful hound to slink off in disgust

#### STRIDER HIRYU VS LEONARDO

■ Trained by Splinter, Leo is the strongest of all four turtles. Years of training can't prepare him for Strider Hiryu's awesome skills though. Left shell-shocked, he soon sods off for some muchneeded pizza with his brothers.



ROUND TWO

### STRIDER HIRYU VS RAIDEN

■ Confident that he won't lose a battle in a box out found in a feature that's entirely dedicated to him, a casual Hiryu wades in. Raiden easily cuts him down in seconds. Did we mention he cuts Metal Gears in half before breakfast?

WINNER: RAIDEN

# nore powers availab

is a pity considering its actual brilliance. Despite his fan base. Hirvu was once again relegated to the sidelines appearing in numerous cameos and the occasional versus fighting game in the intervening years. A Strider remake was revealed to have been in the works at Grin. Barcelona in 2009, but was quickly cancelled by Capcom at its prototype stage. Grin itself disappeared shortly afterwards and the hope of a new game died with it.

Just four years later however, Capcom used the San Diego Comic Con to announce the trailer of a brand new Strider game - to an ecstatic response. As the days passed gamers began to voice concerns due to the previous output of Double Helix Games, but as new information continued to drip out of Capcom HQ, it became clear that the studio did understand the importance of the franchise it had been handed

'We love the Strider fans, both the older generation and the newer generation, and we take all the feedback from them very seriously," assures Strider's producer Jorge Oseguera. "When the game was first announced, we were all very nervous for the reveal. We were confident in the game we were making, but first and foremost we wanted to hear from the Strider fans. It was such a relief once the trailer hit the web and the fans had positive things to say about the reboot. I still get goose bumps watching the reaction from the crowd at SDCC when Strider Hiryu first appeared on-screen."

It takes more than a good trailer to make a good Strider game however, and the biggest surprise about Double Helix's new Strider was that it plays out more like a Metroidvania. meaning the original NES game seems to be as every bit as inspirational as its arcade counterpart. What we've played so far suggests that is plenty of DNA from the original arcade game, but we were still keen to know the reasoning behind the team's new design choices. "We wanted to keep Strider's fast action and fluid gameplay front and centre, but we also wanted to create a much more expansive and immersive backdrop that would support an adventure that takes multiple hours to unfold," admits Jorge. "While I wouldn't say that we are straight up Metroidvania, we're definitely influenced by Metroidvania games, and wanted to marry elements of that sort of nonlinear adventure and exploration with Strider's furious Cypher-slashing action."

ardless of Strider's new game ction, it's all for nothing if ider Hiryu himself doesn't feel ke the titular ninia. After completing the game several times it's clear that Double Helix knows what its doing. The controls feel fluid and precise, Hiryu himself powers through stages, while his repertoire of tricks is extremely impressive. It may not look like a Strider game (it's a little too drab-looking for our tastes) but it certainly feels like one. "The first thing we did was to make sure to nail Hiryu's core movement and Cypher-slashing gameplay," reveals Jorge. "We knew that if we couldn't get that perfect, the rest didn't matter. Beyond that, it was all about fleshing out the world and story. We're all fans of the original games so we really wanted to capture the essence of the classics. You'll see familiar themes throughout the levels as well as characters from the previous games. Tony Barnes (Strider's design director) has been making games for over 20 years and is a huge Strider fan. In the early [21st Century] he created a bucket list of games that he wanted to make. Strider was in his top five. On top of that, we had the creative team from Capcom in Osaka, which included one of the original game's artists. I hope that gives the fans some comfort and lets them know that Strider's in the right hands.'

The one thing that does impress with Strider is just how good the new boss battles are. While a few new enemies appear, many of the mayors from the original game return and they all put up tough, challenging fights. In short, they act exactly as you'd expect them to and we couldn't be more happy. "Modern technology and an expansive game design have provided the opportunity to update and polish classic boss game mechanics, battle length and pacing,



### THE STORY OF STRIDER



beings James. "Solo, the cyborg bounty hunter, for example, has always looked very cool and threatening, but had a limited set of actions and was quickly defeated. In this latest Strider, however, he realises his full potential with an arsenal of powerful attacks that will surely test players' skills in an extensive battle. It's been a challenge to update classic bosses, but seeing them do all of these things that you only fantasised about as a child has been very rewarding, not to mention very cool."

James also feels confident that gamers will enjoy the many new abilities that Hiryu now has at his disposal, revealing that the team looked both to the past and present to ensure that their hero still felt like the Strider Hiryu gamers know and love. "When developing the character for this latest Strider game, both the recent Marvel Vs Capcom and arcade iterations were analysed, and those characteristics which best served the gameplay and visual presentation of the character [were] implemented," he continues.

"From a visual perspective, the character has been updated to match the artistic design and HD fidelity of current systems, but maintains the silhouette, colour scheme and key poses and animations of the Marvel Vs Capcom series, resulting in a fresh yet recognisable design. The core gameplay rests upon a refined iteration of Strider's bedrock of running, sliding, jumping and climbing, and is infused with actions from the Marvel Vs Capcom series as well as an array of new abilities '

Strider was released in 2014 and it proved to be update of the classic franchise. although Capcom currently has no perhaps understandable. He might not have the legacy of some videogame icons, but there's no denying that the character has touched a lot of gamers in the last 25 years. "From the way he moves to the way he talks, he's the embodiment of cool," concludes James when we ask about Strider's enduring popularity with his fan base. "But it's a coolness born from the original design of the character that isn't necessarily good or evil, and certainly isn't topical or trendy. He's the timeless badass that everyone wishes they could be - that is why it feels so empowering to pick up the controller and become Strider Hiryu."

We couldn't agree more.



and Jorge Oseguera have been crucial to the success of Strider's reboot

» There are plenty

of returning bosses many of which are

than before. It's a

far tougher to defeat

a perfectly acceptable plans for a further sequel. It's a pity, but

Special thanks to Laura Skelly and Maiko Hinson for making this article possible

### 

### **ZERO GUNNER**

Developer: Psikyo Year: 1997 Genre: Shoot-'em-up

■ You might well be familiar with the name Zero Gunner, but if you are it's almost certainly because of its excellent sequel Zero Gunner 2, which is one of the many worthwhile shoot-'emups on the Dreamcast. The original game is rather less well-known, having never received a home conversion. Zero Gunner arrived in arcades in 1997, powered by Sega's ageing Model 2 board. The game puts you in charge of a helicopter gunship in the year 2016, fighting to take back control of the world's militaries from terrorists. This flimsy premise is reason enough for you to take to the skies in Asia, the USA and Europe, blowing up all manner of other aircraft as well as bosses including battleships and massive planes.

The primary gimmick in *Zero Gunner* is the lockon feature, which allows your helicopter to roam the screen while still directing fire at the targeted enemy – a feature that would later be expanded upon by the sequel, which offered full 360 degree rotation. In *Zero Gunner*, your lock-on capability is limited, with a helpful bar on the left of the screen showing just how much has been used. With that exception, the game feels vastly more traditional than its successor, with enemies heading down from the top of the screen.

There's a nice variety of stages available, from the deserts of Algeria to windmills in the Netherlands, but the game doesn't look tremendously good – stage backgrounds are repetitive, with little in the way of notable landmarks. Sound is also a little weak, with military-themed music that fits the action without ever grabbing your attention.

However, these weaknesses don't change the fact that Zero Gunner is underpinned by some extremely solid game design. Its conventional approach to the genre doesn't break any new ground in the way that Zero Gunner 2 did, but nevertheless provides a challenging, satisfying blast. Level design is of a high standard and the bosses are excellent, with the multitarget battleship proving to be one of the game's highlights – just as a similar section did years later in Under Defeat. If you've played one too many bullet hell shooters and grown tired of them, playing Zero Gunner could be just the change you need.



### **Converted Alternative**

**UNDER DEFEAT 2006** 

While Zero Gunner 2 did receive a home conversion, it's G Rev's blaster that feels closer to the original game, thanks to the limited helicopter rotation. You can pick this one up on Xbox 360 or PS3, but we still have a soft spot for the Dreamcast conversion.



Dock-on ability is strictly limited in Zero Gunner, with this meter showing you how much time remains before you'll need to re-target the enemy.

Unlike its successor, in Zero Gunner you'll always be facing off against enemies arriving from the top of the screen. This causes the game to feel a little less interesting.

"> Targeting enemies is pretty simple – the first untargeted shot to connect with an enemy will place a crosshair on that enemy until it is destroyed or you stop shooting.

While the scenery is varied by location, the muted colour scheme makes the backdrops look unnecessarily repetitive. It's a shame, as the international theme is otherwise good.



### best left in the arcade

### **ZAVIGA**

Developer: Data East Vear: 1984 Genre: Shoot-'em-up

■ Zaviga adds the extra dimension of height to vertically scrolling shoot-'em-ups, but somehow manages to be less interesting than the likes of Zaxxon despite being two years more recent. The key mechanic is the ability to change your ship's height – flying low opens you up to smashing into mountains and ground-based enemies, while flying high makes it harder to hit ground-based enemies as you're limited to dropping bombs on them.

The problem is that 98 per cent of the time, there's little reason to take the extra risk involved with flying low, as the game

rarely includes any high-level obstacles to encourage you to swoop down. The top-down perspective also limits the game to two levels of height. With the game's most interesting mechanic rendered rather pointless, all that remains in *Zaviga* is a *Xevious* knock-off with uninteresting enemy patterns and less variety in scenery.

We're not surprised that Data East backed its other 1984 shoot-'em-up *B-Wings*, which was eventually converted to the Famicom. It wasn't the most memorable shoot-'em-up, but we're grateful for that fact that it spared home users this shambles.



### **GIGANDES**

Developer: East Technology Vear: 1987 Genre: Shoot-'em-up



» It's perhaps ironic that the biological horror stage offers some of the nicest sights in *Gigandes*.

On first impressions, Gigandes is a mess. The game is visually quite ugly for its time, and the tiny orb spacecraft fires some pretty weedy weaponry. Thankfully, the game improves massively when you learn what that orb design is for – your spacecraft is able to equip weapons on different parts of its body depending on where it makes contact with a power-up. Flying upwards into a power-up will provide

you with that weapon on top of your craft, for example. Weapons can also be rotated around the body of the ship, allowing for four-way fire with all of your weapons. This provides a thoughtful approach to the shoot-'em-up genre that was atypical for the time.

You'll need the multi-directional fire, too – while the early levels consist largely of open air, assaults from all directions become more common and stage walls begin to appear, preventing frontal assaults on your enemies. It's a shame that Gigandes never made it home, as it could have been replicated pretty well on either the Mega Drive or PC Engine. But East Technology never developed any console games itself, and never appears to have had a big enough hit for other companies to pursue licensing.

### **Converted Alternative**

### HELLFIRE 1989

While Hellfire doesn't quite offer the same flexibility as Gigandes in terms of weapon choice, it does allow the player to switch between forwards, backwards, vertical and diagonal shooting to tackle some tricky stages. The excellent Mega Drive version is pretty easy to find and comes highly recommended.



### Converted Alternative

#### **MERCS** 1989

It's an obvious pick, but Capcom's game remains one of the best in its genre. While Sega's in-house Mega Drive conversion lacks the multiplayer of the arcade release, it made up for it with a brilliant original mode in which each character packs their own unique weaponry – just like FixEight.



### **FIXEIGHT**

Developer: Toaplan Year: 1992 Genre: Shoot-'em-up

FixEight is the sequel to Toaplan's cult hit OutZone, a top-down shooter which took the Commando formula and turned everything up to 11. FixEight adopts the same gameplay as its predecessor, increasing the number of playable characters to eight and refining the weapon system. Like OutZone, FixEight allows players to utilise a forward-facing wide shot or a straight stream of shots that can be fired in any direction. However, new charge pads replace the single-use powerups of OutZone, making for far less frustration when you're looking to change. The changes enable the player to enjoy the excellent stages, which are filled with a variety of excellent hazards. Beyond the standard enemies, you'll be forced to contend with moving mid-air platforms and a maze lined with



» The huge explosions in *FixEight* convey a great sense of carnage, especially when battling multiple foes.

buzzsaws. The music is relatively bland, never quite reaching the heights achieved by its predecessor's tunes. However, the game is fast-paced and packed with carnage, adding technical proficiency to the excellent sprite work to produce one of the best-looking shoot-'em-ups of the early Nineties.



### Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles

We take a definitive look back at one of the Eighties' most popular arcade games. Tonight, Martyn Carroll dines on turtle soup





eenage Mutant Ninja Turtles is a perennially popular franchise (and yes, they were indeed 'Ninja Turtles', not mere 'Hero Turtles' - the change of name due to some silly censorship issues in parts of Europe that we'll pretend never happened). Just when you think it's finally died a death, a new comic. TV series, tov line, videogame or movie reminds us all that those reptilian rapscallions who shout 'Cowabunga!' and scoff pizza have been around for over 25 years, and will probably be around for 25 more.

But no matter how long *TMNT* remains in favour, it will never be more popular that it was in 1990. This was the year when the phenomenon reached its peak and *TMNT* became an unstoppable force. The animated series was playing heavily on TV, the first movie was doing big business at the box office, and the tune 'Turtle Power' by pretend rappers Partners in Kryme was topping charts everywhere. And of course there was the *TMNT* coin-op from Konami, which was released in 1989 but by 1990 was established in arcades the world over.

If you'd been suckered into the *Turtles* craze then it was simply impossible to



resist Konami's arcade game. Based on the animated series, it was a scrolling beat-'em-up where you went up against evil Shredder's army of Foot Soldiers and various bosses including Rocksteady, Bebop, Krang and the Shred-head himself. It was slick, fast and fun, with plenty of humour and jokes for fans, yet easily the game's finest feature was its co-op play. Some versions of the cab offered support for four players, allowing you and three mates to each take control of a Turtle and fight together.

The move list was pretty standard for this type of game. Bashing the attack button would result in a simple combo move with your Turtle performing an impromptu back kick should you be approached from behind. Hitting the jump button followed by attack would perform one of three moves depending on your height: a flying kick (low), a diving kick (mid) or a vertical weapon attack (high). Finally, hitting attack and jump together would unleash your Turtle's special move. Leonardo, Michelangelo and Donatello all performed a sweeping attack capable of defeating multiple enemies with a single blow, while Raphael was blessed with a unique roll-and-kick combo that was useful against some bosses.

Despite the Turtles being faster than their foes and boasting powerful specials, the game has earned a reputation as a contemptible coinmuncher. It's true that the later bosses can be a fairly cheap, but they're certainly not invincible. In our experience, at the height of the game's popularity, players were always eager to pump in extras credits and continue, or buy-in and help out their buddies – surely a clear indicator that Konami had produced a winning coin-op that delighted both players and operators.

Konami must have been pretty pleased with the game too. Having already experienced huge success with its first TMNT outing – a platform/ adventure game developed initially for the NES - the company wasted no time in bringing the arcade game home. It developed a well-received NES conversion, which expanded on the coin-op by adding a couple of exclusive new levels. Home computer rights, meanwhile, went to Brit publisher Mirrorsoft which commissioned Probe to convert the coin-op to the Spectrum, Amstrad CPC, Commodore 64, Amiga, Atari ST and PC in 1991. Like a lot of arcade conversions, these releases suffered from single-fire-button syndrome, where players had to clumsily push up and fire to jump.

In recent years, the arcade game has popped out of its shell on a couple of occasions. It was included as an unlockable extra in the 2004 game *TMNT 2: Battle Nexus*, and was probably the best thing about it. In 2007, Ubisoft put the coin-op out on Xbox Live Arcade complete with Achievements and a co-op mode. If you're an X360 owner looking for a nostalgia trip, 400 MS points is a small price to pay to party like it's 1990.

### th∉ expert

4 1111111



### PROFILE

- » Name: Patrick Wheeler
- » Age: 30
- » Location: Diboll, Texas
- » Key Twin Galaxies World Records:
- Metal Slug 3 [Arcade]
- 10,213,610 points Sunset Riders [Arcade]
- 1.010.930 points
- Jailbreak [Arcade]
- 9,999,900 points

### Until recently, Patrick Wheeler held the Twin Galaxies' TMNT high score with a haul of 1,085 points. We find out the story behind the score and why he has no plans to reclaim the record...

### ■ Can you tell us how long you've actually be gaming for and what you like about it?

The past 22 years, starting with the NES at age seven. I credit games like *Battletoads, Contra, Life Force* and *Punch-Out!!* for giving me the skills necessary to compete at a higher level.

### ■ When and where did you first play *TMNT* and what were your initial impressions of the game?

I remember playing the game at a bowling alley when I was around ten years old. At the time I thought it was one of the most fun games I had ever played, because it was different from the typical platforming and shooting games that were common on game consoles during that time.

70000

### ■ Why did you decide to have a crack at taking on the Twin Galaxies high score? Were you confident you could heat it?

Another *TMNT* player offered a bounty on the Twin Galaxies forum in 2008 and, since I already knew the game inside and out, it was an easy cash-in.

### ■ Is your 1,085 score the one you claimed the bounty with, or did you do it with a lower score, and then build on it later?

There was a bit of drama. I made a recording to claim the bounty - I finished the game with a score of 555, with no leeching - and sent it to him. He accused me of cheating, so I then submitted the recording to Twin Galaxies for verification, and it was verified as legit. About three weeks after that, a higher score from a third player was verified and this one was full of boomerang leeching. So, the next day - 12 January, 2009 - I recorded a new score of 1,085, which was basically the same as my previous one, but with added boomerang leeching. I didn't submit it because I don't agree that boomerang leeching is a legitimate tactic that should be allowed. However later that year the same person who



» Hit fire hydrants to blast enemies with water.

offered the original bounty took first place, so I decided to submit my, at the time, seven-month-old score. I did this because none of the other players could finish the game, and I didn't feel that their recordings were actually worthy of first place.

### ■ Can you explain to us what you mean by 'leeching'?

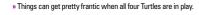
It's possible to gain an infinite number of points by hitting the projectiles that enemies throw at you, as each one is worth one point. Doing this excessively would disqualify the recording though. [The Twin Galaxies rules for the game state: "While some leeching is permitted in regards to opportunities against certain bosses (50 points maximum), too much will result in your score being disqualified."]

### ■ In April 2011, a new top score of 1,311 points by Saulo Bastos was verified by TG. Will you try and reclaim the record?

No, I won't. I've already finished the game many times, and seen everything there is to see. The only thing that could possibly be left to do is find an obscure point-pressing technique to exploit, but I have no interest in doing that.

#### ■ Is it easier, or more difficult, to get a high score when playing with other players on a game like *Turtles*?

It's more difficult to score highly when playing with other players for two reasons: there are less enemies for each individual player to defeat, and it's harder to manipulate the movements and actions of each enemy because an enemy's focus tends to change from one player to another.



### 無Perils and Pitfalls

You'll have to beat these bosses to total the Technodrome

Rocksteady
An early boss in many TMNT games. Move up and down to dodge his gunfire, and jump to avoid his running charge.





Bebop Similar to Rocksteady, only slightly more powerful. Attack at close range, then quickly jump away before he retaliates.

General Traag
Having previously defeated
Granitor, you must face his
formidable boss. He's pretty slow
so keep moving around the screen.





Krang
The toughest boss in the game. Use diving kicks where you can, or if you're playing as Raphael, spam his special move.

The chief adversary tries to confuse you with clones. Just keep plugging away with your combos and specials until he falls.



### COIN-OP CAPERS: TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES



» When Rocksteady and Bebop charge, jump out of the way and they'll smash skulls. The dolts.

### ■ Tell us briefly about your MAME setup. What's it like?

I use my PC with a PlayStation 2 DualShock controller attached through a USB adapter.

#### ■ How do you think the game holds up 20 years on?

I think it holds up well. The graphics are colourful and detailed, control is accurate, and it's the perfect length for this type of game. Most of the reviews say it's unfair and cheap, and that it's designed to suck quarters. Despite what these people say, it's possible to finish TMNT without taking any damage at all. I've never done it, but I've come close enough to know that it's possible.

#### Out of all of your records, which one are you most proud of?

My most impressive score is 10.213.610 in Metal Slug 3. This is a very complex game that requires nearly two hours to finish. The entire game must be memorised to point-press properly, because each segment of the game is unique and you never do the same thing twice. It took me 300 hours over a period of seven months to finally break the 10 million mark, and the feeling of satisfaction after doing that was incredible. 🤺



» The skateboarding stage is not as tricky as it first appears, as it's more about dodging than attacking

### **Useful tricks to** help you freak the **Foot Soldiers**



### **■ DO IT WITH DON**

Use Donatello. It's much easier to finish the game in one credit with him, due to his long attack range. It's possible to finish with one of the other turtles, but it's considerably harder, especially against



certain bosses.

#### **POINT TAKEN**

Hit the rope that the robots fling toward you. Every hit is worth one point even though it doesn't actually damage the enemy. Also, hit the boomerangs that enemies throw at you. They're worth one point



### **KEY POSITION**

Your character has more vertical range than the enemies, so use it to your advantage. The best way to handle an enemy is to move above or below them, then stop moving and time your attack to hit them as they move up/down to



approach you.

#### **■ INCH FORWARD**

To avoid being mobbed by enemies, advance through the levels gradually. By inching your way forward, you'll only spawn one or two enemies at a time, which makes the game a lot easier



### the sequels

Of the many Turtles games, these ones stay true to the original coin-op



### Manhattan Project

Released: 1991

The NES already had its own Turtles game, so the coin-op was released on the Nintendo console as TMNT II: The Arcade Game, This game then, from Konami, was a NES-exclusive sequel to the coin-op that was

essentially an extra set of levels rather than a full-blown follow-up. The main difference was that each Turtle had their own special move. These were almost too powerful, particularly against the bosses, so to prevent the game from being a walkover you lost a little energy each time you used one. Overall, it was a fun yet derivative continuation of the coin-op. Note that there was a 1992 PC game called TMNT: Manhattan Missions but it has nothing to do with this game, being more of an adventure game with fighting elements.





#### **TMNT: Turtles** In Time

Released: 1991

This was the true sequel to the TMNT coin-op. The visuals were slicker (some lovely sprite-scaling effects were added), the action was faster and more frantic, the Turtles were blessed with new moves (included a run and shoulder barge), and

everything was tuned to perfection, resulting in one of the best beat-'em-ups to grace the arcades. Home versions followed, with the SNES version renamed TMNT IV to remain consistent. The Mega Drive version was titled TMNT: The Hyperstone Heist and featured different stages. More recently, the game was given a graphical makeover and released for X360/PS3 as Turtles In Time Re-Shelled.



Released: 2007 The Turtles returned to cinemas in 2007 and Ubisoft was on hand to create games based on the CGI movie. Every platform received a generic tie-in except for the Game Boy Advance, which was treated

to this delightful scrolling beat-'em-up. The game introduced a few RPG-lite elements, but thankfully they didn't detract from what was essentially a straight-up, oldschool brawlathon. The graphics were great too, making this

one title to track down and cherish. In 2009, Ubisoft released a game for the Nintendo DS called TMNT: Arcade Attack, which failed to recaptured the nostalgia of the Konami coin-ops anywhere near as well as this GBA offering.

### the machine

Pride of place in James Dinndorf's games room is a fourplayer TMNT coin-op. Here, he reveals how he transformed an old Desert Assault cab into his most wanted machine



"I'm 27 and from St. Cloud, Minnesota. Since I was a kid, I thought it would be really cool to own an arcade machine. Growing up in the Eighties, there are many that I have fond memories of but the first one that comes to mind is TMNT. This game was a revelation at the time, and was at the top of my want list even before I got into the hobby.

"In 2004, the owner of an old roller-skating rink told me he had a few games to sell. He showed me a few machines, but it didn't take me long to notice a large four-player *Desert Assault* game. The game itself didn't interest me, but it had my attention because the cabinet was identical to the four-player Konami cabinets that *TMNT* came in. The game worked fine and the cabinet was in excellent shape, which was crucial to me since it meant that the power supply, monitor, and wiring all worked. I handed the owner \$400 and loaded the game into my friend's truck.

"I'm very pleased with how well my *TMNT* turned out; it's one of my favourites in my collection. I get a kick out of playing it with my friends and reminiscing about the old arcade days. It's like reliving a part of my childhood."

### CONTROLS

The control panel was one of the more difficult tasks during this project. I began by removing the old joysticks and buttons, followed by the control panel overlay. I found a nice NOS TMNT overlay and discovered that the holes for the joysticks and buttons did not match the old holes. I drilled new holes, which was tricky since some of the new holes overlapped with the old ones. After some very tedious hours, it turned out very well. TMNT originally used leaf joysticks, but I decided to opt for microswitch joysticks. The leaf joysticks are difficult to find, and in my experience they're not as accurate as microswitch joysticks, particularly the diagonal directions.

### • ARTWORK

Having good side art was extremely important to me since it's one of the most iconic elements of the *TMNT* cabinet. I was able to find a company that produced nice quality reproduction side art. It came as two giant adhesive sheets that had to be cut to fit the cabinet's dimensions.





### COIN-OP CAPERS: TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

### CABINET

The cabinet is in great shape. After the old artwork was removed, it was lightly sanded and repainted. I've since repainted the front of the cabinet and coin door as well. The wood is still in excellent shape, with no noticeable damage.

### PCB

I found a working *TMNT* PCB on the internet. Since *TMNT* is a four-player game and of the JAMMA standard, it uses separate wiring harnesses for the third and fourth player controls. I ended up finding those harnesses through the KLOV forums and, after a little soldering, everything wired up nicely. I've recently acquired a *Turtles In Time* PCB and am in the process of constructing a JAMMA switcher that will allow me to run both *TMNT* games in the same cabinet.



### ■ MONITOR

The monitor was the only part in need of some serious work. The colours were washed out and the picture was warped a little and overstretched. I opted to go for a new monitor. I bought a 25-inch monitor from a company that builds arcade monitors using a universal chassis and a good TV tube. It worked flawlessly and looked 100 times better than the original monitor.

### COIN MECH

Original TMNT machines used a dual coin door layout. However, this cabinet used a single door with four slots, which I actually like more. I decided to customise the coin slots by adding colour-coated coin slot inserts that correlate to each player's colour. I think it adds a nice touch and it's one of my favourite components of the machine.

### developer Q&A

We speak to Dave Semmens, the man behind the Spectrum and Amstrad CPC versions of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles



school kid at the time.

Tell us when were you bitten by the programming bug? I had a ZX Spectrum and had a dabble at BASIC but thought that there must be a better way of coding for it. I bought a Z80 assembler and taught myself to code on evenings and weekends. I was a

### How did you get the TMNT job?

I was offered the contract as Probe could convert to most platforms but really struggled to find someone to take on the Spectrum and Amstrad CPC versions.

### Did you have access to the coin-op machine during development?

I travelled down to the south coast to play the coinop. I took my artist with me and we had a day on the machine. We also had an end-to-end video of the game. It was not uncommon in the early days to do conversions after a quick play of the game and then only having photos of the screens.

### How long did the conversion take, and what do you remember as being the most challenging aspects of it?

It normally took a couple of months to code a game. Programmers had their own libraries of sprite routines and scrolling routines so it was a straightforward job to get the bulk of the work done. The challenge on this game was the isometric view of the levels. I had only worked in 2D previously and this game needed X, Y and Z. The Turtles could move in and out of the screen and jump onto different height sections so it all took some working out. The other challenge was how to store all the graphics for each level. The answer was to split the sprites up into component parts so that the Turtles used the same body parts but I overlaid their individual weapons on top. The





baddies also reused body parts (legs, body and heads) and this saved enough memory to fit it all in.

### The first *Turtles* game was a full-colour affair, where as you opted for monochrome graphics on the Spectrum. What was the reason for this?

DS: The detail of the isometric levels and the way the sprites moved over them did not lend itself to the limited attribute colours of the Spectrum. It would have caused quite a bit of colour clash.

#### The first game was a huge hit for the publisher. There must have been a lot of pressure on you to come up with the goods.

The games industry was always full of pressure to deliver the goods so it became the normal way of working. We always used to have tight deadlines and it was always hard to fit as much into the conversion as the publisher wanted, so I became used to it. I remember working 48 hours straight through on some games as deadline approached. Thank God I was young, as it would probably kill me now.

### Were you happy with the end result?

I was very happy with the way the game played, and we fitted all the levels in and delivered on time. That's fine by me.

### Did you remain in the games industry, and what are you up to these days?

I moved onto other games and other systems including ST, Amiga, PC, Game Gear, Master System, then onto the newer home systems. I left the industry around five years ago. I had moved from programmer to senior to lead and then into team management as a producer. Finally I became development director at Acclaim in Cheltenham. Unfortunately, a third redundancy opened my eyes to the fact that it was time to find something more stable.

I currently work as a project manager for a company in Sheffield. I still have some good friends that live the games development dream, but I'm happy with my life as it is now.

### developer Q&A:

### Martin Bysh reveals why the 16-bit versions were sadly lacking



How did you end up with the job of converting *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* to the Atari ST and Amiga? After completing Viz for Probe Software they offered me Turtles. It looked like a straightforward conversion so I accepted.

Did you work alongside Hugh Riley (graphics) and Jeroen Tel (music), or was everything done remotely? I never met or even spoke to Hugh or

Jeroen. Everything was supplied by Probe. This was typical of the Probe method.

### Were the ST and Amiga versions developed simultaneously, or one

One after the other. I can't remember which I did first, but my preference would have been for the ST as that would have presented the most problems. Porting a game from ST to Amiga could take as little as a couple of weeks, whereas porting from superior hardware down would always present problems. I had specialised in such ports prior to Viz and TMNT, converting games from one to the other, often in as little as a week.

How long did it take to complete the job?
I can't remember exactly how long the development took, but it overran considerably. We ran into problems on certain Amiga 1000s with the unusual Amiga compressed disk format we were using.

### Did Probe monitor your progress and give you feedback as the development progressed?

Probe monitored progress, but not at strict intervals. The industry was beginning to mature at that point, but it was still pretty informal. The job of producer eventually emerged to bring order, but it was quite a recent addition to the games industry then. And the average producer's lack of technical knowledge and experience, combined with the independent character of the invariably selftaught programmers, artists and musicians, left them as little more than glorified messengers, passing notes between us.

### How pleased were you with the finished product? MB: Not very. This was the 13th game I'd published without rest,

and I'd begun to tire of the process, which was reflected in the final product. The Probe system, while very lucrative for them, was not enjoyable for a developer. Previously I'd had much more control over products, managing the graphics and sound, or even taking a product to beta before selling it. Creating Probe games felt as dull and uncreative as the quick Amiga-ST ports I'd been doing, but whereas the ports took a couple of very well-paid weeks, Turtles took many months. I'd say that Turtles was one of the main drivers for me leaving the industry and going to university. I returned to it after uni, but by then it had become big business and after managing a large team of developers for a film tie-in, I left it about 12 years ago. With the exception of TMNT, it was fun while it lasted.





### the conversions



### **01.** NFS (Best Version)

Bar the arcade-perfect Xbox Live Arcade version, we think the NES offering is the best port of Konami's arcade game. It looks the part with bright colourful visuals and well animated sprites, and also plays the part with solid collision detection and authentic representations of the original levels. Like the other home versions, it loses out due to the lack of four-player support, but it does make up for this oversight with the inclusion of two

additional exclusive levels and greatly extended levels from the arcade original. A few changes are made to the boss roster (the end battle against Bebop and Rocksteady now has you fighting Baxter Stockman), but this is an otherwise excellent port.

**02.** Amstrad CPC All the 8-bit computer ports are of a very high standard, but our favourite is easily the CPC offering. For starters it looks alorious, with bright, cartoony visuals. excellent animation and -

shock horror - genuinely decent scrolling. Probe were masters at getting the best out of Lord Sugar's machine, and Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles: The Coin-Op was no exception. Like the other 8-bit ports, it lacks the killer pace and constant assault of enemies that the original coin-op offered, but this is still an excellent port that even non-CPC owners will appreciate.

#### 03. Commodore 64

The C64 version isn't quite as good as the Amstrad offering, but



### COIN-OP CAPERS: TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

















we still had a lot of fun with it. The colour scheme may not be as nifty as the CPC game, and the sprites are a lot smaller, but they remain perfectly formed and well animated. The backgrounds are of a very high standard, while the collision detection is very similar to the Amstrad offering, and a darn sight better than the ropey 16-bit offerings. It again suffers from a lack of pace and urgency, but this is mainly down to the fact that so few enemies (typically three) are ever on-screen, meaning it never feels as exciting to play as Konami's coin-op. Despite these issues, the Commodore 64 version is another worthy conversion that fans of the arcade original will still eniov.

### **04.** Atari ST

In some ways the Atari ST port is extremely similar to Probe's woeful Amiga offering. It's redeemed by a number of important differences though. The scrolling, while far from perfect. isn't as juddery as the Amiga offering, and there is a decent representation of the original theme tune playing along in the background. Collision detection is also slightly better that its Amiga counterpart although it still doesn't feel as tight as the 8-bit games. It's far from perfect, and falls short of the superior 8-bit offerings, but it's a rare triumph for the Atari ST. which typically flailed behind Commodore's Amiga when it came to conversions.

### **05.** ZX Spectrum

The Spectrum conversion of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* is another slick port, and further testament to Probe's coding skills. Unlike its peers, the Spectrum offering is in monochrome, lacking

the colourful visuals that work so well on the Amstrad and C64 versions. Luckily, the Speccy offering has some great detail in its large sprites, meaning it still manages to capture the humour and larger-than-life appeal of Konami's original coin-op. Collision detection is very good, while Probe has done a good job of trying to capture all the elements of the arcade game. There are often more enemies on-screen than the other 8-bit versions meaning that it's a little more frenetic than the Amstrad and C64 offerings.

### **06.** PC

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles on the PC suffers from all the same problems that were an issue on the other 16-bit computers. It's better than the Amiga version, but on a par with the Atari ST offering. Like the other home versions it lacks the four-player support found in the original arcade game, but the two-player action is fast-paced and helped along by the sheer number of enemies that constantly attack you. It's probably our favourite version out of all the 16-bit offerings, but it's still a disappointment more so when you put it up against the superior 8-bit versions and the fun NES game.

#### **07.** Xbox Live Arcade

Unsurprisingly, the Xbox Live Arcade version of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles was an exact port of the arcade original. Ported by conversion kings Digital Eclipse, it featured all the levels from the original arcade game, and also boasted online play, enabling you to play with up to three other people online. Released to tie in with the 2007 movie, the

character screen tied in with the style of the characters in the film, but it was an otherwise perfect port and a steal at just 800 points. Sadly, the game is no longer on sale, so if you missed it on its original release, you're now out of luck.

### **08.** GameCube/ Xbox/PS2

The worst thing about this port of Teenage Mutant Ninia Turtles was that you had to endure plaving the decidedly average Teenage Mutant Ninia Turtles 2: Battle Nexus in order to unlock it. Once unlocked, it revealed itself to be an extremely authentic port of the arcade original. The only differences were some alterations to the music and the loss of many of the voice clips presumably because Ubisoft didn't have the rights to use them.

#### **09.** Commodore Amiga (Worst Version)

Amazingly, the Amiga version of Teenage Mutant Ninia Turtles is extremely poor when compared to its 8-bit peers. The scrolling throughout is very jerky and off-putting, while the animation is also stiff and stilting, lacking the smooth-flowing visuals of the arcade game. It earns additional points for having far more on-screen enemies than the 8-bit games, but this simply highlights the poor collision that the Amiga port suffers from. It also lacks the extended and additional levels that were found in the NES game, making the whole thing a massive disappointment for fans of the arcade game. The final nail in the coffin was a complete lack of music in the game and extremely weedy sound effects. A disappointingly bland port that could have been a lot better

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