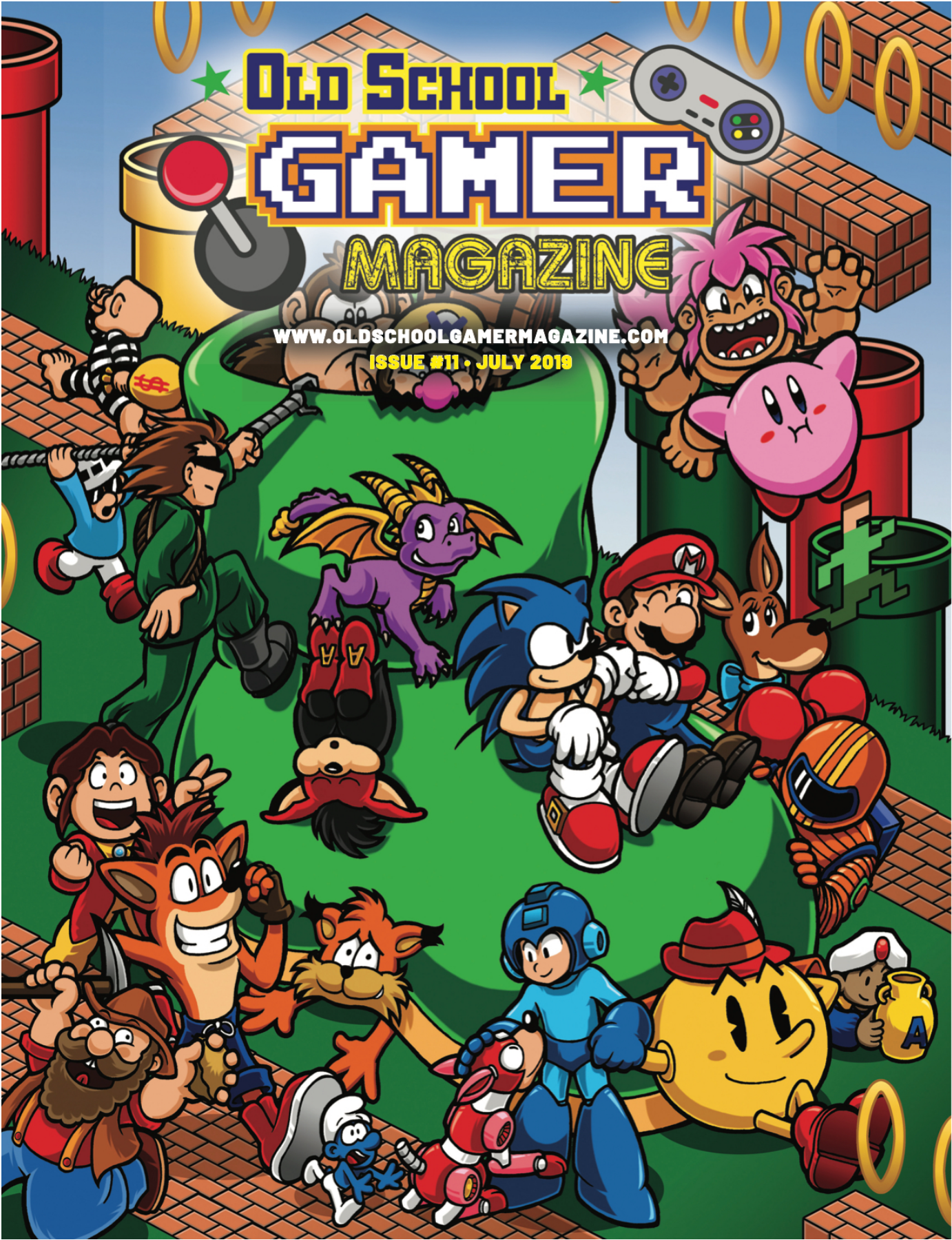
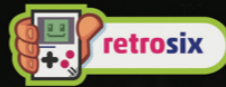


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Great Retro Shops
BY OLD SCHOOL GAMER



I'd like to take a moment to introduce myself. My name is Brian Szarek, Editor for Old School Gamer Magazine. I've been with OSGM since the second issue. After reading the first issue I knew that I had to be a part of this in some way.

Old School Gamer Magazine is really quite unique and fills a void in the retro gaming community. While there are some great online resources, podcasts and YouTube content providers out there, a bi-monthly print and digital magazine featuring all-new content from some of the industry's top writers is always a great read. All of our writers are excellent and bring interesting and unique perspectives. While we've had top industry writers, such as Brett Weiss, Michael Thomasson, and Walter Day, writing for OSGM since the beginning, this issue we've added one of the top names since nearly the very beginning of home console gaming: Howard Scott Warshaw.

With this exciting new addition, we'd also like to create a new section called "Ask the Editor". Email me directly with any recommendations for stories, themes, content, or anything else on your mind as it relates to the publication. In the forthcoming issues we'll take a random sample of the submissions and respond, in kind. We're here to make this the best magazine possible, and your input is critical. We look forward to hearing from you soon!

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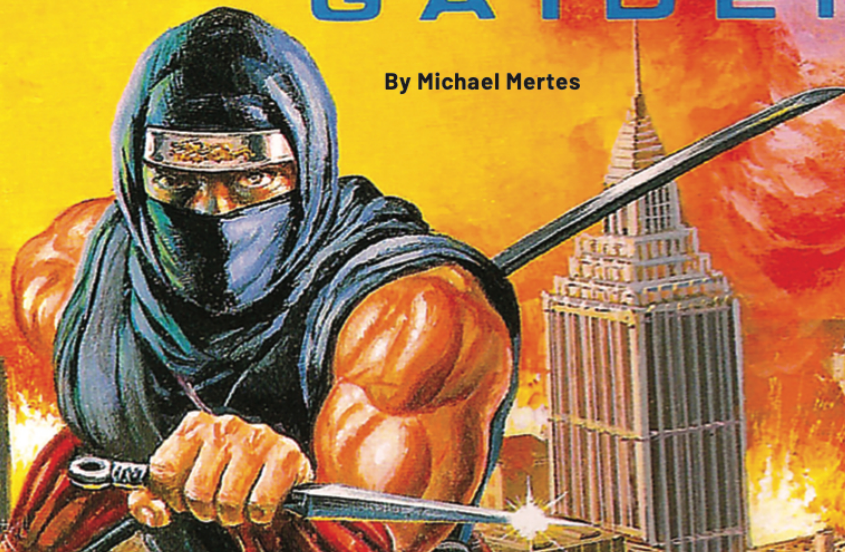
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PLATFORMERS

NINJA

忍法 GAIDEN™

By Michael Mertes



By the beginning of 1989, the Nintendo Entertainment System already had a plethora of platforming titles available, but none of them had evolved the genre as much as one title in particular. Just a few short months into 1989, Ninja Gaiden set itself apart from other action games in a variety of ways and the timing of its release couldn't have been more appropriate. The late '80s had kids in a ninja frenzy with the overwhelming popularity of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and syndicated episodes of GI Joe. I was personally bit by the ninja bug because my father was a martial artist. If anything had ninjas in it, he was getting his hands on it, and by proxy, I would too. So, as you can imagine, when my dad woke me up on a Friday morning with a brand-new NES game in his hands with a Ninja on it, I was stoked!.

Up until the release of Ninja Gaiden, storylines and objectives in platforming games could be pretty simplistic. Many times, the "save the princess!" gimmick you would get in the instruction manual was as much of a plot as you would get. Ninja Gaiden makes it apparent that this isn't the case with this game as soon as you

turn on the console. Instantly, you are greeted with a quick title introduction and then sucked into a cinematic cut scene featuring two ninjas dueling to the death in a field. Lit only by the lunar beams of the moon, they run at each other with great speed, leap high into the air, and clash swords. As both ninjas let gravity take them to the ground, only one remains standing. It's an epic scene that sets the stage for the rest of the game, and it is delivered to the player in the first 30 seconds.

Any game can have a fancy introduction sequence and falter shortly thereafter, but Ninja Gaiden and its sequels proved they had more to offer. Ninja Gaiden takes the action and polish that Castlevania injected into the platforming genre and ramps up the speed of the overall game, requiring players to sharpen their response time against a multitude of enemies and traps. While Simon Belmont possessed decent jumping skills, Ryu Hayabusa steps it up a notch with ninja flips and the ability to grab onto walls. This grappling ability became a skill you must learn in order to survive later levels, but it also makes for a great last-second save from falling to your doom. Finally, Ryu can pick up various ninja arts that he can use to destroy the enemies that hinder his path. All of these ninja abilities are easy to learn but very difficult to master. This is a game where death can come quickly to Ryu, not because of poor design, but rather a lack of reaction time. Thankfully, the game properly ramps up the difficulty as the player progresses to

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give them time to learn those skills and hone his or her craft.

Along with responsive controls, brilliantly composed music and impressive graphics, the feature in this game that revolutionized the platforming genre comes back to the storytelling. The developers at Tecmo used Ninja Gaiden as the launching pad for their Tecmo Theater cutscenes, a feature that further depicted the storyline between each level with detailed cutscenes, giving the hero objective and expanding the overall exposure to the Ninja Gaiden universe. While the previously mentioned opening cutscene started with a one on one duel, future scenes weave a story of a young ninja on a quest for vengeance for his father. This story develops into something much bigger, involving two demon statues, the CIA, a crazed leader of a demonic army and, ultimately, a demon whose resurrection could prove to be the end of the world. Every cutscene sets a precedent for the next level and gives you a clear understanding of where the hero is and why he is there. The game offers a variety of different locations that range from a city, underground bunker, jungle, and a seemingly abandoned temple in the middle of the Amazon. Where most other platforming games would visit the same locations with no explanation, the Tecmo Theater makes it all fit within the context and, most importantly, drives the player to complete the next level to see the next scene. In 1989, many platformers lacked any sort of finale with any weight. Ninja Gaiden wraps up its tale with an epic finish that sees the hero get his revenge and the girl. All in a day's work for the Ninja Dragon.

Ninja Gaiden was a huge commercial success upon its release, so it shouldn't be surprising that a sequel was released for it in 1990. Ninja Gaiden 2: The Dark Sword of Chaos had a lot to live up to after the first game knocked it out of the park and Tecmo delivered the goods once again. The second game's Tecmo Theater intro welcomes a new villain standing on top of his tower as a lightning storm rocks the surrounding land. New characters are introduced along with the return of several from the first game. Ryu has also been given a few new ninja tricks to use on his adventure. The first of which is his ability to climb up and down the side of any vertical surface, minimizing the amount of back and forth flips required to climb objects in the first game. His other new skill allows him to split the spirit of his body into two additional ninjas, effectively tripling his firepower. While a few of the end level bosses from the last game are reused towards the end of the game, the Tecmo Theater cutscenes reiterate why you must do battle with them again. The conclusion to the second game is just as satisfying as the first, with all the scenes in between levels building upon the plot and establishing the design of the levels.

1991 brought the third and final game of the original side-scrolling trilogy, not only to the NES, but also the Atari Lynx. Sadly, Ninja Gaiden 3: The Ancient Ship of Doom is met with the least amount of acclaim, especially when it was released in North America. The first two titles had a reputation for being extremely difficult to conquer;

especially considering that they had to be completed in one sitting. The flip side was that both games offered unlimited continues, so if you needed to walk away for a few hours after being humiliated, you could return where you left off. Ninja Gaiden 3 cranks up the difficulty level even more, and to make matters worse, gives you a limited amount of continues to beat the game. This was not the case for the Famicom version of Ninja Gaiden 3. Unlimited continues were still available in the Japanese version, along with a password system to quickly return to where you left off. There are conflicting statements as to why the decision to make the North American release more difficult was made. Some claim that it was merely to maintain the status that all Ninja Gaiden games were tough to beat, but others



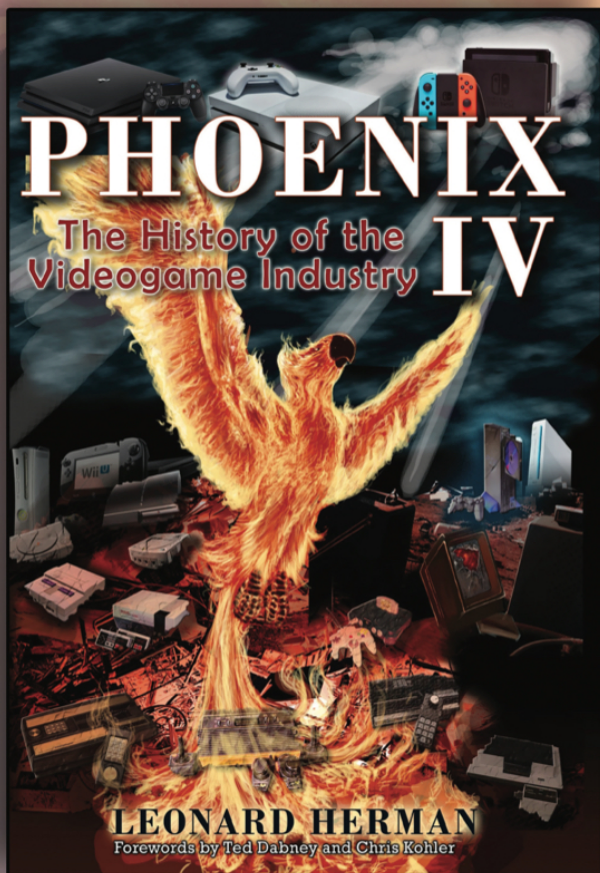
argue that due to the popular video game rental market in North America, Tecmo increased the difficulty for would-be renters.

Ninja Gaiden 3 is a prequel to Ninja Gaiden 2, possibly taking place about six months before the events of the Dark Sword of Chaos. For episode 3, Tecmo opted to drop Ryu's ability to split his body into two more ninjas, and, instead give him the ability to raise the attack level and arc of his sword strikes, similar to the whip upgrade in Castlevania. Additionally, Ryu can perform an overhead climb that will allow him to cross gaps horizontally. Sadly, the level designs for the final sequel does not deliver anything exciting, and the predictability of the story in the Tecmo Theater cutscenes doesn't give the player much reason to push forward, especially with the increased difficulty of the North American release. If you are looking to try the third game out, I highly recommend seeking out the Nintendo Famicom release of the game, as it is the definitive version.

While the Ninja Gaiden trilogy did not end as strong as it probably would have liked, its game design and cut scene presentation has played an influential role in games made after it. If someone asks you to give them an example of a platforming game that has a fantastic plot, I guarantee they will be impressed with Ninja Gaiden. **LG**

Michael Mertes - From the moment he touched an Intellivision controller in 1985, Mike knew that he had experienced something incredible in the world of video games that would shape him for the rest of his life. From that point forward, he would make it his mission to experience video games from every console generation going forward. Eventually, he would become obsessed with magazines that wrote about the games he loved, and it would inspire him to start writing about games himself in 1998 for various local media outlets. Always looking for an opportunity to branch out, Mike eventually coded the foundation of a website that would ultimately morph into Gamer Logic Dot Net, an independent video game site that continues to cover modern and classic video game today. Additional, Mike composes music for indie games under his other alias "Unleaded Logic."

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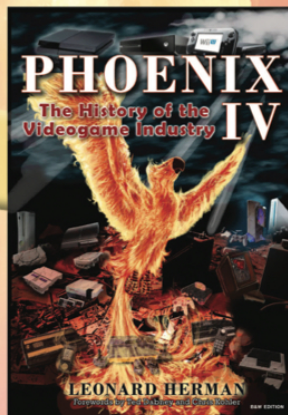
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EARTHWORM JIM

A LOOK BACK

By Shaun Jex

If Doug TenNapel had done nothing more than create a character named Queen Slug-For-A-Butt, it would have been enough to make him a video game legend. The name is pure perfection, the brilliant antidote to the seemingly never ending cascade of games that take themselves WAY too seriously. Fortunately for the gaming world, he went above and beyond and also created the characters of Earthworm Jim, Princess What's Her Name, Psy-Crow, Evil The Cat, Major Mucus, and a whole cast of other bizarre creations.

Twenty-five years since its release, Earthworm Jim remains a classic of the platforming genre, a game that somehow manages to satirize platformers while simultaneously mastering the style. The writing is clever and the humor still seems fresh a quarter century later. It's odd to think that this masterpiece began as a simple sketch of a worm.

Franchises like Sonic the Hedgehog and Super Mario Bros. were wildly popular, and Playmates Toys decided to create their own franchise. TenNapel presented a sketch of a worm to Shiny Entertainment and the company bought off on the concept. With modern video games involving such massive teams and extensive planning, it's hard to imagine such a slap dash approach to game making, but TenNapel remembers it as one of the charms of creating a game in the early 90s.

"What's weird about that time in gaming is the giant game design document wasn't such a big thing," TenNapel said. "We were still coming out of a time when programmers and artists just slammed stuff in and waited to see if it worked. I don't think we ever had a formal design document on Earthworm Jim. If anything, we might have reverse engineered one after the game was done. But our design process was to put sketches on paper, sometimes even stick men, and everyone contributed. The programmers would go off and slam together a test level and we would decide if it was fun or not."

The game features players as the titular Earthworm Jim, a small worm transformed into a superhero when a "super suit" falls to the earth, which gives him arms and legs. His mission is to rescue Princess-What's-Her-Name. The name of the maiden in distress is one of the game's funniest elements, a parody of the myriad helpless female characters that filled the genre. One of the most stunning elements of the game is that it manages this type of goofy humor with an excellence of gameplay.

"We were a lot of fun guys and thought games took themselves too seriously," TenNapel said. "I mean, we were dead-dog serious about the game play and quality, but didn't understand why the content had to take itself so seriously. There were a lot of nights where we worked so hard (that) we were punch-drunk, so it was great to work on a game that was silly and goofy."

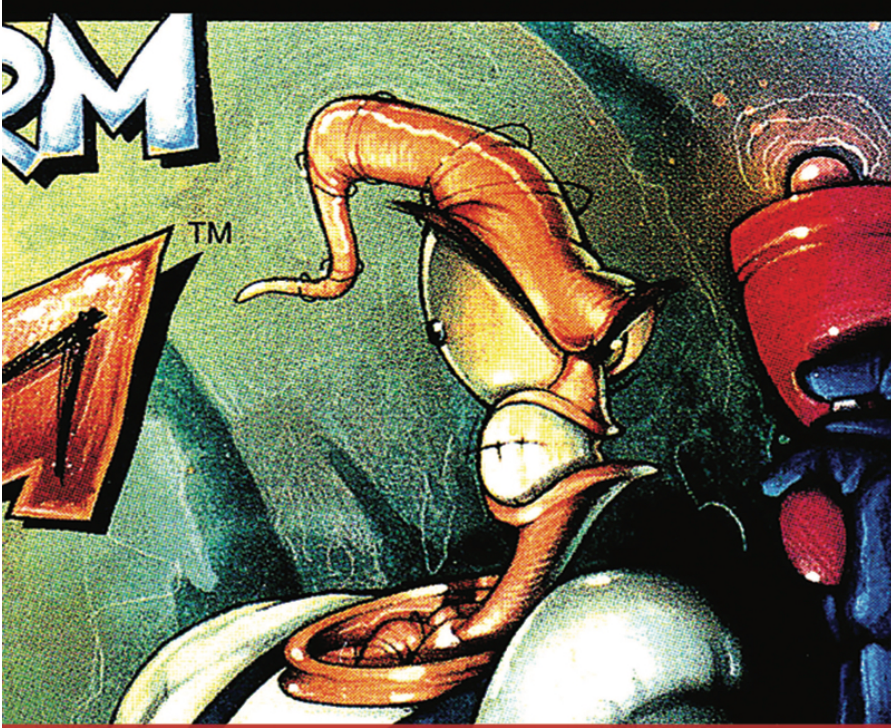
TenNapel drew inspiration from a wide variety of sources, and it shows in the story and characters found in Earthworm Jim. A quick look at his writing credits reveals the diversity of his projects, all of which combine smart writing with a quirky and surreal sense of humor. His writing includes graphic novels like Newtons, Tommysaurus Rex, and Cardboard, and work for television programs like Attack of the Killer Tomatoes, Adventure Time, It's a Spongebob Christmas, and VeggieTales in the House.

"I've always had an odd-ball sense of humor," TenNapel said. "We were all into Monty Python and the Warner Brothers cartoons cracked us up. We also were watching a lot of Wallace and Grommit. The most difficult thing about humor is the timing. That's a big problem on a repetitive game and you want to keep it a surprise. A lot of our humor was "randomized" where the computer decided when something would happen to keep that random feel to it."

Of course, just because the game was silly and a bit off-the-wall, doesn't mean that TenNapel and the rest of the crew weren't rigorous in the writing process. Every joke went through systematic testing to ensure that it would work with the final product.

"We threw out so much humor that was too obscure," TenNapel

Seal



said. "If a joke showed up in the game, and we couldn't make each other laugh, it was a truth serum test that it probably didn't belong in the game. We would try things out, and if it wasn't funny, it went on the cutting room floor with everything else. So, there was a lot of trial and error. Most stuff that's funny on paper usually got even funnier in the game because we couldn't believe we were getting away with it!"

Another memorable feature of the game was its soundtrack. The music was composed by Tommy Tallarico, who went on to compose music for games like *Advent Rising*, *Sonic* and the *Black Night*, and *Metrod Prime*. He also started the brilliant *Video Games Live* series of concerts and heads up the effort to revitalize the Intellivision console.

Tallarico's work on the *Earthworm Jim* music was so popular that the music from the first two games was released as a compilation album in 2006, and then in 2017 as a four-sided vinyl.

"The music was very important, but totally out of my league," TenNapel said. "We would get regular visits from Tommy and he would have some music to put in the game and try out. That was where a lot of the classical music came in. We got it from Tommy and it might end up in a random level, and suddenly it was just hilarious because it didn't belong there."

The bizarre characters, hilarious storyline, and amazing music combined to somehow create something even better than its brilliant, disparate parts. Looking back, TenNapel has thoughts on the game's staying power.

"Certainly, the strength of the gameplay was the spine of the game that made it legit," TenNapel said. "Once you have a great playing foundation, putting the beautiful, kinetic art and character on top made it the legend. If either one of those was missing, I don't think the game would have lasted this long."

The character remains popular and the future looks bright for *Earthworm Jim*. Earlier this year, Tallarico announced that they will be bringing a new *Earthworm Jim* title out for the Amico

(the new system Tallarico has planned for the Intellivision). It will feature a number of members of the original creative team.

"It won't be the whole team," TenNapel said. "There will be a few full timers from the original team, but that depends on who has their schedule open. I'm working on the *Earthworm Jim* comic, and am available any time they want. But we're still in the early stages of that game. It could be anything, but so long as it's funny and plays well, I think it will be a great addition to the *Earthworm Jim* gaming family."

In addition, TenNapel is working on an all-new comic featuring the irrepressible *Earthworm Jim*. Fans of the character can find out more details by checking out <https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/earthworm-jim-the-comic-book#/>.

All of this is great news for fans of the wriggly, pink Lumbricina, and while we wait for his next adventure, we can go back and rescue Princess-What's-Her-Name again. Just don't expect a happy ending. Spoiler alert: she gets crushed by a falling cow.

Shaun Jex is a lifelong gamer, a journalist, and pop culture historian. His love of video games began with a Commodore 64 he played growing up, late night sessions on his NES, Game Boy and Sega Genesis, and frequent trips to the local Tilt arcade. He edits the *Citizens' Advocate* newspaper in Coppell, Texas and writes about Disney and Walt Disney World history for *Celebrations Magazine* and the *Celebrations Magazine* blog. He runs a channel with his wife Kara called "The Marceline Depot," dedicated to Disney, amusement parks, and travel.

SPACE PANIC

THE FOUNDATION OF ALL PLATFORMERS

By Michael Thomasson

MICHAEL THOMASSON'S

JUST 40IX

Universal's *Space Panic*, a rather obscure cult-classic released in 1980, revolutionized game design by introducing novel game mechanics that birthed a new genre. *Space Panic* is often recognized as the first platform game, as it was the premiere title to include ladders for ascending and descending within a playfield. *Space Panic* paved the road for other arcade climbing hits such as Nintendo's *Donkey Kong* (1981), Atari's *Kangaroo* (1982), Data East's *BurgerTime* (1982), as well as popular home platformers such as *Miner 2049er* (1982), *Jumpman* (1983), and the ever-popular *Lode Runner* (1983). While the introduction of ladders allows a new way to maneuver, be careful, because the alien antagonists can also scale the ladders in pursuit!

In *Space Panic*, a very vulnerable astronaut must outlive perilous creatures that inhabit underground caverns beneath an alien planet. The protagonist's space helmet can only protect the space man for so long, as the oxygen supply dissipates quickly. With time ticking, the astronaut must use his trusty shovel to vanquish his foes before running out of air and turning blue! If being able to breathe is not motivation enough, know that any remaining oxygen at level completion converts to player points.

Taking inspiration from the original "digging" game, *Heiankyo Alien* (1979), *Space Panic* remixes its predecessor's overhead

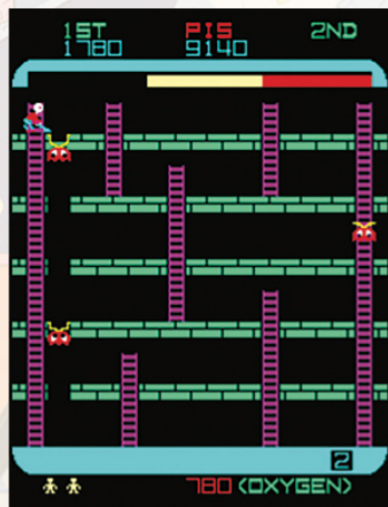
view and turns it on its side. To vanquish the space aliens, the astronaut must dig traps which an advancing alien can plunge into and get stuck. The space man must then swiftly bury the immobilized enemy with freshly shoveled dirt before it can free itself by climbing back out. Aliens that escape such a trap come back twice as deadly!

There are three different types of alien enemies, each with their own distinct personalities. They can be differentiated by their color, with the initial dumb red enemies known as "Monsters." Eliminating a red monster on the ground floor only nets a measly hundred points, but *Space Panic* offers a unique point stacking system. Digging multiple holes, perfectly placed one above another, allows an enemy to be dropped through several holes in one action, amplifying the amount of points earned.

The second type of enemy is the green "Boss." It behaves and moves faster and more intelligently than the regular monsters and requires a minimum drop of two floors to destroy it. Blue "Dons" are the third and final adversary. They are quite crafty and very dangerous. Dropping them through three levels is a must! If any enemies climb out of a trap, they come out much wiser, evolving into the next higher ranked rival type.

Using the shovel to dig small pits seems the smart thing to do to survive, as pits can be used to kill enemies in addition to preventing foes from pursuing the cosmonaut. Remember, the protagonist cannot traverse over pits, so those very same holes must be refilled in order to get to the other side of the platform. This is especially true when multiple enemies are advancing, as only a single enemy can fall into a ditch. An available escape route is essential!

Finding a *Space Panic* coin-op can be quite challenging in today's day and age. It was not a common Universal console even back in the day, so good luck. Broderbund published a clone of the game under the name of *Apple Panic* for the Apple II computer, which later found a home on other home computers such as the Commodore VIC-20, the TRS-80, and IBM compatible computers. If you are fortunate enough to have access to a Colecovision,



you are privy to the only official console port of the game. *Space Panic* for Coleco's console dropped during the holiday season of '82, so it is quite sad that such a pivotal piece of history has mostly been forgotten... but not here in the pages of *Old School Gamer!*

Michael Thomasson is one of the most widely respected videogame historians in the field today. He teaches multiple college level videogame courses, and has contributed to dozens of gaming texts and television shows including MTV's Video MODS and the highly-rated book *Downright Bizarre Games*. He has written business plans, managed a multiple game-related retail stores, and consults for multiple video game and computer museums. Michael has helped publish 100s of games on Atari, Sega and other console platforms. In 2014, *The Guinness Book of World Records* declared that Thomasson had "The Largest Videogame Collection" in the world. Visit www.GoodDealGames.com.



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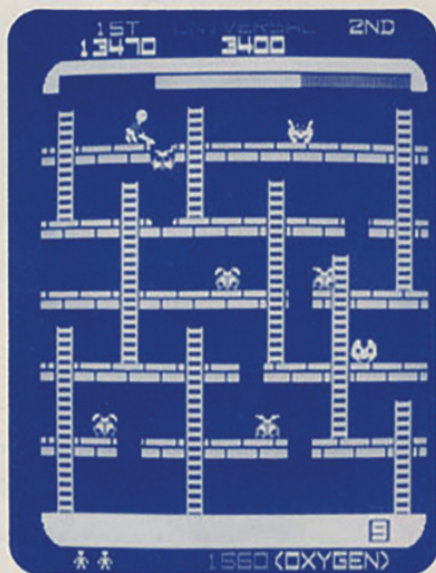
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SPACE PANIC

HOW TO PLAY

- ★ Dig holes by operating the man. When a space monster has fallen into a hole, fill it up before the space monster creeps out of it, and you are awarded points.
- ★ The man can escape by jumping down through the hole he has dug to the next lower floor.
- ★ When oxygen is rarefied, a warning buzzer sounds and the man's movement slows down. When oxygen is reduced to zero, he dies.
- ★ If oxygen has not been reduced to zero even when all the space monsters on the screen have been destroyed, you are awarded corresponding bonus points.
- ★ The highest scorer can register his name on the screen.



SCORE



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BOSS 300~1,200 PTS

DON 800~2,000 PTS

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Jumpin' Jehosephat!

Donkey Kong is often credited as being the initial game where the protagonist can "jump". While it is true that Mario was the first character to leap over enemies, the astronaut in Space Panic could jump down a hole that had been dug to a lower level in order flee from onrushing aliens!

Smurf: Rescue in Gargamel's Castle and Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure

By Brett Weiss

Platformers were ubiquitous during the '80s and '90s, so I could have picked from any of hundreds of titles for this installment of Old School Bargain Bin. I decided to focus on an early platformer based on a cartoon I didn't care about and a sequel to one of the most beloved 8-bit video games of all time. Both are great games respective to their era.

out and bought a copy. Not only did it have the most attractive graphics I had ever seen for any video game up until that point, the gameplay seemed intriguing. Instead of something babyish, like a matching game or some simplified maze title, it was a side-scrolling platformer with elements similar to Pitfall!, which of course is one of the best games for the Atari 2600.

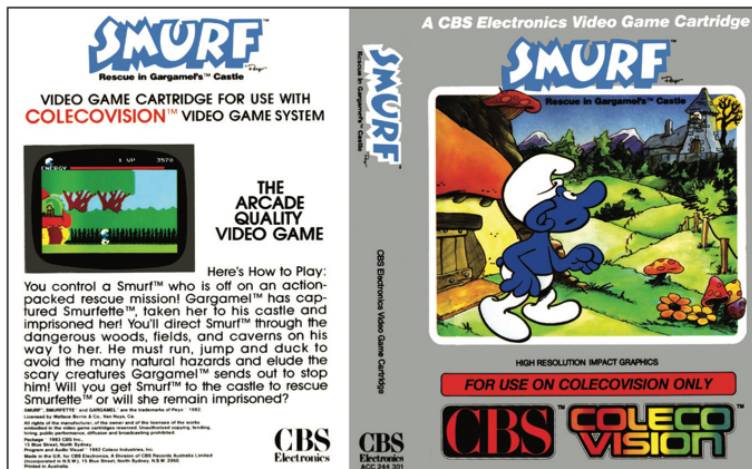
In this colorful, musical, highly entertaining game, the evil Gargamel has captured Smurfette and trapped her in his lab. As Smurf, you must set out on a solo mission to rescue her. You'll walk through fields and the woods, ducking under (or otherwise avoiding) hawks and hopping over bluffs, mounds, spiky grasses, and picket fences blocking your pathway. You score points with each obstacle you jump over, and the faster you finish each section of the countryside, the more bonus points you'll get. Smurf grows fatigued as he goes, but entering a new area fully restores his energy indicator bar.

After traversing the great outdoors, you'll reach Gargamel's spooky castle, where the music turns from chipper to gloomy, and the bright, sunny skies yield to more somber hues of black and purple (as well as muted yellow). Here you'll duck under, dodge, and jump over bats and spiders, as well as leap over stalagmites.

When you reach Smurfette, you'll jump up on a giant skull and then onto a platform where she awaits rescue. If you walk offscreen to the left, then reenter, a famous glitch occurs where Smurfette's eyes go black and part of her dress disappears (making her appear "topless," more or less). Then the looping action begins anew.

The jumping mechanic is a little awkward. Instead of pressing a side action button, you push up on the joystick. Pushing it immediately a second time makes Smurf take a large jump forward. If you wait a bit longer, he will make a small jump forward, but if you wait too long, he jumps in place. Like most ColecoVision games, there are four skill levels. Level 1 is super

Game Covers provided by TheCoverProject.net



Smurf: Rescue in Gargamel's Castle

ColecoVision

Publisher: Coleco

Developer: Coleco

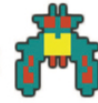
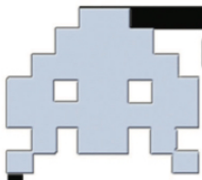
1 or 2 players (alternating)

1982

Approximate value: \$12 (cartridge only)

When The Smurfs cartoon series, featuring the cutesy blue characters, debuted in 1981, I was 14 years old and a huge fan of The Super Friends and Thundarr the Barbarian. The show was clearly aimed at kids younger than me, so I didn't give it much attention.

However, when Coleco debuted Smurf: Rescue in Gargamel's Castle for the ColecoVision the next year, I rushed



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easy, with smaller obstacles and no flying creatures. Jumps and obstacles get trickier in harder levels, and in level 4, the hawks and bats will come back to you after you have dodged them, making for a legitimately challenging game.

I played *Smurf: Rescue in Gargamel's Castle* for countless hours back in the 80s, and for this review I dusted off my copy, intending to play for just a few minutes as a quick refresher. Three hours later, I was still at it, having a blast. Despite the fact that you don't have any weapons, and you can't even jump on enemies to defeat them, it's still a lot of fun to travel through the cartoonlike areas and make all those tricky jumps, accompanied by charming, circuslike music.

Smurf: Rescue in Gargamel's Castle was also released for the Atari 2600. It has blockier graphics, of course, but it does include snakes, which aren't in the ColecoVision game.



Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure

Super Nintendo

Publisher: Activision

Developer: Redline Games

1 player

1994

Approximate value: \$8-\$10 (cartridge only)

Super Pitfall for the Nintendo NES was hot garbage and an insult to Pitfall!, the legendary Atari 2600 classic. It featured a clumsy protagonist, terrible music, ugly graphics, generic level design, and hidden items that are annoying to look for, since you have to jump in random locations to make them appear. Fortunately, the follow-up, *Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure* for the Super NES, is far superior and a fitting tribute to Activision's Atari 2600 masterpiece.

After numerous successful quests, bold adventurer Pitfall Harry has retired and passed on his thrill of exploration and discovery to his hip, attitudinal son, Harry Junior. Pitfall Harry eventually grows restless and decides to come out of retirement for one last adventure: exploring the jungles of Central America with his son for the lost Mayan treasures. Unfortunately, while

deep in the heart of the jungle, Harry Sr. gets taken captive by the warrior spirit Zakelua: Lord of Evil. You, as Harry Jr., must look for treasure as well as rescue dear old dad from a fate worse than death.

You begin the adventure armed only with your trusty sling, which can be used as a whip or to throw stones. You must fend off numerous skeletons, jaguars, hawks, gargoyles, snakes, vapor ghosts, and spirits as you go through the game's 10 levels of play. Mayan lands you must explore include the Jungle of Ceiba, the Tazamul Mines, Xibalba Falls, the Lost City of Copan, Copan Temple, Lakamul Rain Forest, Yaxchilan Lagoon, Balankanche Mine, the Tikal Ruins, and Tikal Temple. You can find artifacts that give you extra time, health, and continues. If you stumble across a chili pepper, you will be temporarily endowed with super-human strength, which enables you to run faster and jump higher.

As you progress through the game, you will discover ancient Mayan weapons, such as boomerangs and exploding stones, that will help you defeat enemies and overcome obstacles. Jungle exploration requires significant agility and the ability to perform many skills, such as swinging on vines, crawling, climbing ropes, crossing pegs and cords, riding ziplines, and spring-jumping off webs. You will also ride a skate car, pull levers, enter doors, bungee-jump, and hop aboard a runaway mine car. Bonus worlds are hidden throughout, including the original Atari 2600 rendition of classic Pitfall!.

The action has an overall linear feel to it, but the puzzles, bonus mini-games, and hidden areas mix up the action quite nicely. Elaborate animation causes a slight delay in the controls, and the blind jumps and small, swarming, regenerating enemies (such as dragonflies, monkeys, and spiders) can be a pain as Harry Jr. can't throw straight up or down.

However, this is nevertheless a beautifully animated, nicely scored, graphically detailed, highly entertaining game. The action makes me feel like an adventurer/explorer more than just about any other video game, including *Jungle Hunt*, *Tutankham*, and the various *Indiana Jones* titles.

Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure was also released for the Game Boy Advance, Genesis, Jaguar (with a welcome save feature), Sega CD (with CD quality sound, better graphics, and extra stages), and 32X (with better graphics and extra stages).

Brett Weiss - Noted video game historian Brett Weiss is the author of 10 books, including the *Classic Home Video Games* series, *The 100 Greatest Console Video Games: 1977-1987*, *Retro Pop Culture A to Z*, and *The SNES Omnibus Volumes 1 and 2*. He's had articles published in numerous newspapers and magazines, including the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, *AntiqueWeek*, *Game Informer*, *Classic Gamer Magazine*, *Video Game Trader*, *Video Game Collector*, *Filmfax*, and *Fangoria*. Check out Brett's new YouTube show, "Tales from a Retro Gamer."

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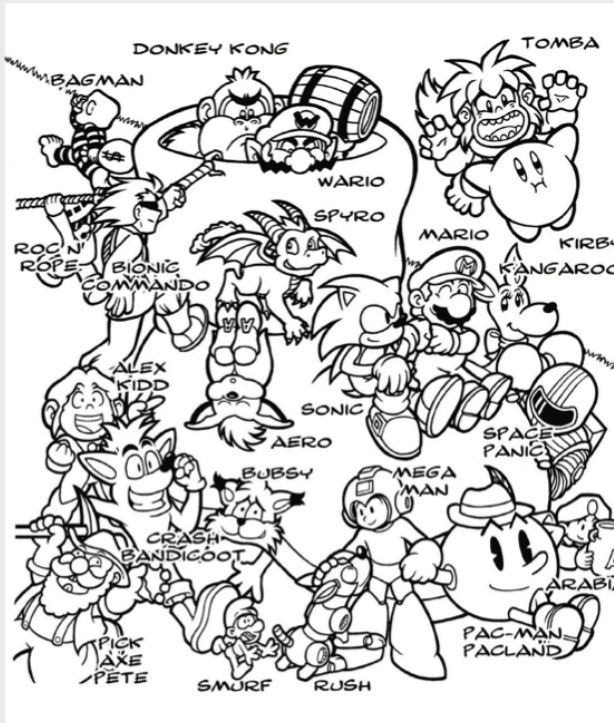


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Opining on Designing

By Howard Scott Warshaw



"Talent borrows, genius steals." -Oscar Wilde

When Oscar said this in the late 1800's, his medium was the written word. He said many new things, but his medium was firmly established and didn't change much during his lifetime. He stood on the shoulders (and picked the intellectual pockets) of prior contributors, and others in turn would come to stand on his. I believe the quote demonstrates his awareness of this continuum.

Here's something that never happened during his lifetime: A new medium. Radio, television and desktop publishing were still decades away at the time of his death.

What's the point of this Wilde rant? Hang on a tic...

Have you ever tried to invent a game? Kids do it constantly. Making up silly ways of passing the time is easy as a child. Have you ever tried to do it as a grown up? And instead of doing it for your own entertainment, have you tried doing something others will enjoy? And then try doing it so someone will bet millions on your idea! And what if it's not just a game, but a video game? Suddenly the game

concept isn't enough, you must also be able to realize it within the technology. It's an interesting challenge.

Of course, the easiest way to meet this challenge is to take an existing game that works well and make some minor tweaks to it. This is called a "knock off," and it explains the lion's share of human endeavor.

To create something fresh and new, to actually innovate... that's hard to do. Consequently, it doesn't happen very often (as demonstrated by the video game industry for the last four decades). How many truly new games do you see vs how many knock offs?

Here's the point - Before there are

knock offs there must first be originals.

Initially, they were all originals... because they had to be. The Video Game was a new medium. The concept of a knock off didn't exist yet.

In this medium, Oscar's quote raises a question: If talent borrows and genius steals, who innovates? In the world of video games, who creates the fodder for all this talent and genius?

The Pioneers, that's who. We were defining a new medium. It was our job to make the originals before there was any basis upon which to build. One way to view our job was as software engineers programming microprocessors. Another way to see it was as entertainers inventing games.

Some of us focused more on the tech, others on the entertainment. The best of us used the interplay of the two in hopes of producing the maximal player experience. We were product designers and implementers, much like engineers in other disciplines except for one all-important distinction... video games face a requirement you rarely find in the tech world: In addition to working it must also be fun!

It's a balancing act. We're constrained by extremely limited hardware and lacking an existing cannon of standards, while trying to keep pace with the idealized entertainment demands of bored teenage minds...Now that is a challenging design problem.

I believe Design is what it's all about, and it's about design that I plan to opine. This column is about revealing the thinking behind the foreheads of people who attempt to solve this problem time and time again. OK, OK, predominantly one forehead, but I've spent a lot of time chatting enjoyably with other foreheads.

Who am I to tell you? Well... I'm Howard. Known by many as HSW. Know by some as HSWWSH. I was a game engineer at Atari in the early days. If you are familiar with the Atari 2600 console, then you've probably come across my work. I made Yars' Revenge, Raiders of the Lost Ark, E.T. and the eventu-

ally released Saboteur. I've also worked in the later days at places like 3DO and BlueShift, making games for a variety of more modern consoles. I've been in and around games for 40 years. I know, I can hardly believe it myself.

I'm going to talk about the theory behind the practice, and how they interact. I'll share stories of the inception and development of each of my games, as well as insights into what I consider to be significant design innovations in video gaming over time.

Every one of my games had a major distinction. I'll tell you what it's like to make one of the best games of all time. I will also share the creation of what is widely held to be the worst game of all time. I will share with you the concepts, goals and tradeoffs which made them what they came to be.

To do this, I'm going to answer questions like these:


- What are you trying to do with your design? In other words, where is your focus?
- What are suitable (or reasonable) design goals? Are you trying to make a game or a contribution?

I'll explore fundamental issues like...

- What is a game? What is a video game? and What's the difference?
- Is your video game merely a labor-saving-device for an existing game (Chess, Monopoly, etc.) or is it something that couldn't exist in any other form but video?

We'll explore the difference between designing Action and Adventure games, about how a game tends to reflect the personality of its designer (and its players, too). Modern games frequently separate design talent from programming talent. At Atari, they both resided in the same brain which created both advantages and disadvantages.

I'll also tell you about how making games for Atari led to my eventually becoming a psychotherapist. It's the first thing I've found since Atari that's given me the depth of joy and satisfaction I first experienced making video games in a dawning industry.

I'm writing this column to help you understand games more deeply and pursue your gaming dreams more intensely. Inspiring your talent or genius, that's my hope! 



Howard Scott Warshaw is a Video Game pioneer, authoring several of Atari's most famous and infamous titles. Launching this new medium, seeing the industry mature and now as a psychotherapist, Howard brings unique perspective to our interactive world. Check out his documentary series "Once Upon Atari" at www.onceuponatari.com and look for his upcoming book this fall.

Analogue In A Digital World

By Michael Mertes



While some are satisfied with connecting their classic game consoles to a CRT television and calling it a day, there are others out there that want to see those games of yesteryear in razor sharp quality on their HDTVs. I certainly fall into that category, and I'll be the first to admit that I've spent a modest amount of money on video upscalers, RGB cables, and other video peripherals to get the best picture possible on a modern TV. If I could go back in time and tell myself to hold out until Analogue released their Super NT and Mega SG consoles, I would have saved myself a lot of time and money.

Analogue has made quite the name for itself in delivering high caliber, FPGA (Field Programmable Gate Arrays) clone systems, that, while fetching a high price, make up for it with high compatibility and the vast amount of video options available with their products.

The Super NT and Mega SG are Analogue's vision of a souped-up Super Nintendo and Sega Mega Drive/Genesis respectively. Both systems have a common theme to them: support the game cartridge-

es from any region, utilize the same control ports that the original console used, operate with a simple USB to 5-volt power brick and most importantly, use an HDMI output that can display your games in resolutions up to 1080P. Plugging either system into a large HD television and seeing how sharply defined the pixels are is quite a spectacle to behold. If you don't find the picture to your liking, you can adjust several video options to achieve the exact look you wish to get. I've verified compatibility with several major TV manufacturers, including 4K televisions with both devices and encountered no issues. Sharp looking, classic games with little to no latency? It's instantly enjoyable as it is enticing.

NOW YOU'RE PLAYING WITH SUPER POWER:

Having a vast library of Super Nintendo games in my collection meant that I could put the Super NT to the test comparing it to my beloved SNES console. I put the NT through its paces with all-time favorites like Super Mario World, Super Metroid, Final Fantasy III, Chrono Trigger and Contra 3, even firing up its Super Famicom equivalents to see if I could trip up the system. No issues there, so I thought I would further test compatibility with games that utilize enhancement chips like Star Fox, Doom, Mega Man X2, and Mega Man X3. The result?



(left) Super Mario World on Super NT
(right) Gunstar Heroes on Mega SG



Everything performed exactly how they performed on my original SNES, only with crystal clear quality on my 75 inch, 4K television. Even reproduction cartridges and flash carts performed without incident on the Super NT. To come anywhere close to what I was experiencing image-wise on the Super NT with an original Super Nintendo, I would need to invest in a late production 1CHIP model, purchase a video upscaler, acquire the correct RGB cables and even potentially have my Super Nintendo modded to match the picture quality. The items and time spent on this would far exceed the \$189.99 price that Analogue is asking for with the Super NT.

MEGA SG DOES WHAT GENESIS DON'T:

While I was undoubtedly in the corner of Nintendo during the 16-bit console wars, that doesn't mean I didn't have a fondness for some of the games available on the Genesis. For my testing on Analogue's Mega SG, I opted to try out classics like Castlevania: Bloodlines, Contra: Hard Corps, Gunstar Heroes and Phantasy Star IV with the same results as its Super Nintendo brethren - Pixel-perfect perfection on a modern device. This is quite a triumph for fans of Sega's 16-bit system as the Genesis had multiple revisions, and almost all of them suffered from a video issue that produced jail bars when utilizing an RGB cable. Jail bars create a grid-like stripe on the screen that can be distracting. Fixing this would require the modification of the system, but that's not an action that needs to be taken with the Mega SG.


An exciting feature of the Mega SG is the fact that it can interface with a Sega CD unit, regardless of model. While the difference in size compared to the original Genesis/Mega Drive units looks a little silly, it does its job in terms of performance. I tested some Sega CD favorites, like Sewer Shark, Snatcher and Eternal Champions with my Sega CD Model 1 and did not encounter any compatibility issues. If that wasn't

enough to make you interested, Analogue also includes an adapter that will let you use your Master System games on the console, giving you access to many great 8-bit Sega classics. Unfortunately, those looking to get their 32X games in high definition quality will be disappointed as the unit does not offer support for Sega's first ill-fated 32-bit console add on. Game Gear support is on the horizon however with the purchase of a future cartridge converter add on.

100 PERCENT COMPATIBILITY?

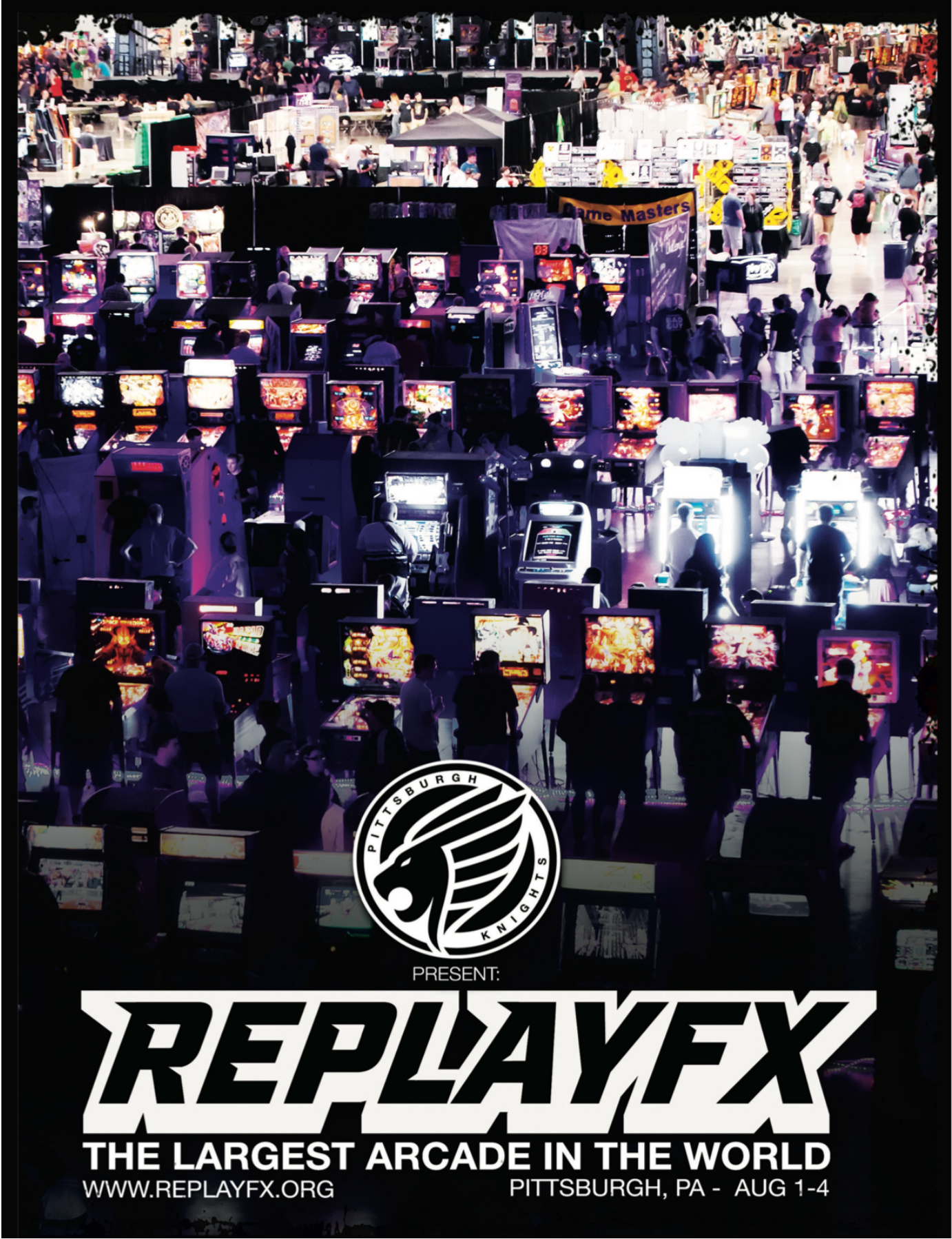
While I threw a myriad of games to test on both systems, there is bound to be some games that may encounter an issue or two. Thankfully, Analogue listens to its user base, and, in my experience has worked tirelessly to ensure that games with reported problems are fixed with a system firmware update. Updating the firmware on the system is extremely easy - Grab an SD card, head over to Analogue's website, download the latest firmware, put it on a memory card, place the SD card into your system and turn it on. Within minutes, you are operating on the newest build of the software, sometimes with additional features like a built-in Game Genie.

THE CONCLUSION:

If you are looking for an easy solution to play your 16-bit classics with minimum fuss; look no further than the Super NT and Mega SG. The performance of both systems is unmatched and have become extremely handy in both personal and professional use for me. Analogue's aim to expand the legacy of these 16-bit systems has been a successful one and is well worth the \$189.99 investment, regardless of what side you took during the console wars. 

[Analogue.Co](https://www.analogue.co)

Michael Mertes - From the moment he touched an Intellivision controller in 1985, Mike knew that he had experienced something incredible in the world of video games that would shape him for the rest of his life. From that point forward, he would make it his mission to experience video games from every console generation going forward. Eventually, he would become obsessed with magazines that wrote about the games he loved, and it would inspire him to start writing about games himself in 1998 for various local media outlets. Always looking for an opportunity to branch out, Mike eventually coded the foundation of a website that would ultimately morph into Gamer Logic Dot Net, an independent video game site that continues to cover modern and classic video game today. Additional, Mike composes music for indie games under his other alias "Unleaded Logic."



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Atari Program Exchange

AN EARLY APP STORE

By Bill Lange

Long before the advent of the Google Play Store, the official app store for the Android operating system, or the Apple App Store for the iOS operating system, and even before the idea of Shareware, there was the Atari Program Exchange (APX), an early form of for-profit distribution of end user written programs.

APX was a wholly owned subsidiary of Atari that produced and sold software for the Atari 8-bit family of home computers. APX was known for its quarterly and annual contests, and its detailed and colorfully illustrated catalogs containing Home Management, Personal Development, Educational, Systems/Telecommunications, and of course, Entertainment software, books such as the ever popular Atari programming bible, *De Re Atari*, and some random Atari 8-bit compatible hardware such as RAM expansion, cables, and connectors. You couldn't download and install software from APX like you can with today's all digital online app stores. Your software usually came

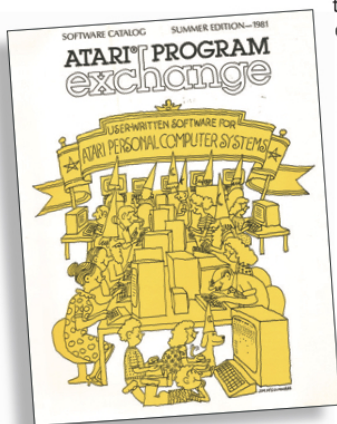
through the mail, on a cassette tape or, if you were lucky, a 5 ¼ floppy disk, with a minimal user-written, dot-matrix-printed manual and not much else. APX didn't produce any expensive, cartridge-based software. In its short lifetime, from early 1981 to mid-1984, APX purchased, produced, and sold 254 software titles, many for low volume, niche subjects and hobbies.

Why was APX created? By early 1981, the Atari 400/800 home computers had been in the market for a little over a year. They were being covered in platform agnostic

home computing magazines such as *Creative Computing* and *Compute!*. The Atari-specific magazine *A.N.A.L.O.G. Computing* (Atari Newsletter And Lots Of Games) was just getting started, and its chief competitor, *ANTIC* magazine, was still a year away from publishing its first issue. Hardware sales were picking up, but Atari 8-bit computer users wanted more software than Atari itself could produce and third-party publishers were not yet filling the void. In February 1981, Atari employee Dale Yocum came up with the idea of creating Atari's own third-party publishing arm that would accept software submissions from anyone: professional programmers, students, home computer enthusiasts, and even Atari employees, as long as they followed the guidelines laid out in the *APX Program Author's Handbook* and the *APX Submission Manual*. And, if accepted, cheaply reproduce the software, and sell it through quarterly catalogs and, eventual, through retail outlets, paying programmers a small royalty with the ability to earn even more money and/or Atari merchandise allowances with quarterly contests and the annual grand

prize of the coveted Atari Star trophy and \$25,000 in cash.

In 1981, the first Atari Star winner was the educational program *My First Alphabet* by Fernando Herrera, who was inspired to create the program to assist his visually-impaired son in learning how to read. He used his winnings to fund his own software company, the aptly named *First Star Software*, which would later publish *Astro Chase*, *Boulder Dash*, and *Spy vs. Spy*, among others. The 1982 winner was David Buehler with his edutainment touch typing game *Typo Attack*. The third and, as it turns out, final winner of the Atari Star trophy in



1983 went to Mark Reid, a chemical engineer from Charleston, West Virginia, for his game *Getaway!*.

Several of APX titles were so popular, polished, and profitable, that they were picked up by Atari's official product catalog, including Chris Crawford's classic wargame *Eastern Front* (1941). It was one of the earliest game programs on the Atari 8-bits to make use of its hardware fine scrolling feature. In addition to the game, APX would separately sell the game's source code so that budding programmers could learn how it worked. Also available were additional "scenario" disks for the game engine. The *Eastern Front* (1941) line would be one of APX's biggest money makers. In a 2000 interview with Kevin Savetz, APX Director Fred Thorlin stated that "I hold a special affection for *Eastern Front* (1941) and *De Re Atari*, both by Chris Crawford. They paid the bills ... were our biggest sellers." The game was eventually moved to the official product catalog, once it was realized that, yes, wargames could be profitable. In a September 2007 interview with Steve Fulton, Chris Crawford stated that APX was a "...monster success...", and "...a major profit center for Atari..."

The vertically scrolling shooter *Caverns of Mars*, created by then, teenaged programmer Greg Christensen from Anaheim, California, was another of the lucky few. According to Crawford in Vol. 5 of *The Journal of Computer Game Design*, "... You could make a great deal of money out of a program that took very little time to develop. An extreme example of this was Greg Christensen, a high school student who hacked together a variation on *Defender* ... with the Atari Assembler cartridge ... several months. ... it was published by APX as *Caverns of Mars* and it sold about 50,000 copies, earning Greg



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something like \$80,000.” Atari would also move *Caverns of Mars* to its official product catalog with both disk-based and later cartridge-based version, getting the professional artwork, full-colored manual, and slick packaging treatment from Atari.

As previously mentioned, another big hit for APX was the cops and robbers game *Getaway!*. Programmer Reid has stated various times (in podcasts discussions, interviews, and letters) that APX planned a significant marketing campaign around *Getaway!* and that Atari was also discussing releasing a cartridge version of the game in its official product catalog, but, unfortunately, a recession in the video game industry began to occur in 1983 and not long after, Atari would shut APX down for good. Reid was later able to reacquire the rights to his game from Atari and attempted to publish it elsewhere. There is a treasure trove of Mark Reid/*Getaway!* information achieved



on archive.org for those so inclined to search for it. The rare, but beautiful, full-colored, poster-sized city map that APX created for the *Getaway!* marketing campaign is a sight to behold!

More recently, in 2016, Rob McMullen, host of the *Player/Missile Podcast* created a cross-platform Atari binary editor for modern computing hardware called *Omnivore* (<https://pypi.org/project/Omnivore/>). *Omnivore* can also be used to create and edit maps for Atari 8-bit games such as *Getaway!* and the ever popular EPYX platformer title *Jumpman* by Randy Glover. Wade Ripkowski, host of the *Inverse ATASCII (ding)* podcast, used McMullen's *Omnivore* editor to create a new city map for *Getaway!* breathing some new life to this classic 8-bit game. Much more information about McMullen's and Ripkowski's work can be found in the Atari 8-bit computer forums on the atarriage.com website.

In addition to *Eastern Front* (1941), *Caverns of Mars*, *Typo Attack*, and *My First Alphabet*, a few other programs, including a few home finance titles, would find their way from APX into Atari's official product catalog. At least one notable software package went the other way, the MT Microsystems designed Atari Pascal, the highly anticipated and much advertised structured programming language package, meant to be an excellent bridge between BASIC for beginning programmers and Assembly Language for the experts, which was also a hugely popular programming language in high school and college computer science programs in the early to mid-1980s. Atari Pascal required a fully loaded 48K Atari computer with two expensive Atari 810 disk drives, greatly limiting its target audience. It also shipped with a 161-page manual aimed at expert Pascal programmers rather than students and/or computer enthusiasts. The small size of Atari's original 90k, single sided, single density disk drives, the tight RAM space of 48K, as well as a few crucial bugs crippled Atari Pascal. Instead of fixing it, Atari published Atari Pascal through APX as unsupported software. It was briefly covered by a few magazine articles/reviews, languished in obscurity, and then disappeared.

While John Palevich's APX-published dungeon crawler *Dandy* (a play on D and D) never made it to Atari's official software catalog,

it directly inspired Atari's later arcade coin-op video game *Gauntlet*, resulting in threatened legal action by *Dandy*'s designer, but eventually settled out of court. *Gauntlet* itself would go on to influence a series of arcade coin-op video games, as well as versions (as both *Gauntlet* and *Dark Chambers*) for various computer systems and gaming consoles of the day.


For various reasons (such as niche markets, passion projects, experimental programming, etc.), a handful of professional Atari programmers released software through APX. And, a few programmers who released software through APX, later wound up working at Atari as employees. Seems like it was a great way to find a few rare gems, in both product and personnel!

Incoming Atari CEO James J. Morgan shuttered APX in 1984. In an interview in the July 1984 issue of *Compute!* magazine, Morgan stated "...In the case of APX, Atari has discontinued the mail-order portion of the program. Atari lost money in this portion of the business. Moreover, Atari had to come to grips with the fact that Atari is not in the mail-order business." This is in stark contrast to Crawford's "major profit center" comments.

After the abrupt closure of APX, the publishers of *ANTIC* magazine reached out to many of the APX programmers, and if interested, re-published some APX titles in their own *ANTIC* Software Catalog distributed with the magazine. According to at least one programmer, *ANTIC* paid out several nice royalty checks before the Atari 8-bit market completely collapsed.

Kevin Savetz, a co-host of the popular *ANTIC The Atari 8-bit Podcast* (<https://ataripodcast.libsyn.com/>), has been instrumental in locating and interviewing the personalities involved in creating and running APX. Also, according to Savetz, 159 individuals wrote 254 software titles for APX and 112 have been accounted for (contacted, interviewed, declined, and/or deceased). Amazingly, he has interviewed 92 of them, more than his stated goal of 50%, forever capturing some early home computing history, which might have otherwise been lost.

Allan Bushman, another amateur Atari historian and archivist himself, and who had an informational APX exhibit at the Vintage Computer Federation's (vcfed.org) Vintage Computer Festival East 2018 at the InfoAge Science Center in Wall, NJ, has been diligently scanning, archiving, and preserving almost all of the APX software titles and manuals. According to Bushman, there are about eight titles missing a software dump, such as *Home Load Analysis*, *Dragon's Quest*, or a *Twist in the Tail*, and about twenty titles, such as *Real Estate Cash Flow Analysis* and the *Deep Blue C Compiler*, with quality manual scans outstanding.

The APX catalogs are still fun to browse through today, to see the artwork, read the descriptions, and to really understand the eclectic width and breadth of the APX offerings. They can be found on various websites. Much of the software can be quickly and easily tried, using In-Browser emulation on the archive.org website. Disk images of the software can also be downloaded from the atarimania.com website and used in your favorite Atari 8-bit emulator such as Altirra. If you have vintage Atari 8-bit hardware and a means of loading disk images, you can try APX programs as they were meant to be used. 

Bill Lange – Bill is a software engineer. He designs and developments cloud based software solutions. He resides in NJ with his wife Lucy and their dog Yoda. In his spare time, he likes to tinker with game programming, 8-bit computers and the classic arcade machines of his youth.

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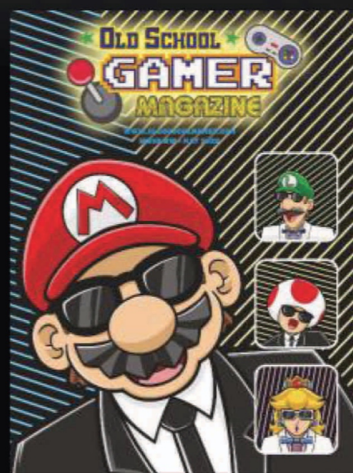
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