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## COIN UP.?

Welcome to the Thunderdome! Two men enter; one man leaves. IT'S DYIN' TIME!!!!... Oops! Sorry... I was reliving the late 80's... Not an easy task if you were as crazy as I was back then. What we have here is the Late 80's issue of OSG, loaded with incredible stories about Double Dragons, Robot Monsters, the End Of Days, Defenders, Game-Changing Consoles, insane Asylums, and a hedgehog named Lizzy. So grab a cold one and dive into gaming history!

I'd like to apologize to Richard Moss for accidently omitting him from The Scribes section. His piece "Mac Attack" was a great expose of shooters that appeared on Apple computers.

Hey, If you've got something to say about our labor of love here, feel free to shoot me an email. I'd love to hear from y'all! My email is [billd.oldschoolgamer@gmail.com](mailto:billd.oldschoolgamer@gmail.com).

# THE SCRIBES



Kevin Butler

Since he played on the first Magnavox Odyssey in 1973, Kevin was bitten by the video game bug. He has played many arcade and console games. He even learned to program the Apple II+ in the early 80's. Kevin has worked for Majicsoft and was doing FAQ's (for GameFAQ's) and contributing to the MAME project. He lives in Neosho, MO with his wife and son,



Brad Feingold

Brad has been with OSG for 2 years now. His love for retro gaming is dated all the way back to loving *Space Invaders* and *Asteroids*. Even though he plays the newer games, he always goes back to the classics. Thanks to the Nintendo Switch and the ability to play the retro and retro looking games, his retro cravings will be complete.



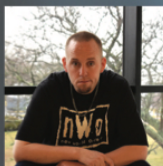
Todd Friedman

Todd Friedman is currently writing for Old School Gamer Magazine, Retro Gaming Times, and the Walter Day Trading Card Collection. He has co-promoted the Video Game Summit in Chicago, IL for the last 12 years. He is also the Chairman of the Nomination Committee for the International Video Game Hall of Fame.



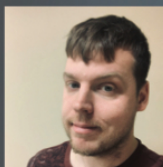
Adam Pratt

An avid gamer forged in the Bit Wars of the 1980's, Adam Pratt grew up playing games whenever he found them. The arcade industry has been the focus of his professional life, which includes writing for ArcadeHeroes.com since 2006, and operating his business, Arcade Galactic, since 2008. From SLC, UT.



Patrick Hickey Jr.

Patrick Hickey Jr. is the author of The Minds Behind the Games book series. The first book in the series was released in April 2018. The sequel, The Minds Behind Adventure Games, was released in Dec. 2019. Three more editions of the series are forthcoming through 2021.



Michael Mertes

From the moment he touched an Intellivision controller in 1985, Mike knew that he had experienced something incredible that would shape him for the rest of his life. As a writer for [www.gamerlogic.net](http://www.gamerlogic.net) and other media outlets, Mike enjoys articulating why games from the 8 and 16-bit console generations are some of the best of all time.



Michael Thomasson

Michael Thomasson is one of the most widely respected videogame historians in the field today. He currently teaches college level videogame history, design, and graphics courses. He authored *Downright Bizarre Games*, and has contributed to nearly a dozen textbooks. Michael's historical columns have been distributed in newspapers and magazines worldwide.



Brett Weiss

Video game historian and national columnist Brett Weiss is the author of 10 books, including the *Classic Home Video Games* series, *The 100 Greatest Console Video Games: 1977-1987*, and *The SNES Omnibus* volumes 1 and 2. Find Weiss online at [www.brettweisswords.com](http://www.brettweisswords.com), and check out his YouTube show, *Tales from a Retro Gamer*.

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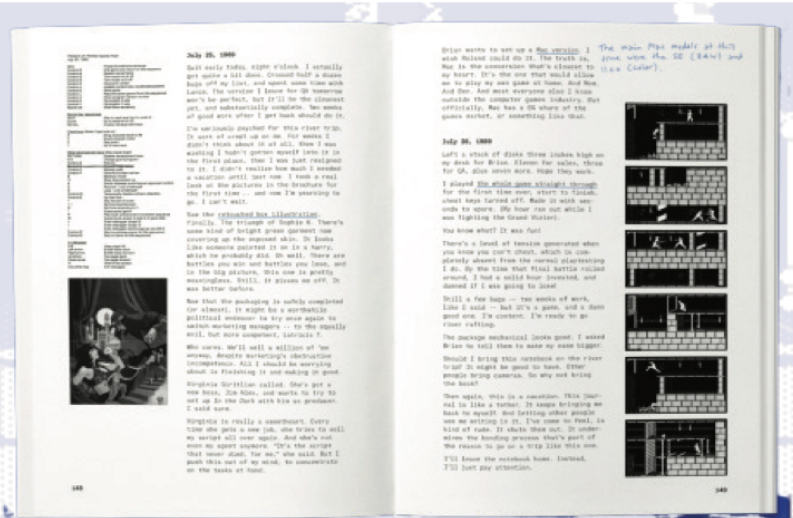
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# The Prince of Prince of Persia

by Ryan Burger

The first computer that I spent a lot of time on was an Apple IIc (after experiencing Apple IIe's at junior high school) and one of the first games that I spent a lot of time on was *Karateka* - Jordan Mechner's martial arts game that came out in 1984. I probably played it around 1985 or 1986. The cinematic style of it was fantastic and it ate up a lot of my time. Its animated motion was absolutely fantastic and the easy going story was fun to play over and over.



The game was set in the Arab world and was inspired by the Arabian Nights stories. Luckily for us, he kept track of everything he was doing while developing *Karateka* and *Prince of Persia* in what he called "development journals." Starting in May of 1985, he chronicled his work on *Prince of Persia* and other things related to video games and the world in which he lived. It wraps up in January 1993 with the regular entries and then covers the movie development, comic books, and other interesting things related to Prince of Persia.

The book has been nicely typed out and organized well, but Jordan was careful not to make any changes to what he wrote 25+ years ago. Instead, he made notes on the side of the journal entries, pictures, letters, screen shots and a ton more that add to the story immensely. For anyone that was into gaming in the era of the 1980s, especially on the Apple II, this is a fantastic book that you need to pick up.

Available at [jordanmechner.com](http://jordanmechner.com) in both digital and printed versions. 

# ESCAPE

## FROM THE PLANET OF THE ROBOT MONSTERS

by Michael Thomasson

**E**scape from the Planet of the Robot Monsters boasts what may be the longest coin-op title ever. So big, in fact, that the marquee is larger than the actual gameplay monitor! It is quite a sight to see, and screams of a classic B-movie bijou sci-fi serial showcasing menacing evil robots, a colossal lizard, and the token risqué woman in red. The attract mode and cut-scenes are even presented in a comic strip narrative format as if torn from the pages of Buck Rogers or Flash Gordon - truly the stuff of a 50's drive-in double feature.

While such theatrical creature-features operated on a shoe-string budget, Atari's coin-op didn't cut corners. The custom-designed cabinet included two main central-processing units and Hall effect joysticks, a form of analog joysticks that doubled the standard 8-way controls allowing for 16-directional control.

The game's story is just as hokey as its cheesy presentation. Evil Reptilons have invaded the synthetic industrial planetoid known as... Planet X. The aliens have commandeered the research laboratory, captured the buxom and brainy Dr. Sarah Bellum, and plan to use her mental might to do no good. The occupiers have enslaved

the humans stationed in the lab and are forcing them to use the factory to manufacture an evil robot army to obliterate the Earth! Stereotypical Sci-fi schlock, indeed!

Similar to how Hollywood drapes many productions with subtle, and not-so-subtle sex appeal, this game drips of casual sexual innuendo such as dressing, or undressing, the curvy female factory workers so that they all look like scantily clad bikini models. The male workers, of course, look as if they are treated with much less care by the invaders, wearing ruffled and torn clothes and clearly unshaven. The slave labor provides some comic relief when accidentally shot as they appear befuddled and dumbfounded, coated in soot.

*Escape from the Planet of the Robot Monsters* is best played cooperatively with a friend. It is twice the fun with twice the firepower! Players assume the roles of Jake and Duke, two slick-looking members of an Interplanetary SWAT Team. Together, the protagonists must transport the human hostages back to the mothership, destroy all the robots, locate and liberate the professor, and rid Planet X of the evil Reptilons before they bring all of humankind to its knees!

The game is portrayed in an isometric perspective. Players maneuver through a string of maze-like levels, fending off hordes of robot monsters while avoiding electrified floor partitions, spike entrapments, and other fatal entanglements.



To aid survival, breaking into lockers provides valuable assets such as food, bombs, and the occasional FLAK force shields which makes them temporarily immune to enemies. Collecting green-glowing pods powers up their laser pistols, allowing for more robot-mashing action against opposing drone carts, cyber guards, and killer tracking orbs! Upper areas are accessed by pulling levers that activate no-thrill escalators given the fancy name of "electro-stairs." After overcoming all obstacles, the heroes leap into the nifty Port 'o' Matic transporter and they are teleported to their next mission.

Intermingled among the factory levels are canal maze bonus waves. The game shifts to an auto-scrolling metallic labyrinth where the SWAT members must steer a cybersled, clearly inspired by George Jetson's flying car, through the corridors, avoiding dead-end paths to reach the end before time runs out. Every third stage hosts a Reptilon guardian boss wave. EEKS!

No sci-fi or horror romp is complete without a dollop of gore in the mix. Planet X hosts its share of gruesome traps. Spears will jut out of the wall to impale the heroes if they are not careful. Even after the spikes have caught their prey, they will continue to slide in and out as blood and guts spills from the corpse in what can only be described as wonderfully grisly cartoon animation.

As long as one's trousers are full and flowing with change, the adventure can continue... that is, until the final boss bout. Then, after three-quarters of an hour battling to reach the finale and

## UNDERCOVER

The Interplanetary SWAT Team communicates via a Dick Tracy style wrist watch, but that isn't the only way covert messages were dispatched. If "someone in the know" dives deep within the game's programming code, they will discover a hidden message kindly stating, "HI LISA, ROBIN, MOM & DAD." How sweet!



# MISSION COMPLETE!



If you can complete your dangerous mission successfully...

... rest assured that you will be "doubly" rewarded!!!

**JAKE** Enter Your Initials  
00344450


**GAME OVER**

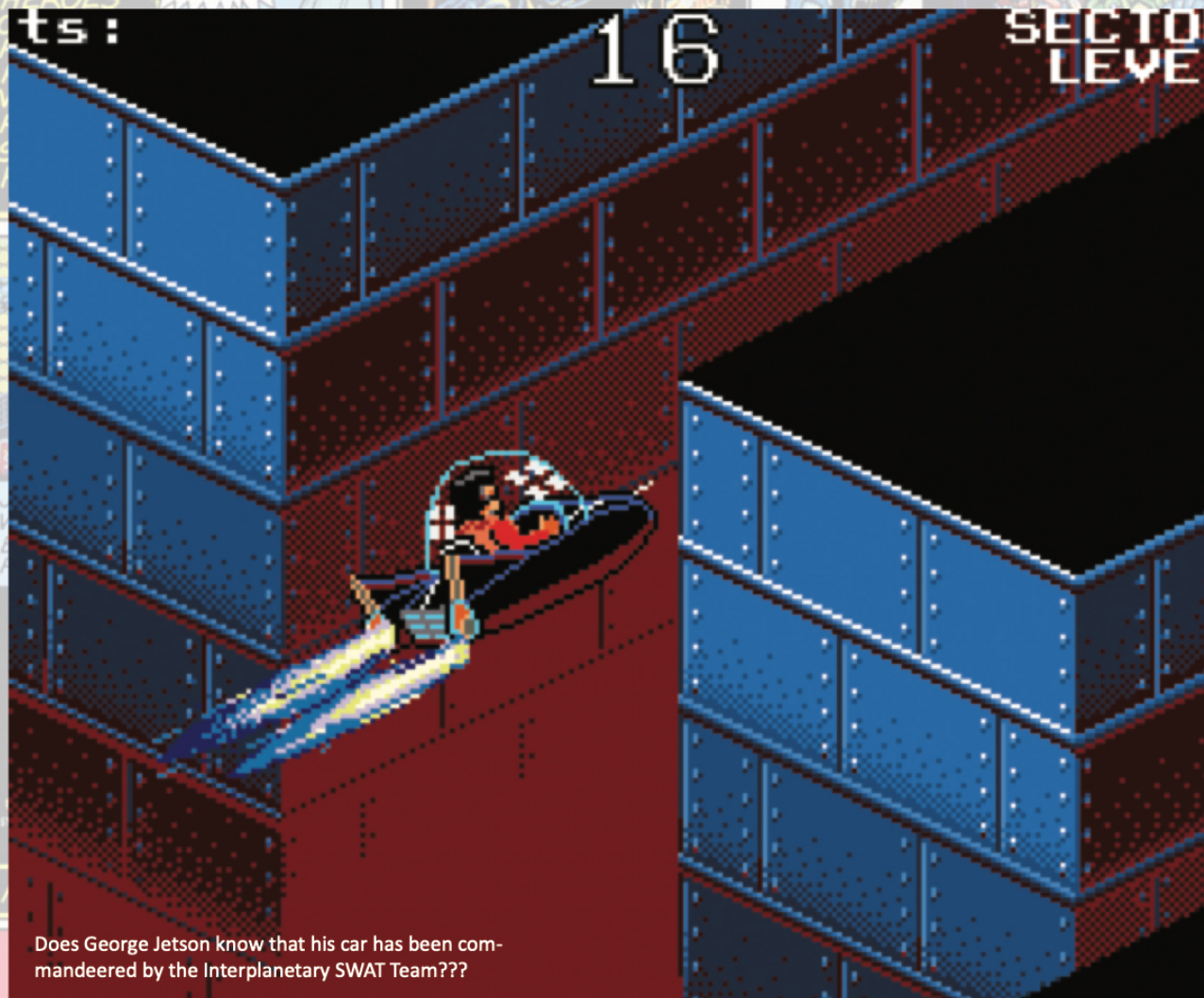
JAKE

DUKE

dispensing enough coins to possibly pay off your mortgage, the game cruelly limits the player to a single life to annihilate the robotic foe. Stockpiling bombs is an absolute necessity!

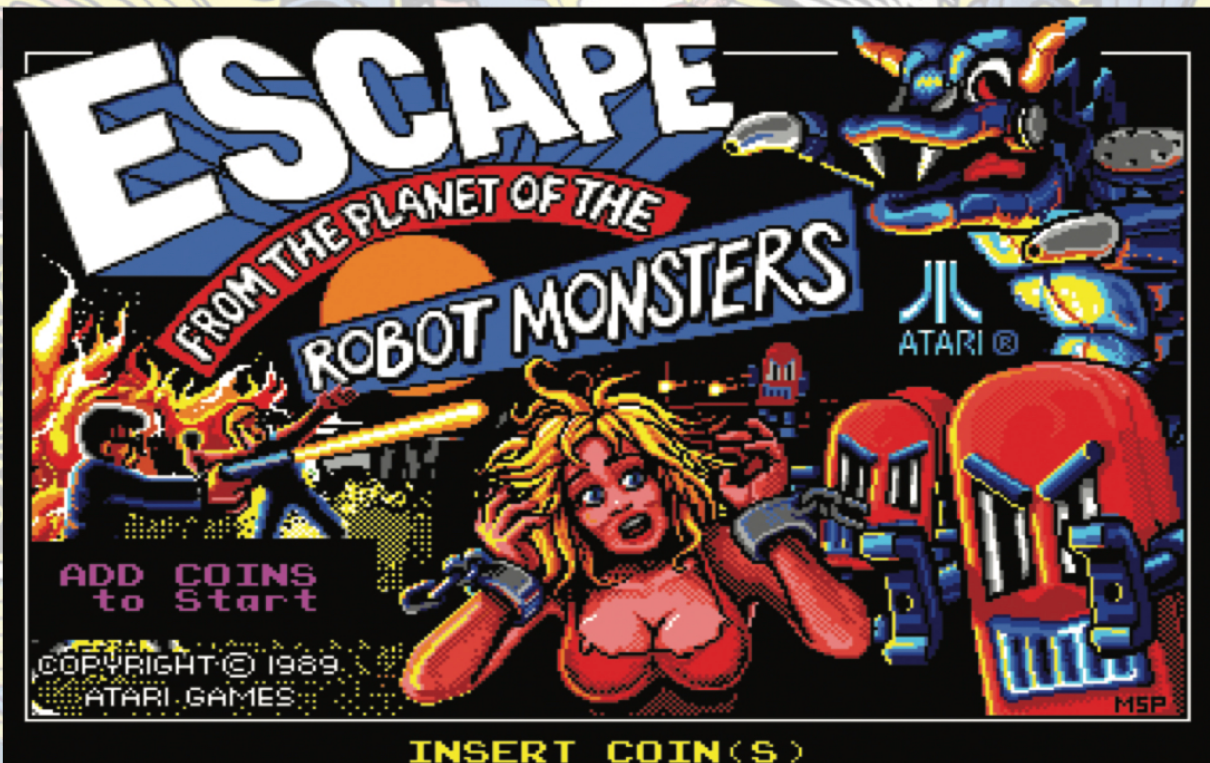
*Escape from the Planet of the Robot Monsters* is such an exhibition of tawdry pulp that it is hard not to fancy. Tongue-in-

cheek humor, callous soldiers parading around in brightly colored spandex jumpsuits, sexed-up slave labor doing the bidding of scaled space invaders, all bundled together within a bubble-gum art style – it doesn't get much better! 



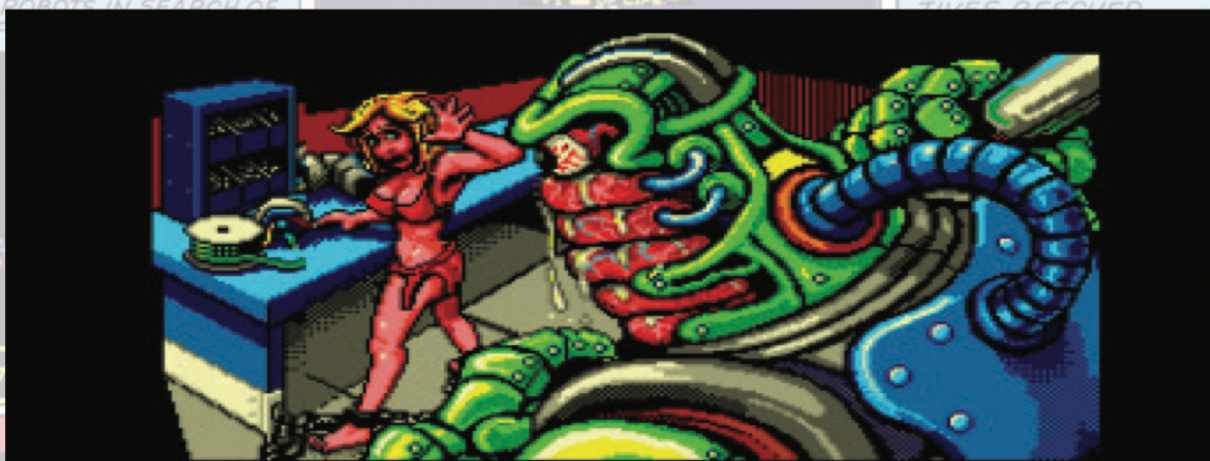
Does George Jetson know that his car has been commandeered by the Interplanetary SWAT Team???





INSERT COIN(S)

THIS GAME DRIPS WITH CASUAL SEXUAL INNUENDO SUCH AS DRESSING, OR UNDESSING, THE CURVY FEMALE FACTORY WORKERS SO THAT THEY ALL LOOK LIKE SCANTILY CLAD BIKINI MODELS.



THEY ARE BEING FORCED TO CREATE AN EVIL ROBOT ARMY DESTINED TO **DESTROY EARTH!**

INSERT COIN(S)

JAKE

DUKE

# MSX2: Game Changer

by Michael Mertes

**T**he first time I heard the name MSX was when I stumbled upon a *Metal Gear* Fan Page on the internet in the mid-1990s. Browsing the website, a hyperlink popped up under the list of *Metal Gear* games that stopped me dead in my mouse clicks. It read: *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake (MSX2)*. “What?! The sequel to *Metal Gear* is *Snake’s Revenge*, not *Solid Snake*.” I said to myself. I clicked the link and was completely blown away to discover that not only was there an entirely different sequel to *Metal Gear*, but it was only available in Japan, and it was on a computer called the MSX2. I wanted one ever since that day, but it wasn’t until just recently that I picked one up.

The original MSX line of computers was first announced and released in 1983 and featured a unified standard, meaning that despite there being multiple manufactures of the MSX computer, all of them contained the Microsoft Extended Basic operating system. If the computer had the MSX logo on it, then you could be assured that any hardware expansions or games cartridges would function in

it, regardless of manufacture. The MSX line of computers became incredibly popular, not just in Japan but in several other large countries across the world. As the 1980s progressed, the MSX2 computer was launched towards the end of the decade. The MSX2 would expand and upgrade several of the system components over the original MSX but was still backward compatible with software from the computer’s first generation. Sadly, neither system made much of an impact in the United States, so it remains much of curiosity for most people. To retro gamers though, a potential treasure trove of undiscovered games awaits.

## SAME NAME, DIFFERENT GAME

While many famous Japanese game companies produced games for the MSX computer systems, our focus will be on Konami. Konami has always been well regarded for its games across multiple generations. It is incredible how three of its most popular games released on the NES are drastically different on the MSX2 platform.

## Vampire Killer (MSX) VS Castlevania (NES)

Released just over a month after the NES/Famicom *Castlevania*, *Vampire Killer* takes the same concept of



its console brethren as you assist Simon Belmont on his quest to destroy Count Dracula. Most *Castlevania* games are stage by stage games that present a linear path to the end of each level. In the case of *Vampire Killer*, it features the same levels and music as *Castlevania*, but the levels branch out drastically. Doors and treasure chests require keys to open; merchants to buy items from are hidden away in secret passages, and you can find brand new things like shields to deflect enemy attacks. None of these things were in the NES version of *Castlevania*, but the one thing the MSX version does not have is scrolling. Due to limitations within the system's video RAM, scrolling was not an easy task to perform; instead, most games would not draw the next portion of the level until the player character exited the edge of the current room displayed. The lack of scrolling is probably the most

jaunting change to those who played the NES version as it leaves those playing it with an almost disconnected feeling to the overall stage. The difficulty in this game is also very high due to needing to memorize the stages and exercise extreme patience. You only have three lives to make it to Dracula, with absolutely no continues or cheat codes to utilize. While *Vampire Killer* is a unique entry in the series and is what laid the foundation for how *Castlevania 2* would play, only diehard vampire hunters need to seek this game out.

## METAL GEAR (MSX) VS. METAL GEAR (NES)

I know many people who love *Metal Gear* on the NES, and it's easy to see why: It was one of the very first stealth actions available on consoles, and it was very unique compared to other games at the time. It

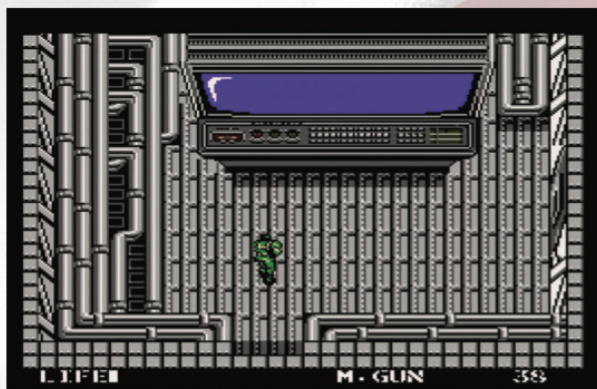


also introduced us to Hideo Kojima's lone wolf, Solid Snake, who would infiltrate Outer Heaven in an attempt to destroy Metal Gear, a walking nuclear battle tank. Fans of the NES port may need to sit down after hearing this, but the truth is that the NES version of *Metal Gear* is pure trash compared to the original MSX version. The MSX version is far less obtuse with solving the game's objectives, and the design structure of the game is more concise. Some boss characters are radically different in the MSX version, and while the game is challenging, it doesn't feature as many cheap deaths compared to the console version. The biggest stand out of this game is that you blow

up *Metal Gear* in the MSX version as opposed to blowing up a supercomputer in its NES counterpart. That's right, Nintendo gamers didn't even to see *Metal Gear* in that version. This title stands out as one of the reasons to pick up an MSX2 computer. It was eventually introduced to North American gamers for the first time as a bonus game on the second disk of *Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence* on the PlayStation 2.

## CONTRA (MSX) VS CONTRA (NES)

Even after 33 years, the original *Contra* remains one




## SO YOU WANT TO BUY AN MSX?

Now that I've told you a little about all the mysteries and wonder that the MSX2 platform contains, you may want to pick up one for yourself. Unfortunately, picking one up isn't going to be cheap. Expect to pay anywhere to from 150 dollars and upwards for an MSX2 model on sites like eBay. When selecting a unit, try to get one with a power brick and ask the seller if they can show you pictures of the unit functioning at boot up and with a game loaded on it. Make sure you ask if all the keys work, the joystick ports work and if the unit has ever had any repair work done on the inside of it. Since there is a very high chance the computer you are thinking about buying is coming from overseas, you want to make sure that you cover all bases before you plunk down the cash on it. If you want to increase your chances of scoring an MSX2 domestically, search around on social media platforms and ask around if anyone is selling one. I got fortunate and knew someone on Twitter who had an extra MSX2 to sell, making the process much easier for me. Through him, I got a beautiful red Panasonic FS-A1 MSX2 and Rambo.

If you managed to score an MSX2 with a joystick, consider yourself lucky. If not, be prepared to spend at least 50 dollars or more for an officially MSX branded joystick. I opted instead to pick up a controller from eBay seller retrogameboyz for around 35 dollars. The MSX2 controller they offer is essentially a standard NES controller, and it works fantastically for MSX games. Shifting the focus to video output, most MSX computers come with composite video out to connect to a TV, but some also feature RGB output for even better video quality. The kicker for this is that finding an RGB cable isn't particularly easy, and the wiring pinout scheme can vary depending on the model of MSX2 you pick up. Again, do your research before you buy; you don't want to blow up that beautiful vintage computer you just bought. The MSX2 is a computer, not a console. Make sure that wherever you plan on using the MSX2 that you have easy access to the keyboard. Some games require you to use the keyboard, even if you have a joystick, and not having it close by can make for a very uncomfortable experience. You don't want to have to get up every time


of the most memorable action-packed, side-scrolling shooters of all time. The NES version superseded the arcade version in playability and popularity. It also featured the most famous implementation of Kazuhisa Hashimoto's Konami code, giving players 30 lives to fight the evil Red Falcon and his alien henchmen.

How does the MSX2 handle the task of presenting *Contra*? For starters: the game is only one player, doesn't feature the Konami code, and, most importantly, doesn't have scrolling. If imagining a lack of scrolling for a *Castlevania* game bothered you, you'll have an even harder time wrapping your head around it on this

one. Thankfully, no scrolling makes up for the lack of Konami code because you can reach the other side of the screen rather quickly. Enemy attack patterns are also straightforward to memorize, so patience will be a virtue to complete the game. The MSX2 version is graphically a substantial step-down from the NES version with most boss characters and enemies lacking any significant animation. The game is quite a bit longer than any other version of the game, but the significant differences in this game make for more a unique curiosity than a must-play. 



you want to switch a keycard in *Metal Gear*, do you?

So you want to pick up *Contra*, *Vampire Killer*, and *Metal Gear 1&2*? Here's what the final nail in the coffin for you could be that would stop you from wanting to pick up an MSX2. Combined, you can expect to pay close to 1000 dollars to be able to acquire all three titles, depending on condition. If you have to play these games on actual hardware, a flashcart will be your cheapest option to take. If not, emulation may be the easiest way to experience the games of the MSX platform without having to take a loan out at the bank. 



# End of Days: Magic Knight Rayearth & the Sega Saturn

by Michael Mertes

**T**he original *Magic Knight Rayearth* has the dubious honor of being the last game released for the Sega Saturn in North America. Published in late 1998, the game was translated to English by Working Designs, a company known to RPG fans for their great packaging design and their history of bringing RPGs to the Western shores that would otherwise have never been given a chance. *Magic Knight Rayearth* proved to be a challenging project for the company due to the amount of translating, compiling lost source code, and redubbing the anime cutscenes featured in the game. Initially released in Japan in 1995, it took Working Designs almost three years to bring a translated version to store shelves.

One day during a Junior High School field trip to Tokyo Tower, three young girls find themselves magically transported to the Kingdom of Cefiro. After plummeting to the ground in this strange new world, they are quickly greeted by the Kingdom's lead magician, Clef. The great mage tells them that they were summoned by the Princess of Cefiro to save her and the world from the evil Zagat. With no way home without defeating Zagat and saving the Princess, the girls embrace their destiny as magic knights and begin their adventure to save Cefiro. The story itself is presented in an anime format and, as such, presents your typical anime story tropes. Almost all the characters in the game have voiceovers and the English dub, while not fantastic, stands above several other English-dubbed games in quality during the 32-bit console generation. If turn-based battle RPGs disinterest you, you may



Time waits for no one... not even the  
Sega Saturn...





want to give *Magic Knight Rayearth* a chance, since it's considered an action RPG. The game plays more like a *Ys* title and features plenty of action in between its long plotline advancing scenes. Players can switch instantly between one of three female leads with the push of a button. Each character possesses a unique physical attack along with different magic spells that can either harm or heal. The combat mechanics do take some time to get adjusted to as enemies can attack in 8 different directions, and the heroines are sometimes not speedy enough to react to them. Even when you do seem to have the upper hand on the enemy, the distance between them can be mistaken, often resulting in you taking a hit instead of the enemy. The sprites in this game are very well animated, and the environments you visit are beautifully drawn. As the swan song for the Saturn in North America, RPG lovers purchased a fun adventure for the console.

## FOR SATURN, THE BELL TOLLS

Trying to find a copy of *Magic Knight Rayearth* was a difficult task for anyone near the end of 1998 as the Sega Saturn had fallen off the radar for most gamers in the United States, but it wasn't much of a shock for anyone paying attention to the Video Game Industry.

Just two years before, in 1996 specifically, I can remember playing the Sega Saturn on a Best Buy demo kiosk and being amazed at the look and gameplay of *Panzer Dragoon II Zwei* that was featured. No other customers seemed to share the enthusiasm I had for

the game, though, as other teenagers were far more interested in the PlayStation demo kiosk. The fact was that the PlayStation aisle always seemed to be booming with new accessories, new demo disks, and far more games on the shelves than the Sega Saturn section. It was very obvious to me that the Saturn was going to need to step it up somehow in the coming months or it was going to be nothing but a memory.

That success did not come. *Next Generation* magazine reported that the Saturn had only secured about 15 percent of the video game console market in 1996, and most industry vets in 1997 were labeling the console the loser in the next-generation console war. The remarkable thing was that the Nintendo 64 was still a few months off during these industry statements, which probably made Sega feel even more pressure with the impending doom of *Super Mario 64*'s release. Reviewing gaming magazines from this era, you could visually see the presence of Saturn hinking. Fewer advertisements for Saturn games were featured, reviewers favored the PlayStation port of games released over the Saturn versions, and even game stores like Babbages and EB Games focused on advertising SNES titles over Saturn titles in their catalogs.

By 1998, the Saturn in the United States was only being championed by the most die-hard of fans. Saturn games were actively being thrown in bargain bins, and even titles like the now rare *Panzer Dragoon Saga* were being discounted. I choose a PlayStation as my console of that generation, betraying my long history




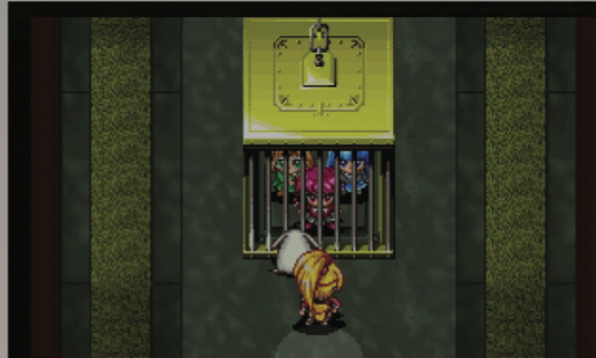
***EVEN IN THE DARKEST MOMENTS, WHAT'S AN ALL-GIRL ADVENTURE WITHOUT THE USUAL COMPLIMENTARY QUIPS?***



with Nintendo, taking Sony's console over the shiny new Nintendo 64. Why did the Saturn fail? Some blame Sega's poor support of their 32X Genesis add-on, which left a lot of hardcore Sega fans regretting that they dropped the cash on a severely hampered attempt at a 32-bit upgrade. If you ask developers, the Sega Saturn was not an easy system for which to develop. The Saturn was much faster than the PlayStation and had close to 50 percent more processing power, but Sega didn't provide the tips and tricks developers needed to code the system for optimum use of those features. By the time developers did start figuring out how to make the console perform, it was

too late. PlayStation had taken over the market, and Nintendo had landed with its 64-bit system. The Sega Saturn was discontinued shortly thereafter.

The only hope for Sega fans remained in the upcoming launch of the Dreamcast. Surely, Sega would make sure their next system would see significantly more support. Right? 





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PRESENTS  
**DEFENDER**

## An Interview with Eugene Jarvis

by Kevin Butler

**D**efender was created by a company that was, up to that time, much more known for its pinball machines than electronic arcade machines. In 1974, Williams released its first arcade game, *Paddle-Ball*, and acquired Magnavox's Magnetic Corporation of America. The *Pong* craze proved to be a flash in the pan, and the company abandoned video games shortly thereafter. Williams prospered in the the exploding electronic pinball market of the 1970's. However, when video game mania hit with the release of *Space Invaders* in 1978 and *Asteroids* in '79, it was clear that the future of the arcade was with video games, and pinball's star would fade.

For more about Defender, please read my FAQ at: <https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/arcade/584162-defender/faqs/25139>

I had the honor and privilege of talking to Eugene Jarvis, the creator and programmer of Defender.

**Old School Gamer (OSG):** How did you first get involved with computers?

Eugene Jarvis (EJ): I grew up in Silicon Valley. As a kid, I was into chess, Stratego, pinball and the early video games like Pong. I also liked to ride my bike over to Stanford. I would check out the AI lab and play what was the first arcade video game at the student Union.



Eugene Jarvis  
at CA Extreme  
in 2016.

It was called the Galaxy Game which was a derivative of Spacewar!. The Galaxy Game was the first commercial arcade video game and it was in its own cool space-age cabinet. This was back in 1971. It was also during this time, in high school, that I had my first exposure to FORTRAN.

**OSG: Did you go to college with the intent of going into computers?**

EJ: No, I wanted to go into biochemistry. I went to the University of California in Berkley from 1973 to 1974 to study biochemistry and learn the secrets of biological life, but I soon learned it would take more than a few lifetimes to figure this out. I realized, though, that my main love was computers. Therefore, I changed my major in 1974. One of my first assignments was programming in FORTRAN on a CDC (Control Data Corporation) 6600, 64 bit mainframe.

Later, I started working in a hardware lab with an Intel 4004 CPU, the first true microprocessor. As I got better, I started programming other microprocessors such as the Motorola 6800, MOS 6502, Intel 8008, and Intel 8088 (all were eight (8) bit microprocessors). Many of these programs involved also using a teletype and paper to run programs. I also found an old IBM 708 in the basement and it was able to run Spacewar!. Needless to say, I played a lot of that game at night, then headed directly to my 8 A.M. Physics lecture.

**OSG: So, you eventually got your degree then?**

EJ: Yes, I got my degree in Electrical Engineering in 1976. Since I had an interest in computer languages, my original plan was to create a language translator that would be natural enough to pass the Turing Test which was developed by Alan Turing. Alan stated that computers would reach a level of sophistication where someone could talk to a computer via keyboard and not realize they were talking to a computer.

It was during this time that I heard about the Homebrew Computer Club at Stanford. I went to see what new things were there, like two long haired guys in sandals. Steve Wozniak and Steve Jobs, introduced us to their first creation, the Apple I. It was a kit which cost \$666. I also played with a S-100 graphics card called the "TV Dazzler" which was even more impressive. Little did I know that 40 years later, Apple would become the most famous company in the world!

In my senior year I interviewed with a cool game company called Atari, but I never heard back from them. So I got a job at Hewlett Packard (HP) working on COBOL compilers. I remember the engineers always talking about programming their lawn sprinklers. Unfortunately, after 3 days, I couldn't take it anymore and quit. This would have been late 1976.

**OSG: What did you do after that?**

EJ: I finally got a call from Atari and got an offer from them. They were seeking someone to program their electronic pinball machines. In essence, they wanted someone who knew how to code these systems. Also, at this time, the big arcade game they put out was Breakout. This was during a time when CPU's (Central Processing Units) cost hundreds of dollars. Anyway, it seems that the guy in charge of programming the pinball machines had left, along with his boss. Therefore, I became the head programmer for the pinball machines. Due to my ability to show some programming tricks, I was nicknamed "Dr. J". The first "trick" I did was make the lights blink on the pinball machine. Apparently, the previous programmer told them it couldn't be done, but within two or three days of me getting there, I got them blinking. I had also worked on the sound generator for the pinball machines. The big weakness of the boards was the fact that they caught fire due to the electromechanical parts falling off the playfield and shorting out the CPU board.

**OSG: That sounds like something that was really opposite of what you eventually would do designing arcade games.**

EJ: Yes, the closest I got to any video games was that due to the demand that Atari was getting for their VCS 2600 game consoles, I helped assemble and QA these units. It actually was a total disaster trying to get office workers do any real useful work on an assembly line.

**OSG: So how long did you stay at Atari?**

EJ: I was coding pins at Atari from early 1977 to late 1978. I was approached by Steve Ritchie, who also worked at Atari's Pinball Division. We had worked together on two of Atari's best pinball machines: Airborne Avenger and Superman. Steve suggested that I follow him to Williams Electronics to further our pinball designing skills.

**OSG: What did you do at Williams?**

EJ: This would have been early 1979 when we both were working for the pinball division at Williams. In the fall of 1979, I did the sound effects for the pinball machine Gorgon which was the first pinball machine that utilized speech. I then worked with Ritchie programming the pinball game Firepower. It was the first electronic game to be multi-ball. We did the first dis-

play effects and I created an incredible sound effect package for the game: the gwave, variwave, and white noise routines became standards in William's pinball machines and videos games for years

**OSG: How did you break away from doing pinball?**

EJ: I wanted to get away from pinball and do a video arcade game. I was bored of the "simple" games that were out there. I wanted to create the ultimate arcade game that captured the essence of Asteroids and Spacewar! for flying. I also envisioned it having a wrap-around multi-screen world so you could fly non-stop.

**OSG: So is this how Defender came to be?**

EJ: Yes, in early 1980 I was put in charge of a team with our task being to create a new space game that was different than the ones out there but still familiar. My part on the team was doing the coding but also helping to architect the hardware. Since we knew nothing of special purpose motion object (sprite) hardware used in games at the time, we decided to use a bitmapped memory graphics system, and all graphics operations would be done by the CPU through software. We chose the most powerful processor of the era, the Motorola 6809. It has a nifty dual stack pointer architecture that allowed very fast memory writing, which we used for moving around the variable sized motion objects that would make up the various enemies and friendlies.

Defender would be full color, which means we would have 16 colors to choose from on a 256 byte hardware palette. The game would be on a 300 x 256 pixel screen. In addition, my original intent was to have the screen only scroll left to right for simplicity, but Steve Ritchie convinced me that you should be able to also go right to left. The multi-screen environment is 3.5 screens long.

**OSG: About the sprites, I count 75 of them used in the game. Many of**

**them are variants of each for, I assume, showing animation. Do you recall any of the code used for the various colors of the sprites?**

EJ: In response to your first question, you are correct. A table of different frames was used to animate the sprites. Some of the color values were used for not only color, but also some video color animating effects such as flashing and changing color cycling effects. If I recall, the following color palette was used: Black 0, Cyan 1, Red 2, Green 3, Yellow 4, Gray 6, Brown 7, Magenta 8, White 1 9, White 2 A, Purple C, Dark Blue D, Blue E, and Dark Yellow F. If I recall, 10 colors were constant and 5 (colors A through F hexadecimal) would be color cycling effects. The color RAM RGB values for color proportions were three bits of red, three bits in green, and two bits in blue.

NOTE: The 75 sprites are various sizes. For instance, the player's ship that faces left looks like this (translating numbers into the above colors also includes the animation at the cockpit):

```
0066000000000000
0666600000000000
2666660000000000
068666666DEF0000
2688886666666930
0088869300000000
```

This makes an 8 x 6 sprite or 48 bytes in size. By conserving space like this, the program can quickly render each sprite from a look-up table.

**OSG: What is the story with the "International Date Line" in the game where after you go through your 3.5 screens, you start over again? Also, this seems to affect how enemies behave.**

EJ: You are right. I originally set up the Mutant to be be



able to pursue the player by taking the shortest route. Because of the way the formula works, that line becomes where plus and minus infinity meet, due to the use of signed arithmetic. Therefore, when you cross that line, it becomes shorter in math for the Mutant to go the other way. The other enemies used unsigned math, so they have a different line where zero meets infinity. I also designed enemies such as the Baiters and Swarmers to move relative to the player. In a sense, they are “leading” the target to hit that player. They will go the shortest distance without regard to that date line.

**OSG: Were there any other interesting things about this game?**

EJ: At first, I designed the terrain to be deadly. I found, though, that with all the other difficulties in the game, that wasn't feasible. So therefore, the terrain is just for visual effect, although it does represent the limit that astronauts can travel, which comes into play when astronauts are dropped off or picked up. Also, the radar (I believe the first in an arcade game) constantly showed where you were in the world and also any enemies that were on or off screen

**OSG: Sounds like you had things well in hand to create this game then.**

EJ: Yes and no. There was a lot of trial and error trying to figure out what should be and not be in the game. In addition, progress was going slowly and by the middle

of 1980, we weren't as far as we wanted to be. As a matter of fact, we had fallen behind to the point I was ready to walk on this project. Fortunately, a new programmer, by the name of Sam Dicker, joined the team and started to make improvements to the game. For instance, he created the explosions of the enemies

which consisted of their actual pixels exploded in an expanded form depending on the center of impact of the player's laser shot. In the heat of the battle, there could be hundreds of explosion pieces on screen. These were the most incredible video game particle effects seen in that era. He also implemented the guys on the planet to be rescued, the lander, and the mutant to add more of a challenge. We also made the enemies more aggressive so they would go after the player and keep the player from sitting around in one place. Fortunately, we were using the Motorola 6809 CPU and this allowed us to have the necessary power to add these effects.

**OSG: So how long did the game take to make? You were basically at it from the beginning of 1980 to what seems late summer.**

EJ: That is correct, we had everybody eventually lend a hand in getting this game out. We wanted to feature it at the AMOA trade show in November. To give you an idea of how close we were, we were still programming and putting the finishing touches on the game all night before the show's opening. We allowed people to test out the first five levels of the game.

**OSG: After you got Defender out the door, what did you do next?**

EJ: Larry DeMar and I formed a company called Vid Kidz. It was here that we created Stargate, which was a sequel to Defender. There were things we had wanted to add to the original Defender that we thought would enhance it. We managed to use much of the Defender code for Stargate. We had to add some new sprites and streamlined the coding for efficiency so we could display many more objects on screen. After we did this, we basically had a relatively new game. Williams was more



than eager to purchase said game from us. After that, we created my personal favorite game Robotron 2084 in 1982 and our final game was Blaster in 1983. After that, we dissolved Vid Kidz in 1984.

**OSG: What did you do after closing down shop at Vid Kidz?**

EJ: I decided to go back to school. I went to Stanford from 1984-86 and got my Masters in Business. It was after I got my degree I was offered a chance to come back to Williams and make an anti-drug game in Chicago. It was here that I designed NARC, which was a shooter that put you in as a SWAT guy whose job was to arrest drug dealers and collect their money and drugs for evidence. The neat thing about this game is that it would become the first true hi-res live action photorealistic arcade game ever created. We digitized real actors and backgrounds - it was like playing a cop movie! This would have been around late 1987 to early 1988. After that, I joined the team to develop Smash TV which was around 1989-1990.

**OSG: Although you created two lasting games, it seems that you were anxious to move on to the next level.**

EJ: Yes, this was around 1991. I saw the games that were coming out that were rendered in 3D using shaded polygons. I figured we could do it better. So me, along with six other guys, formed TV Games company and created a new piece of hardware with a new chip-set that could render 3D texture mapped polygons smoothly. We designed the hardware to render quadrilaterals as opposed to triangles to double the render speed and accuracy. The first time this hardware was used was in Cruis'n USA in 1994 and Cruis'n World in 1996 when we rejoined Midway. Cruis'n was the most popular series of driving games ever in the arcade. Cruis'n USA was also a launch title for the Nintendo 64 console.


**OSG: With all of that, it seems you did a lot of what you set out to do.**

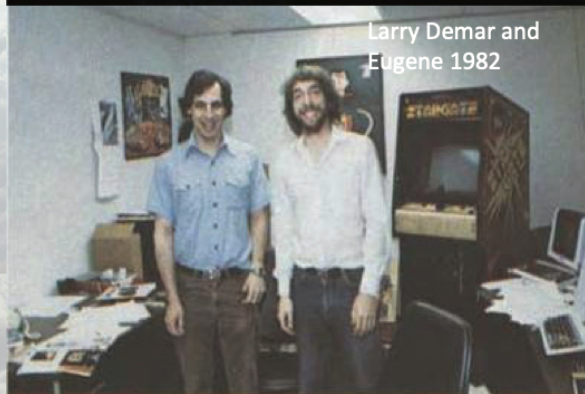
EJ: We had a helluva a ride at Midway, but it all came crashing down in the early 2000's when the company went bankrupt after Xbox and Playstation 2 destroyed the arcade business, and Midway failed to successfully transition to home console games. So, we were unemployed and couldn't find work, so me and a team of ex-Midway guys formed Raw Thrills - to launch a new

era in the arcade. We created games such as Target: Terror, The Fast and the Furious, Target: Terror Gold, Jurassic Park, Big Buck Hunter, the Walking Dead, Cruis'n Blast, and Halo arcade, the largest and most incredible game we ever made.

**OSG: What about the MAME project in regard to Defender and even Stargate?**

EJ: It is a wonderful library preserving these games for posterity, even when the last original arcade cabinet finally dies. The problem is that these games were designed to be played at an arcade cabinet. Robotron 2084 requires two joysticks to get the maximum effects of the game. That is hard to achieve on a computer controller unless you have built a custom board with said joysticks. The crazy Defender controls really demand a custom MAME panel to really enjoy the game.

**OSG: I would like to thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to talk to me, Mr. Jarvis. **

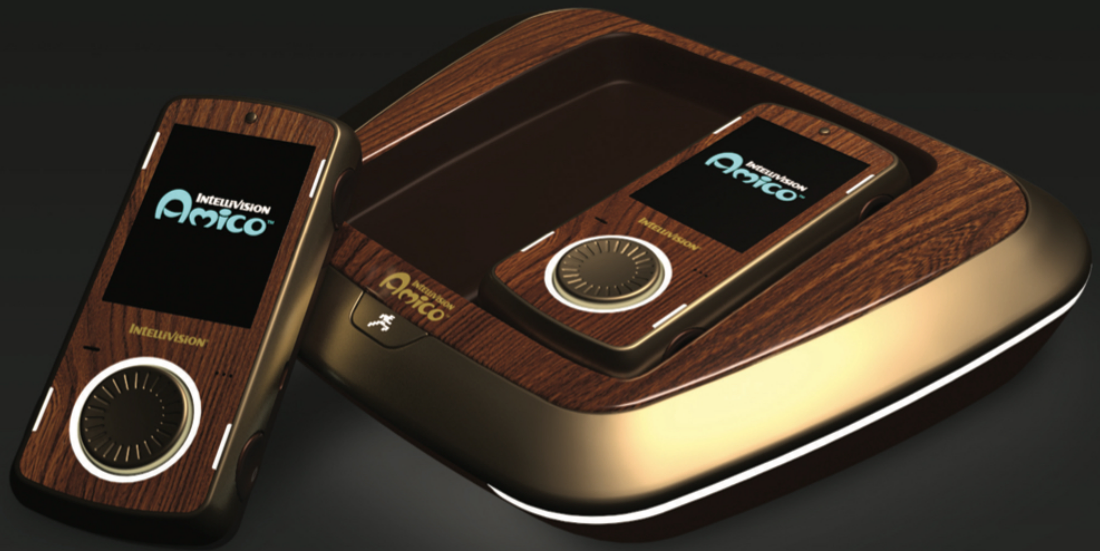


Larry Demar and Eugene 1982



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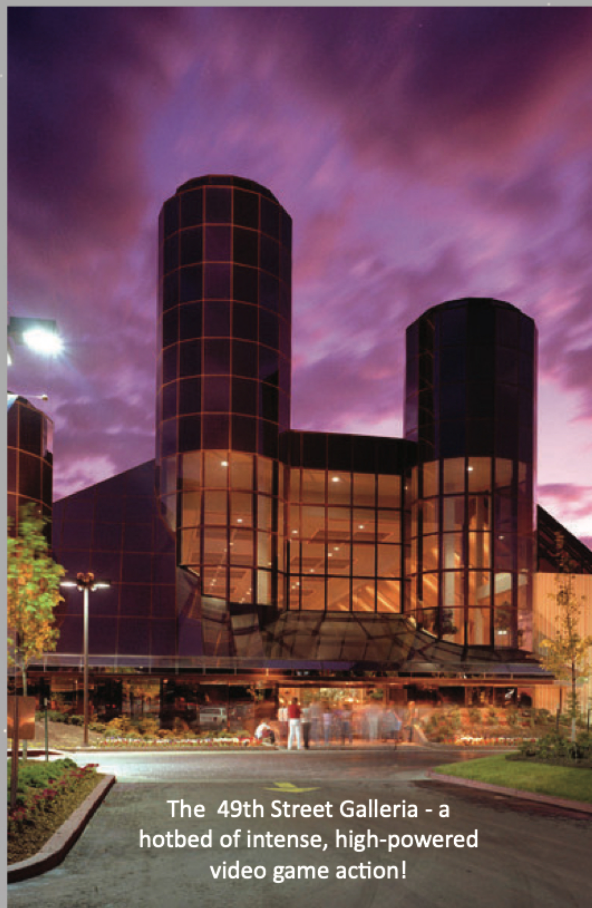
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TOGETHER AGAIN

# LA VIDA ARCADA

By Adam Pratt

**T**he 1980's – if you grew up during that decade as I did, then just hearing the term can bring back a flood of memories. Granted, the intensity depends on how much of the decade that you were around for; I was born near the beginning, so the times that stick out the most to me were the late 80's. In my case, I think I had a typical experience that any kid growing up in the middle-class suburbs would have had. No, I didn't get everything I wanted that popped up during commercial breaks during Saturday Morning Cartoons (or that some of my friends on my street had), but my parents provided enough to leave me happy in the blissful ignorance that a child should enjoy.

As the place where I grew up was in the middle of the suburban sprawl, there were no arcades within walking or even biking distance – excepting a pair of machines at a nearby 7-11. Of course I wasn't allowed to go there by myself until it would have been the 90's, but I still knew about the game machines in the corner by the door that we never had time for if I got the chance to go inside.



The 49th Street Galleria - a hotbed of intense, high-powered video game action!

My first real & memorable experience with arcades in the late 80's came from a friend's birthday party that was held at a popular spot called the 49th Street Galleria. This "Family Entertainment Center" had opened in 1983 in the city of Murray, UT, and it was packed to the brim with attractions: a carousel, bowling, go karts, mini-golf, party rooms, and a state-of-the-art arcade, featuring games that we now consider to be "retro."

Because I was so young, the memories of that day are fragmented, but there are a few things that I can recall – the arcade was dark, only lit by from the game machines and some overhead black lighting. The game floor was packed with games with little space between them. The air smelled like old cigarettes, as indoor smoking was still allowed in businesses at the time. I don't remember most of the games they had, apart from the one that would mesmerize me – a *Discs of Tron* by Midway. After staring at it for a few mo-



Hey, baby, do you come here often?

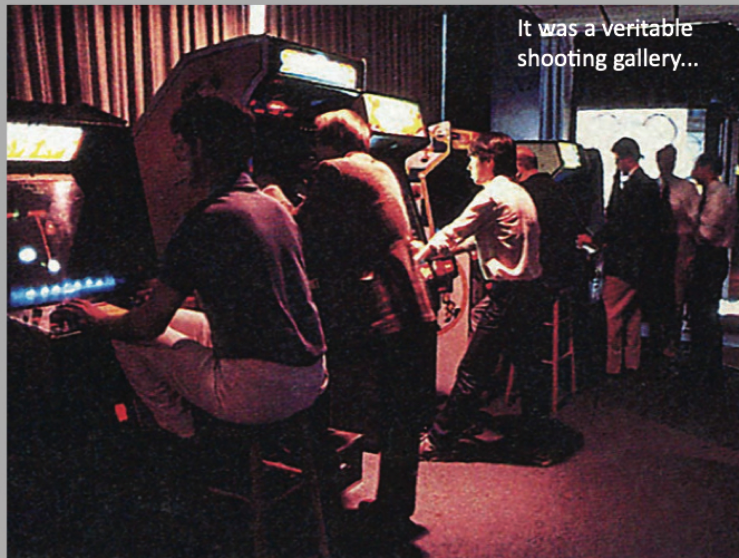
ments, I realized that I had already spent the measly amount of tokens we'd been given for the party, so it came down to fishing for coins in the coin eject slots to come up with something to try it out. Did I find one? I don't remember... but I do remember the hunt (this was 32 years ago, so you'll have to cut me a break).

While this was my first visit to an arcade, it was not my first time playing some of the games. Unbeknownst to me before this and some other rare visits to an arcade, many of the names I was familiar with started out as arcade titles, well before they were ported to the likes of the Atari 2600, NES and Sega's Master System & Genesis game consoles. Out of those, the only one that I owned was the 2600; everyone else in my neighborhood had an NES, and my best friend of the time had any console I had heard of... but for a long time, I had no clue that games like *Pac-Man*, *Asteroids*, *Front Line*, *Contra*, *Venture* and more started life as coin-op titles.

Plenty has been written about "Golden Age" of gaming, which some say ended in 1982; others say 1984, or even 1986. When you look at the games that spanned the '86-89 era, I think an argument could be made that the entire decade (and the tail end of the 70's) was the Golden Age. It is true that there was a crash in '83, which left the industry hobbling along for a couple of years, but when it came back, it did so with an awesome vengeance.

Nintendo is often given sole credit with "saving video games" after the 1983 crash, due to the release of their popular Nintendo Entertainment System console. However, both American and Japanese arcade developers would continue to create the games that players really wanted on their shiny new consoles. Laserdisc games like *Dragon's Lair* would provide for a small boost after the crash had settled, but the combination of martial arts games (like *Karate Champ*, *Kung Fu Master* and *Yie Ar Kung-Fu*) along with shoot 'em ups (like *1942*, *Gradius*, *Darius*) and the occasional unique title like *Gauntlet* and *Marble Madness*, deserve a lot of kudos for keeping interest in both arcades and gaming alive.

While consoles would make their mark in the mid-80's, Sega would show where innovation & power



could rule the day with their "Super Scalar" games that stormed the scene in 1985 and '86. No matter how good consoles got, they could never match the thrill of sitting down to drive a Ferrari in *OutRun*'s simulator-style cabinets. Joined by titles like *Super Hang-on*, *AfterBurner* and *Space Harrier*'s deluxe configuration, Sega demonstrated a special advantage that arcades had over their console cousins – the ability to immerse the player through a customized build, specially tailored to the specific game. It was almost like launching a new game console with every game release.

Not every arcade game did or had to go this route though. Many games were designed to be swapped out by the arcade operator without too much trouble in what were known as "conversion kits." These became extremely common in the late 80's and throughout the 90's thanks to a wiring standard called JAMMA (short for Japan Amusement Machine and Marketing Association). While the JAMMA standard didn't make switching out/upgrading games as easy as swapping cartridges, it did simplify the process so that a buyer didn't usually have to re-wire their entire game cabinet when they changed games. Most games to use this wouldn't remake the whole control scheme like in those aforementioned Sega efforts – they would use a standard 8-way joystick and 1-4 buttons (six was a rare exception in a later version of the first *Street Fighter*; standardized in 1991 by the sequel).

This made game additions easy and affordable, as operators had plenty of cabinets to use already. Unfortu-

nately, the practice of conversion has at times led to rarities and gems getting changed over to something common and forgettable. Still, the arcades of the late 80's would become dominated by these "JAMMA games," and it's extremely likely that if you played anything made between 1987 and 1989, that it would have followed this standard.

Arcade releases in the latter half of the decade would continue carrying the torch for video games, sometimes in being original trailblazers, in others by following pop culture trends. Unlike today, licensing was uncommon, so creators would cook up inspired spin-offs of their favorite films. Many of those movies glorified the macho man, a one-man army brimming with heroism, bent on saving the princess from waves of bad guys. Sure, not every game involved those ideas, but where it was prevalent in Hollywood, that translated well into gaming. Sometimes you were a punching & kicking punishment machine, like in *Kung Fu Master*, *Double Dragon*, or *Altered Beast*; or a katana & shuriken-wielding ninja as found in *Shinobi*, *Ninja Gaiden*, *The Ninja Warriors*. Other times an arsenal of fire-power would be at your disposal, like in *Contra*, *Cabal*, *Xenophobe*, *NARC* and more. Perhaps one game that embodied all these elements into one would be *Bad Dudes Vs. Dragon Ninja* by Data East. With street smart dudes battling hordes of ninjas who kidnapped President Reagan, it's hard to find a game that is more 80's than it was.

One way you could tell if an arcade game was a hit, was looking at the number of console and computer ports that it received. Almost every game mentioned in the previous paragraph enjoyed that attention, along with players demanding to play the likes of *Bubble Bobble*, *Gauntlet*, *Marble Madness*, *R-Type*, *Tetris*, *Rampage*, *Paperboy*, *Strider*, *A.P.B.*, *Ghosts 'N Goblins*, *Xybots*, *Arkanoid*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and a whole slew of others at home. The efforts to port these games to inferior hardware is something that still sticks with people today and has been at the center of many good-natured debates across the world ever since. Regardless of the quality found in a port, I can't help but appreciate the skill it took to translate some of those games over to extremely limited hardware and still come up with something playable. Sometimes the games were changed when making the transition, which happened frequently with NES ports; sometimes the ports were rushed and nothing more than hollow shells of the original. Still, one must tip the hat to the coders who found a way to make *Double Dragon* sort-of work on the Atari 2600.

Since these were pre-internet times, the way to promote arcade games is different than what we're familiar with now. Apart from word-of-mouth, manufacturers would produce flyers that they would send out to their authorized distributors, who would in turn share these with arcade operator buyers. While such flyers had existed in the 70's, they really took on a unique character in the 1980's, and particularly the late 80's. Apart from using artwork to exaggerate what was involved in the game, some companies used models to help grab attention. Konami USA became a master at this, capturing the essence of a game through what we would call "cheesy" today, but I think this made for a great artistic quirk that has since been lost.



It is also worth our time to shine a light on multiplayer co-op games of the time. Atari Games' *Gauntlet* really deserves a bulk of the credit in jump starting this style of play, and it was perfect for the social nature of arcades. While most games released in the early 80's were designed as single-player (or two-players taking turns) affairs, *Gauntlet* showed that you could get friends or completely strangers

to cram around a machine as they had a blast playing it. While it wasn't the first co-op or multi-player game ever invented, the way it handled it made for another pioneering influence on other games.

On a personal note, I was too young to enjoy that experience with the original *Gauntlet* in the 80's, but I did enjoy the same unique comrade with three other strangers on *Gauntlet Legends* in 1999. It's one of those things that isn't perfectly replicated at home, even with online gaming, as people tend to be nice to each other in a public gaming setting like that. Jumping back to the 80's, many games were influenced by *Gauntlet*, which lead to Atari's competitors coming up with their "responses:" Sega had games like *Quartet*, *Gain Ground* and *Hot Rod*; Konami had *Dark Adventure* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*; Midway had *Rampage* and *Xenophobe* – among other great games.

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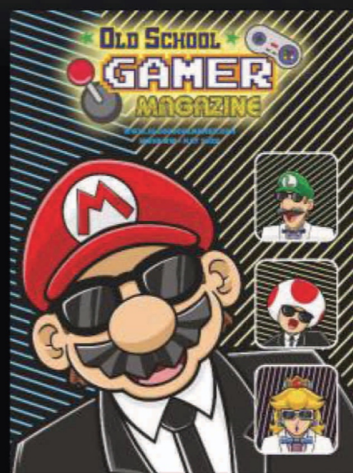
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It can feel surprising to look back at the sheer number of unique and original ideas that came about from this era. That is in part because we've gotten used to the modern reliance on sequels, licenses and reboots. Other forms of entertainment, such as TV and movies are in the same conundrum, as ideas dry up and tastes change. Games from our beloved era required a level of skill and challenge that we've lost for the most part in the current gaming culture. Players used to demand that games be difficult, but nowadays you'd have to go to Japan to get that level of tough (for the most part). Granted, there were bad games when we were growing up – but those aren't the ones we go back to. Just those entertaining greats that we didn't think of as "classics" at the time. Games that were fun, engrossing and timeless, which makes them still fun to play 30+ years later.

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