

★ Old School ★



**GAMER**

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ISSUE #15 • MARCH 2020



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# AUGUST 8<sup>TH</sup> - 9<sup>TH</sup>



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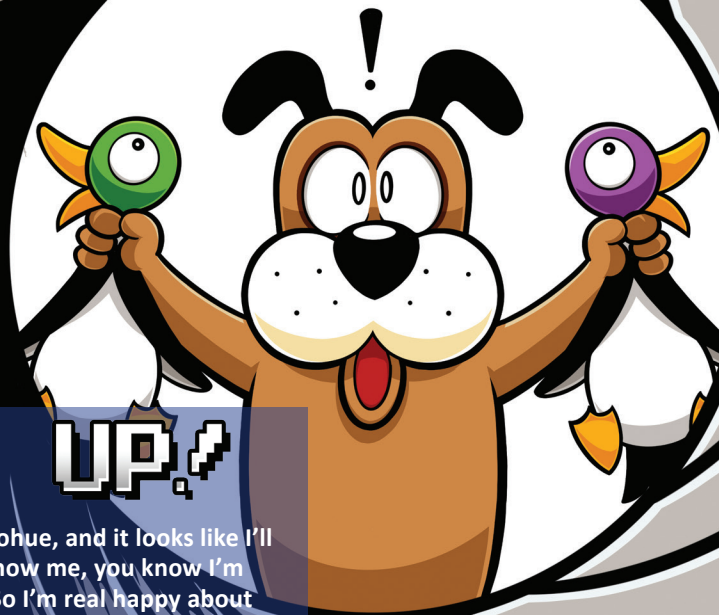
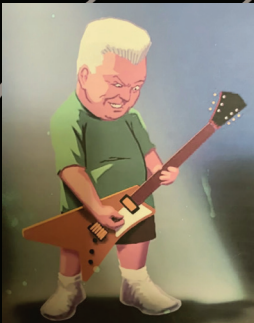
- MUSICAL PERFORMANCES
- VINTAGE PC'S
- GUEST SPEAKERS
- COSPLAY CONTEST
- TABLETOP GAMING AND RPGS



LIRETRO.COM

**07 KONAMI SHOOTERS**  
**08 DUCK HUNT**  
**10 BRETT'S OLD SCHOOL  
BARGAIN BIN**  
**14 THE JADED GAMER:  
MMU812A**  
**16 MAC ATTACK!**  
**22 METALSTORM**  
**28 THE SUPER SPY**  
**31 BREAKOUT**  
**31 VIDEO GAME BOX ART**  
**38 INTERVIEW WITH  
JIM LEVY**

**32 SINISTAR:  
NOAH FALSTEIN:  
MORE THAN WORDS**  
**36 THE GAME SCHOLAR:  
WAR GAMES**  
**44 YOU CAN'T CALL  
IT... #!%%\$!**  
**46 ULTIMATE GUIDE  
TO NES LIBRARY  
1985 - 1995**



## COIN UP!

Howdy, folks! My name is Bill Donohue, and it looks like I'll be filling up this box now. If you know me, you know I'm a huge gun fan, real or pixelated. So I'm real happy about Issue 15... SHOOTERS! We've got shooters you've probably never heard of. We've got shooters that existed only on Macs. We've also got the classics: *Duck Hunt* (You know dog is delicious, right?), *Sinistar* (Face it, the only thing getting eaten is you), and *Airborne Ranger* (Foon!). So hunker down and set your sights on Issue 15 of Old School Gamer. Drop me a line sometime. I'd love to hear from the folks we do this for. My email is [billd.oldschoolgamer@gmail.com](mailto:billd.oldschoolgamer@gmail.com).  
Bill Donohue, Editor

# THE SCRIBES



## Warren Davis

Warren Davis' career in the videogame industry spans three decades. He began in 1982 at Gottlieb where his first game was the hugely successful arcade classic, *Q\*bert*. He also created the digitizing system that Williams/Bally/Midway would use for many of their hit games of the 1990s. In 2018, he was inducted into the International Video Game Hall of Fame.



## Brad Feingold

Brad has been with OSG for 2 years now. His love for retro gaming goes all the way back to loving *Space Invaders* and *Asteroids*. Even though he plays 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.



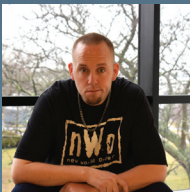
## Todd Friedman

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.



## Leonard Herman

The Game Scholar is regarded as one of the most respected videogame historians. He has written articles for Videogaming & Computer Illustrated, Games Magazine, Electronic Gaming Monthly, the Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine, Pocket Games, Classic Gamer Magazine, Edge, Game Informer, Old School Gamer Magazine, Gamespot.com and Video Game Trader.



## Patrick Hickey

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.



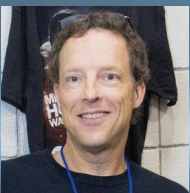
## Michael Mertes

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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# The Konami Arcade Classics

By Brad Feingold



In a previous issue, I talked about the Switch collections from Konami: the *Contra Collection* and the *Castlevania Collection*. But did you know that there was a third one... or should I say a first one? Prior to these two awesome classic collections, in April 2019, Konami released a collection of a different type. This was the *Arcade Classics Anniversary Collection*. Unlike the other two reviewed, this title was released with a different variety of games.

*Haunted Castle*, *Typhoon (A-Jax)*, *Nemesis (Gradius)*, *Vulcan Venture (Gradius II)*, *Life Force (Salamander)*, *Thunder Cross*, *Scramble* and *Twin Bee* were the titles combined into one solid package. In addition to these, there were also Japanese versions of the games available for play.

Similar to the other two Konami Collections, there is also a book file that lets you look at the concept and history of the games, which I actually found extremely interesting. What it really comes down to are the games themselves and if they live up to the video arcade predecessors. That answer is - absolutely! The graphics, controls and sound that was blasting through the TV made it feel like I was back at the arcade. You also have several options for the display from standard 4:3 aspect ratio to "stretch" (across your viewing area). You can also alter the screen display into pinball mode.

Is auto-fire cheating? HECK NO!!! Anyone who has put quarters into the machines or even played the games at home will attest that pounding on the buttons to fire and shoot bombs can really take a toll on your hands. That is where a nice little feature comes in handy in the controls menu that allows you to turn it on for fire,

bombs and/or both. It's still tricky to get through some levels, though, no matter what you do.

The *Gradius* series and *Scramble* were always my go-to games when I went to the arcade if I didn't see an *R-Type*. It was extremely pleasing to come across these titles as well as *Life Force*. I'm unsure how many hours I lost playing these games, not only at the arcade, but on the NES as well. Trust me when I say that these versions are way better!

For every positive there is usually a negative. This is probably the first time I have ever made a negative comment about a game, but here it goes. I have absolutely NO idea why *Haunted Castle (Akumajo Dracula)* in Japan) was put into this collection, since the theme for this collection appears to be space and plane shooters. *Haunted Castle* was just plain awful to play. I stayed away from it, but was not disappointed, since I had so many more games to play.

So, if you take away one bad ingredient, you still have a really great recipe for a classic collection. It is time for the other companies to step up and take note on how to do this. Even though you can go into the Nintendo store and individually purchase one NEO GEO game at a time, it would be a really smart idea to create another collection like they had previously released. These collections are a great way to get more and more people involved with the retro classics. I would love to see a Capcom collection like they had for the PSP, as well as the Midway Collections to return to the Switch. But for now, game on! 🎮



# Duck Hunt

## The Ultimate Shooter

By Todd Friedman

If you ask a gamer to name some popular shooter titles, they will tell you games like *Call of Duty*, *Doom*, *Halo*, *Grand Theft Auto* and *Goldeneye*. Before all of these hit the shelves, Nintendo had a vision of providing a shooter game with the new Nintendo Entertainment System launch in 1985. One of the games that would be the poster child of the NES shooters was *Duck Hunt*. The NES offered an alternative to games using the control pad by creating the “Light Gun”, also known as the “NES Zapper.” This plastic, gun-shaped controller made shooting at the TV screen exciting and challenging at the same time. *Duck Hunt* was the game designed for all ages. As simple as the task of shooting birds in the sky was, the game itself brought challenges to the gamer, so long as you were not putting the barrel of gun right on the screen.

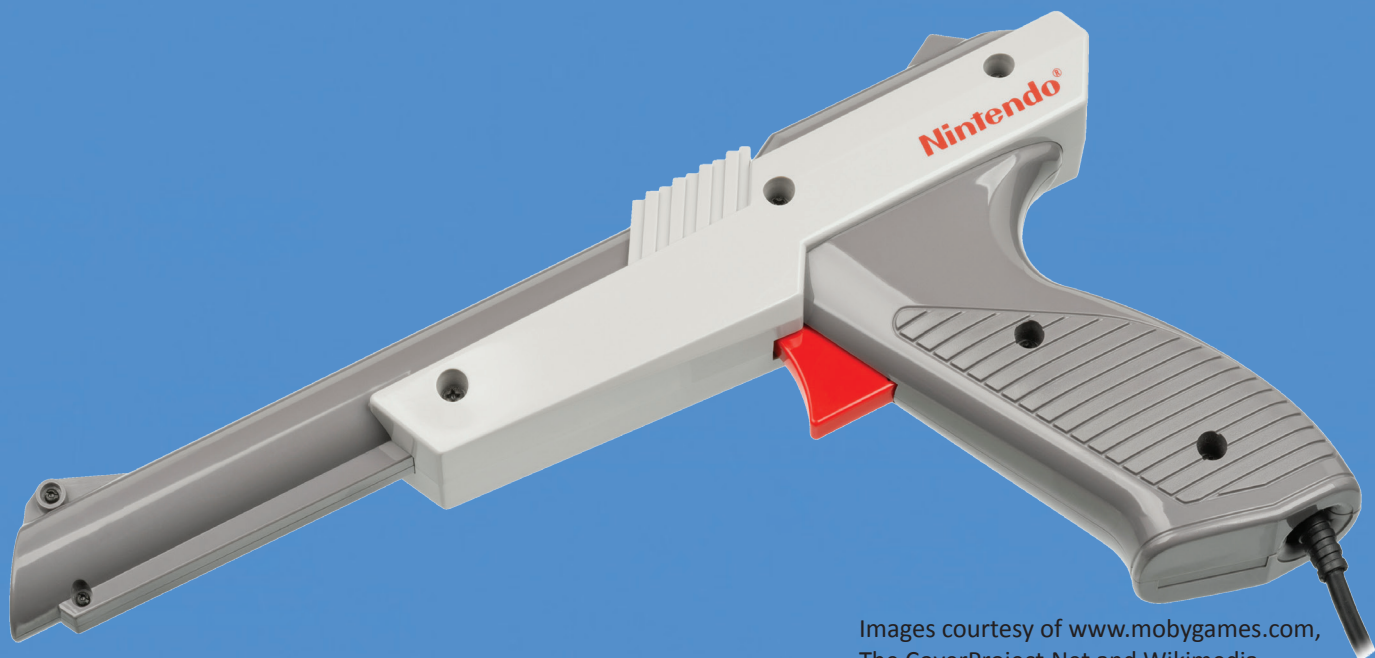
*Duck Hunt* was released at launch with the NES on October 18, 1985. The rules were very simple. When one or two ducks flew out, you would attempt to shoot them down. The higher the level, the faster they would fly around making it more

difficult to shoot them down. Trees and bushes occasionally blocked your shots. When the round was over, points were tallied based on your performance. If you reached the requisite score for that round, you moved on to the next one. Each time the ducks flew onto the screen, the player got three shots in order to hit one or two of the ducks. If you missed them, an annoying dog popped out of the bushes and laughed at you, ending the game.

There are three different game modes for *Duck Hunt*. The duck game has Game A and Game B. The Game C option replaced ducks with clay pigeons. This clay shooting simulation gives the gamer an alternate challenge that does not include the laughing dog. Game A, for novice players, has one duck on the screen at a time during gameplay. If you are ready for a challenge, Game B will have two ducks on the screen at one time. Either way, the game never gets old. Trying to get to the highest level, or beating your friend’s score, made this game one of the reasons to get an NES for the holidays that year.

*Duck Hunt* was an arcade game released





Images courtesy of [www.mobygames.com](http://www.mobygames.com),  
[The CoverProject.Net](http://TheCoverProject.Net) and [Wikimedia](http://Wikimedia)

in 1984, quickly followed by the NES home console version in 1985. This rendition of the arcade game was called *Vs. Duck Hunt*. As part of the PlayChoice-10 arcade machine, *Vs. Duck Hunt* would be able to accommodate two light guns and two player competition. The annoying dog from the NES version is more of a pain in the arcade version, as he is able to jump out and block you from shooting the ducks. If you shoot the dog, the game is over. Another notable difference is the sheer number of ducks that come out. In the arcade game, up to three ducks can fly out at a time as opposed to a maximum of two on the NES.

There were a few different models of the light gun. The one that most people are familiar with is gray and orange. This was Nintendo's way of making sure no one mistook it for a real gun. They also had an all grey (light and dark) gun with an orange trigger. There was even an attachment for a deluxe scope that was needed for more precise shooting.

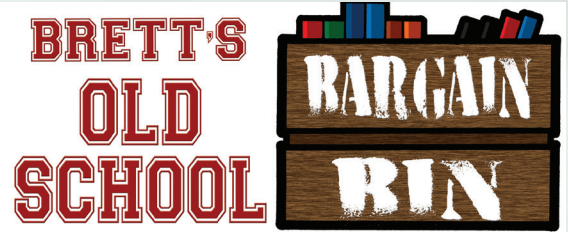
One of the nostalgic parts of *Duck Hunt* is that you need to play it on a CRT television. The technology of the Zapper was quite aged, even at the time of its release. Due to the technology used by the Zapper, there was a lag in game play. When the gamer hits the trigger, there is a light sen-

sor that causes the screen to go black for a single frame. The objects become white boxes for a single frame. All this happens so quickly that the gamer will never see this until a hit or miss is recorded. LCD or Flat Panel TVs don't have the same draw rate as a tube TV. When these light guns were produced, the technology of LCD or Plasma TVs (as we know them today) was not even a consideration.

One strategy that gamers seem to always do out of frustration is place the light gun nearly on top of the screen and shoot the ducks up close. This is a form a "cheating" as the object is to hit them while aiming and shooting from an appropriate distance. If you put the gun on the screen and follow the duck, there really isn't much of a challenge and fun to that. I guess it is a way to continue to the next level, but it won't get you into Walter Day's record books!

There have been a few knock-off, plug and play versions of *Duck Hunt*, but nothing beats the original. The original NES Zapper is iconic, and one cannot own an NES system without having it. The NES had a handful of other light gun games such as *Gumshoe* and *Hogan's Alley*, but in my opinion, *Duck Hunt* will always be the best of the bunch.

# Shooters Not Available on the Atari 2600



By Brett Weiss

**W**hen the word “shooter” is brought up among gamers, first-person shooters like *Call of Duty* and *Halo* typically come to mind, or maybe vertical scrolling “bullet hell” games like *Ikaruga* and *Raiden IV*. That’s not the case for this old-school gamer. My mind goes to such classics as *Defender* and *Missile Command*, at least initially.

Let’s take a look at some of the better gold-age shooters that were **not** released for Atari’s first programmable console, including such favorites as *Galaga* and *Attack of the Timelord!*

(Pricing for each game is for cartridge only.)

## ATARI 5200

### *The Dreadnaught Factor*

Publisher: Activision. Developer: Activision, Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 player, 1983.

Instead of pitting players against wave after wave of small ships, *The Dreadnaught Factor* is a battle against one mammoth “dreadnaught.” Dotting the giant ship in question are strategic targets, such as engines, command centers, scanning towers, and ex-

haust ports. Shooting and annihilating an engine, for example, slows down the behemoth space cruiser, which must be destroyed before it reaches a space station. It’s sort of like the Millennium Falcon facing off against a Star Destroyer, which is always a good time. *The Dreadnaught Factor*, which could use auto fire to prevent hand cramping, was also released for the Intellivision, but that version scrolls horizontally. At \$20, the game is a little pricey, but it’s well worth it.

### *Space Dungeon*

Publisher: Atari. Developer: Atari, Fixed-Screen Shooter, 1 or 2 players (alternating), 1983.

Adapted from Taito’s obscure arcade game from 1981, *Space Dungeon* is a fast, exciting, action-packed shooter and one of the better games for the console. Gripping two joysticks, you guide a laser cannon through a series of 99 rooms, collecting treasure while shooting thieves, executioners, guards, enforcers, and other enemies. You can move and shoot in eight directions as in *Robotron*, with the left stick controlling the ship and the right stick aiming the cannon. A small map at the top of the screen helps you track your location. The game will only cost you around \$8 loose,





but you'll want to pick up a controller holder (originally packaged with the game) for the best results. Or, you can rubber band the two joysticks together.

## ATARI 7800

### *Galaga*

Publisher: Atari, Developer: General Computer Corp, Fixed-Screen Shooter, 1/2 players (alternate), 1987.

While *Galaga* is one of the most ubiquitous arcade games ever made (you still see it today in many locations), it was, strangely enough, never released for the Atari 2600 or 5200. While it's not a perfect port of Namco's coin-op classic from 1981 (your ship is smaller, the action is a little slower, indicator badges have been replaced by numerals), it is an important entry in the system's relatively small library of games. Shooting action is solid, sound effects are respectable, enemies behave like their coin-op counterparts, and, most importantly, the dual-ship action and challenge stages - the two key components of the original game - are as engaging as ever. Plus, the game will only set you back around \$8.



## COLECOVISION

### *Cosmic Avenger*

Publisher: Coleco. Developer: Coleco, Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 or 2 players (alternate), 1982.

One of the original nine launch titles for the ColecoVision, *Cosmic Avenger* is also one of the more common games for the console and will only set you back around \$3 to \$5. Like many first party ColecoVision games, it's an excellent (if somewhat watered down) port of a relatively obscure arcade game (Universal's 1981 semi-classic in this case). You pilot a fighter over domed cities and through alien seas, firing missiles at, and dropping bombs on, UFOs, rockets, fuel domes, submarines, launch pads, and other enemy targets. The arcade version has sharper graphics and smoother gameplay, but these things are expected. Fans of *Scramble* and *Super Cobra* will enjoy this early example of a side-scrolling shooter.



### *Space Fury*

Publisher: Coleco. Developer: Coleco, Fixed-Screen Shooter, 1 or 2 players (alternate), 1982.

The 1981 Sega/Gremlin *Space Fury* was noteworthy for its colorful vector graphics, and, more importantly, the Alien Commander, a cyclopean monster who would verbally taunt arcade gamers with such taunts as, "You are starting to annoy me, creature. My destroyers will annihilate you." Thanks to relatively limited hardware, the Coleco game substitutes raster graphics and leaves out the verbal sounds in place of mere text. And, obviously, the home game lacks rotary control. Even so, this is a playable port,

with gamers piloting a ship in *Asteroids*-like fashion, shooting fireballs, cruisers, warships, and enemy destroyers. Docking in one of three mother ships provides firepower upgrades, setting the game apart from *Asteroids*. This one will set you back just \$6 or so.

## INTELLIVISION

### *Buzz Bombers*

Publisher: Mattel Electronics.  
Developer: Mattel Electronics,  
Fixed-Screen  
Shooter, 1 player.  
1983.

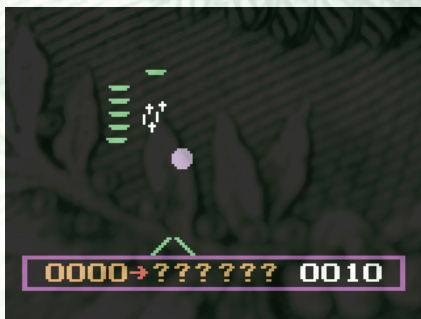


Mattel's answer to *Centipede*, *Buzz Bombers* has you guiding a can of bug spray along the bottom of the playfield, spraying upward at worker bees before they can pollinate flowers located around the lower portion of the playfield (pollinated flowers give the spray can less room to operate). When a bee is shot, it leaves behind a honeycomb. Honeycombs play the same basic role as the mushrooms in *Centipede* and can be shot by the sprayer or eaten by a helpful hummingbird. Later levels introduce white killer bees, which are faster than worker bees. *Buzz Bombers* isn't as polished as *Centipede*, but it is a fun challenge, so it's a good value at around \$10.

## ODYSSEY2

### *Attack of the Timelord!*

Publisher:  
North American Philips.  
Developer:  
North American Philips.  
Fixed-Screen Shooter, 1 player. 1982.



A favorite among Odyssey2 owners, *Attack of the Timelord!* has many of the typical trappings of a classic "slide-and-shoot" game, from the horizontal

movement of the player's cannon to the waves of bomb-dropping enemies. However, the game distinguishes itself with a skull-like being called Spyro the Deathless - Time Lord of the Chaos, who appears between levels to unleash his time ships and taunt the player with, "Your planet is doomed," "Kill the human," and other barbs emitted via the O2's The Voice speech synthesis module. The time ships move in intricate, snake-like patterns, firing four types of weapons: missiles, antimatter mines, annihilators, and nucleonic time killers. *Attack of the Time Lord!* boasts 256 levels, electrifying sound effects, and the type of challenges that will have shooter fans trying to top their high scores. It's worth around \$10 or \$12.

## VECTREX

### *Armor Attack*

Publisher: GCE. Developer: GCE.  
Maze Shooter, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).  
1983.

With its vector graphics display, the Vectrex is the perfect vehicle for *Armor Attack*, the 1980 Cinematronics arcade game. Gameplay is vaguely similar to *Combat* for the Atari 2600, but players in this game team up against an enemy instead of shooting at one another. The action consists of driving a jeep through the streets of a bombed-out city, firing away at nicely animated tanks and helicopters that remain on patrol. Tanks must be shot twice, while shooting a helicopter once destroys it and gives players an extra jeep. Good sound effects and fun, duck-and-cover gameplay make it a highly playable game. It will only set you back \$10 or so.



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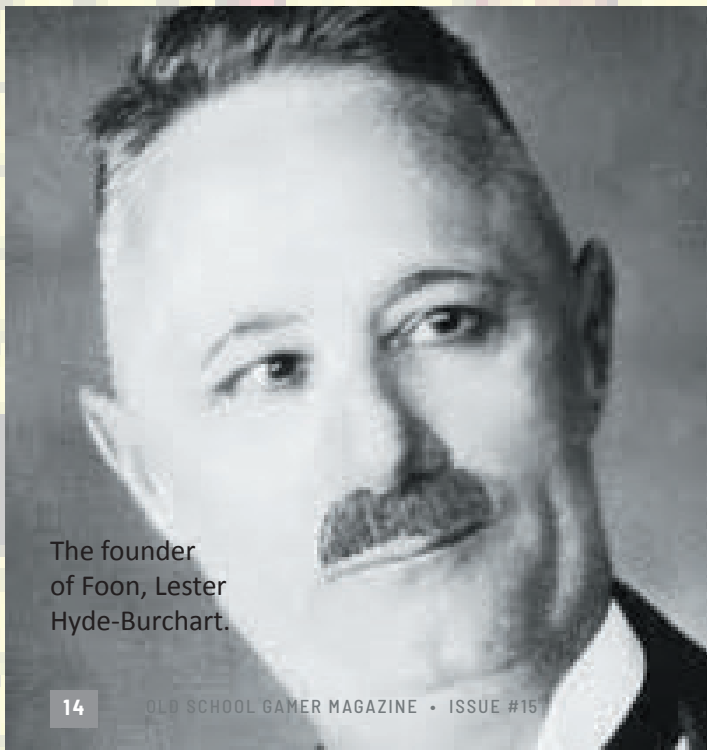
# AIRBORNE RANGER or MMU812A

by the writer formerly known as The Jaded Gamer - Bill Donohue

**A**irborne Ranger is a very intense military combat simulator that requires careful planning and stealthy execution in order to win over a numerically superior hostile force. These ops take place in a number of different environments; everything from the baking desert to the frozen arctic – and everything in between. Anything that can possibly happen on a mission will happen, as shown by the following timeline...

**10/13/1922**

Lester Hyde-Burchart invents a unique eating utensil that can be used as both a spoon and a fork. In a stroke of so-so genius, he names his device the “foon,” which proves disastrous. The New Delhi Industrial Dictionary defines the word “buffoon” with a picture of Lester Hyde-Burchart holding a foon. Lester takes to wearing women’s clothing and collecting cats, which later suffocate him in his sleep.



The founder of Foon, Lester Hyde-Burchart.

**04/22/1937**

While cleaning out his grandparents’ home, Randolph Burchart discovers the foon in a roll-top desk and, in a slightly better stroke of genius, sells the foon and all rights to it to the United States Army under the name of the “Yummy Stick.” The Army, short on humor, renames it the MMU812A and issues it as such in Army K rations.



Camo foons - white for the Arctic, black for night fighting, while red was for MASH units.

**12/07/1941 – 10/07/2001**

The MMU812A serves honorably through World War II, the Korean Conflict, the Vietnamese war and into the Special Ops actions in the Afghanistan theatre. The MMU821A also went through changes, from K Rats to MREs. While the form of the MMU812A didn’t change, it underwent changes in color to match the type of operations it was involved in: Black for night ops, White for Arctic ops, Green for jungle warfare, Tan for desert ops, and Blue for underwater action. This last type required intensive testing, as the main complaint the troops had was that the sea water made everything taste too salty.

**06/13/2003**

On this morning, Specialist Robert “Booboo” Burchart was headed in-country to meet with a high desert

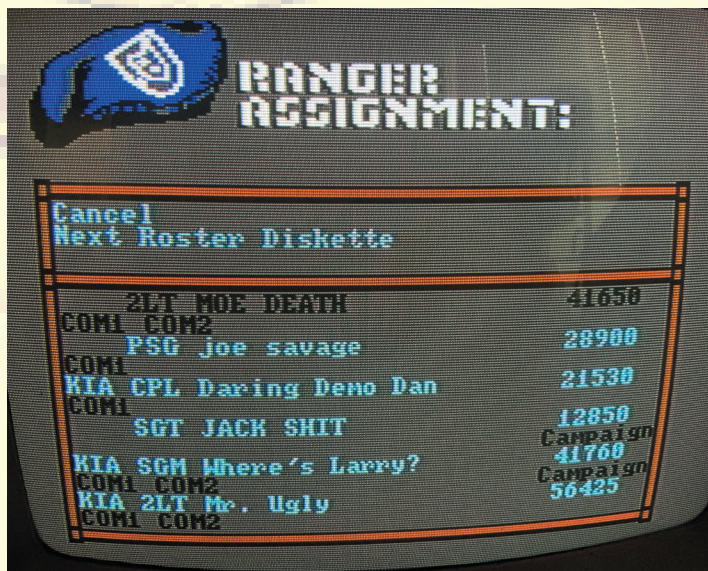
tribe thought to be friendly to Americans. To that end, a V-22 Osprey picked up Booboo and three mission packs, flew a classified flight path to a point somewhere in the high desert and dropped the three packs at locations specified by the operator, who then executed a HALO insertion to begin the mission. Booboo was traveling light, carrying a pistol and a flashlight. He knew something was wrong when he found the first pack. Indigenous tribesmen had found the pack first and taken everything with the exception of a can of SPAM and an MMU812A. He moved slowly through the enemy-infested terrain, disposing of guards and snipers by holding the MMU812A to their throats and bashing them on the head with the can of SPAM. Booboo might have had a successful mission had the can of SPAM been made of stouter material. The can simply fell apart in Booboo's hands before he could brain his 24th victim, who let out a yell, which resulted in Booboo being taken prisoner by a not-so-friendly tribe, who traded him to the Russians for a case of canned borscht and a can opener. Booboo was returned to the Army in a prisoner exchange. No one knows what happened to the trusty MMU821A.



02/05/2020

While this story about a mystical “foon” and its part in military history was completely full of “SPAM”, one thing is for certain. During a campaign waged back in 1988, while under my control, 2nd Lieutenant Mr. Ugly did in fact kill 57 enemy troops with nothing more than a knife. No carbine, no grenades, no time bombs, no MMU812A... just a simple knife and the cunning and savagery to use it. Sadly, victim 58 was faster on the trigger... Personally, I blame the beer I was holding..

Background art - classicreload.com  
 Ben Turpin - Pinterest.com  
 Sporks - bladehq.com  
 Box and Screen - Bill Donohue



# MAC ATTACK!

## “YES, VIRGINIA, MAC COMPUTERS HAD SHOOTERS... REALLY!”

by Richard Moss

It may be strange to imagine, but there has never been a point in the Mac's life where shooters weren't available for it. I mean, when you think Mac, even if you think games, you probably don't think shooters, except maybe *Marathon* (more on that later). Shooters loomed surprisingly large in the Classic Mac era (loosely defined as pre-2001, when Mac OS X officially launched).

Even before the user-friendly personal computing platform's January 1984 launch, it had two different versions of the 1970s *Maze* (aka *Maze Wars*) minicomputer game — a first-person multiplayer free-for-all where you wander a maze shooting rival players. Both pre-1984 Mac versions were built internally at Apple, both were popular within the company, and both soon leaked to the public. In fact, the story goes that the world's first LAN party involved these two *Maze* conversions, *Bus'd Out* and *MazeWars*. It happened in a pizza parlor one evening during the first Macworld Expo (February 21-23, 1985) on approximately 20 Macs, connected via homemade versions of the AppleTalk local area net-

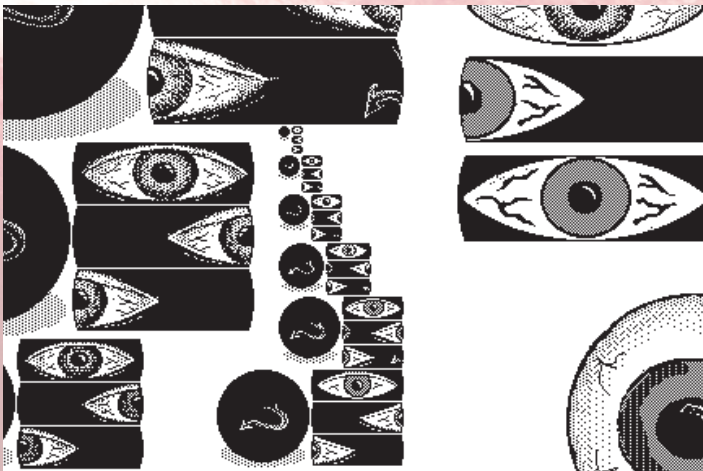
working suite that Apple had announced that week.

*Bus'd Out* and *MazeWars* both attained a cult following in the early Mac community, were passed around within user groups and played religiously anywhere there were at least two Macs and an AppleTalk cable at hand.

Public domain game *MacBugs* (1985) — a top-down, single-screen, mouse-controlled *Robotron*-like shooter, about fighting software bugs, also made waves in the community, spread the world over via Macintosh user groups, while early commercial Mac shooters like *MacAttack* (a 1984 *Battlezone* clone) and *Ground Control* (*Space Invaders*, also 1984) impressed more for their crisp black-and-white graphics than brilliant gameplay.

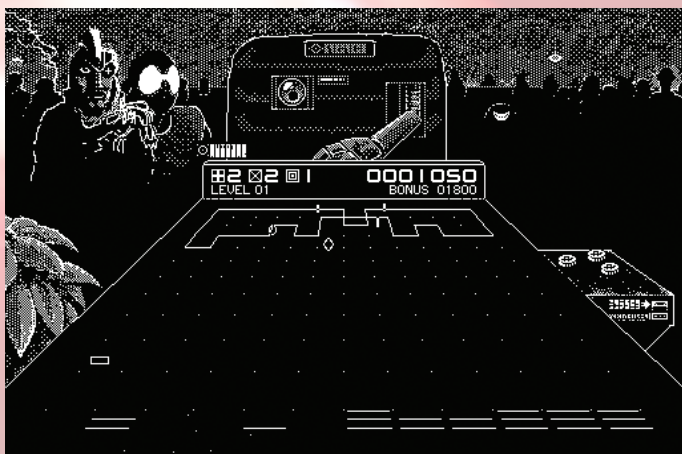
The best early Mac shooters came from unexpected places. In 1985, for instance, a serial tech entrepreneur with a background in competitive shooting for the US Marine Corps saw an opportunity to start one of the first Mac software companies, Silicon Beach Software. With no money to hire professionals (he spent his life savings on an Apple Lisa development machine), he brought a couple of students in to help with programming and took on the design reins himself for their first product: a game called *Airborne*.

In *Airborne*, players try to repel endless waves of invaders using a single stationary gunner who can swap back and forth between mortar and anti-air rounds. Nothing special, really, except that its digitized sound samples packed a huge punch. *Airborne's* introductory tune — an excerpt of Richard Wagner's *Flight of the Valkyries* — bursting through the tiny Mac speakers made quite a stir at the Macworld Expo when it was



MazeWars - Eyeballs





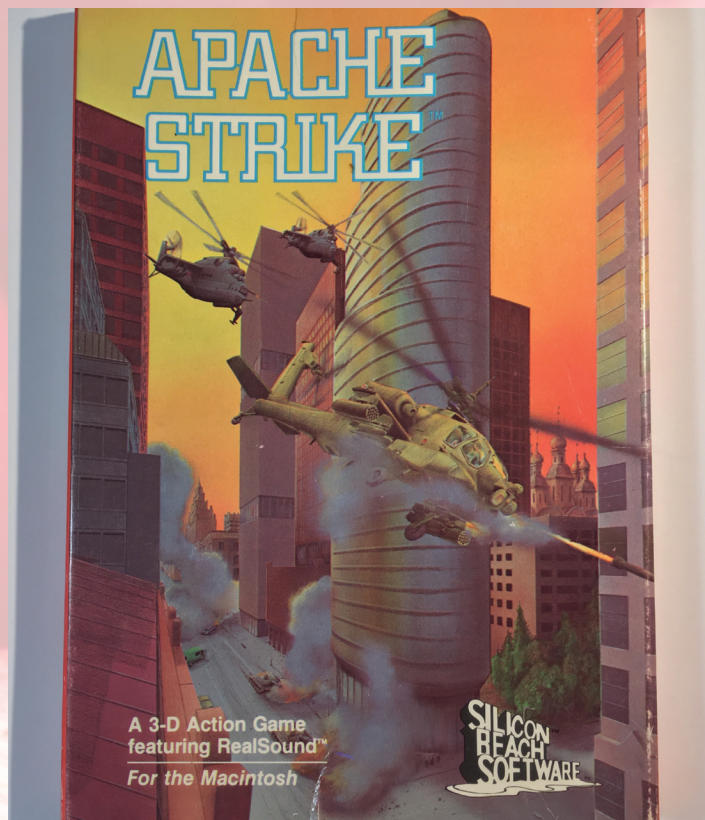
Grid Wars

first demoed publicly, as it was almost unheard of for a personal computer to output such high-quality audio. On these merits, the game sold like gangbusters.

More inventive, but much less popular, a *Tempest*-inspired puzzler called *Grid Wars* (1985) provided a 3D, down-the-field perspective on a tabletop battlefield populated by expanding shapes called Grid Walkers and kamikaze attackers called Grid Nasties. You had to destroy the Grid Walkers with your laser cannon before they reached the end of the table and avoid the Grid Nasties before they could destroy your shields. It was a cool game, oozing with style, but it was hard to understand and harder still to actually succeed at, thus it was quickly forgotten.

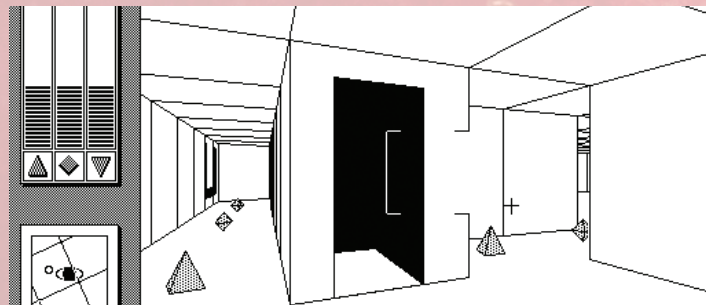
Not so for 1987's *Apache Strike* — from the publisher of *Airborne*. Despite its immense difficulty, its tours de force technical achievements helped it achieve great fame in the Mac community. It used a custom mouse, display, and sound drivers because the Mac's built-in software was too slow to handle real-time wireframe 3D without a choppy frame rate. The result was a smooth-flying, behind-the-chopper view of a line-rendered city, as you used the mouse to steer around buildings and to shoot at enemy helicopters and tanks.

*The Colony* (1988), by David Alan Smith, was even more ambitious. It put players into a whole pre-authored world, with a first-person-perspective adventure through both indoor and outdoor environments populated, not only by aliens that needed to be shot, but also by the sorts of objects you might expect in a multi-level research and living facility

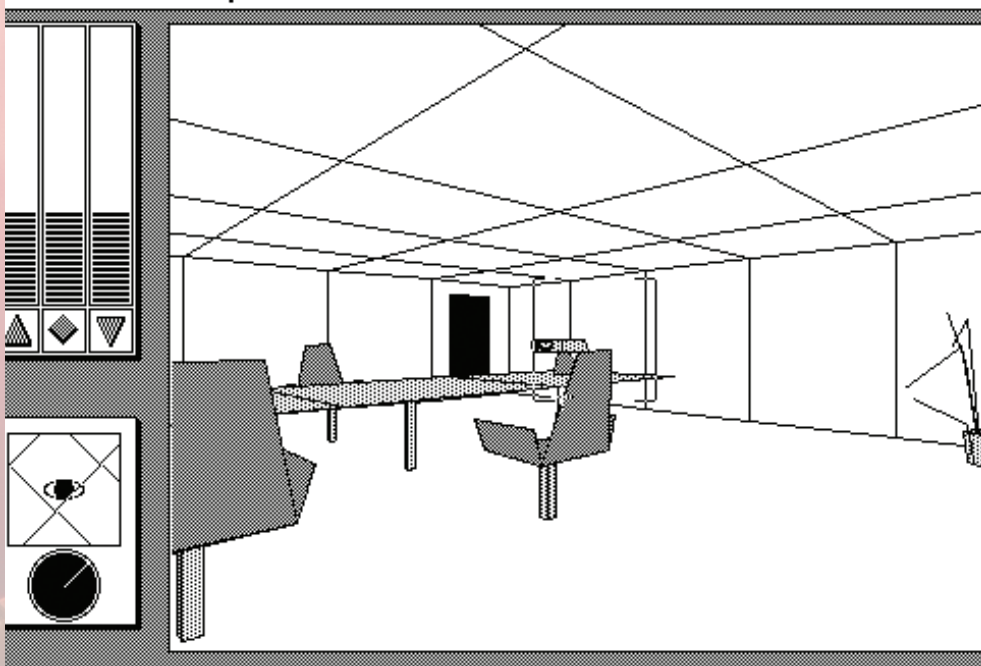


— tables, chairs, pot plants, computers, and so on.

This was possible thanks to a few programming tricks. First, Smith rendered his world in 256 pseudo-degrees — as 360 degrees is actually just an abstraction of the mathematical representation " $2\pi$  radian." This way he could avoid the computational cost of 3D rotations, as 256 is exactly eight bits — or one channel of address space, which was doubly important, as early Macintosh models lacked a floating-point co-processor. Next, he split the world at eye level. Everything above the player's eye level was a mirror image of everything below it. He also used a ray-casting algorithm to determine which objects would be visible at any moment.



The Colony



The Colony

It's a shame, though, that the game was so ridiculously sadistic that Sierra's adventure games seemed tame by comparison. You'd die constantly, for stupid reasons, like if you picked up a cigarette or pushed the wrong button out of two identical buttons, or if you failed to close the airlock or don your spacesuit (and power it up) before going outside. You could get stuck in an infinite hallway, looping back on itself, again and again for eternity, and the game would tell you nothing — no hints, no explanations... just death.

## SHAREWARE GEMS

Far more so than other computing platforms, the Mac relied on its own community to provide good games — perhaps because there weren't enough Mac gamers to satiate the cross-platform commercial publishers who came and went with the changing of the seasons, or maybe just because developing for Mac was too different to anything else (and Mac users were uncompromising about the feel of an interface needing to be Mac-like). A few homegrown companies did fine business with retail game releases, like Bungie and Silicon Beach Software, but most bypassed the challenges of retail by focusing instead on shareware.

As on the PC, shareware Mac games varied widely in quality, but the good ones were really good. Case

in point: *Maelstrom*, which was made in 1992 by Ambrosia Software founder Andrew Welch, simply because he wanted to prove someone on the internet wrong (about the technical capabilities of a particular Macintosh model).

On the surface, it was little more than an *Asteroids* clone — a simple, single-screen space shooter about blowing up (and dodging) asteroids, but dig deeper and there was much to celebrate. *Maelstrom* remains today one of the video game industry's best examples of remix culture, as it used *Asteroids* as a skeleton on which to layer in dozens of pop culture references — in sound clips recorded

from TV and movies and radio as well as in interchangeable graphics, with most "skins" made for the game infringing on one or more intellectual properties.

It was loud and brash and unrelentingly-bold, like many of the Ambrosia games that followed — including, if we stick to just shooters of various kinds, *Swoop* (a *Galaxian* remix), *Escape Velocity* (a brilliant *Elite*-style space trading/adventure), *Mars Rising* (a vertically-scrolling shmup), *Harry the Handsome Executive* (not a shooter, per se, though I mention it because it involved a fair amount of projectile combat using a staple gun), and *Avara* (an abstract multiplayer arena FPS with online play, integrated text chat, and hundreds if not thousands of player-made maps).

Outside of Ambrosia's fare, *Battle-Girl* (1997) was a brilliantly frantic top-down multidirectional arena shmup in a similar style to the later *Geometry Wars*. *Solarian II* (1988) was an excellent *Galaga*/*Galaxian*-style shooter, and also the first color shareware game on the Macintosh. *Crystal Raider* (1985) was a solid mouse-driven game of collecting crystals and shooting/avoiding enemies, then carefully guiding your momentum-controlled puck-shaped ship through a small gateway.

*Crystal Raider* is especially notable as it later got polished and colorized as 1987 hit com-



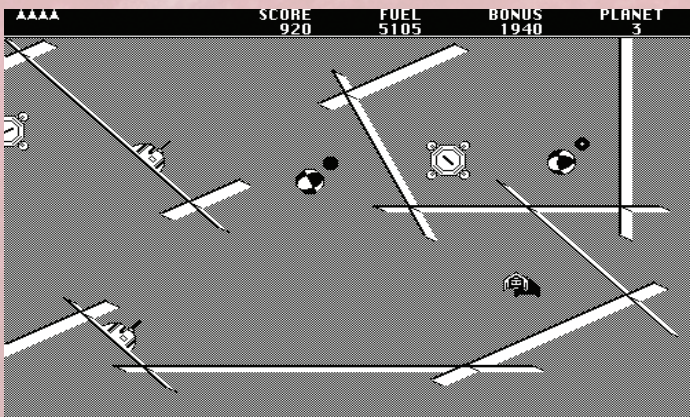
Crystal Quest

mercial game *Crystal Quest*, which regularly topped sales charts despite being widely pirated, and got ported to several other platforms.

One of the very best Classic Mac games was not sold commercially or as shareware, but as “beerware.” Developed in 1984, but not released until 1987 (aside from a disastrous Commodore 64 port called *Magnetron* that was published by Brøderbund), *Continuum* took inspiration from the likes of *Gravitar* and *Lunar Lander*. Part action-puzzler, part shooter, it asked you to navigate maze-like planet surfaces while keeping your ship from crashing into anything or getting shot down. Its brilliance lay in its attention to detail — in the way collision detection was so finely-tuned that it was pixel perfect, and in the precise mechanics and level design, again tuned just right to balance difficulty against fairness.

*Continuum*’s claim to fame, though, was not

Continuum



Images courtesy of [www.mobygames.com](http://www.mobygames.com)

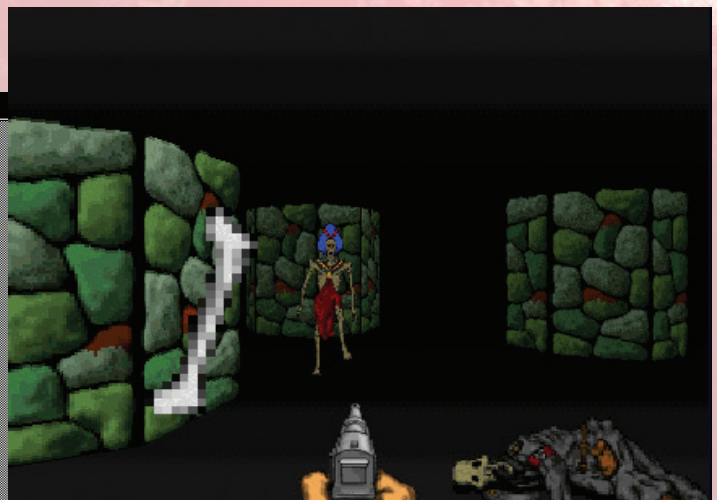
the game itself, but rather the fact that its creators asked that if you liked the game, you send them a case of fine beer (or if you were too young, they’d accept money, foot rubs, or promises of first-born children). They thought it was obvious this was a joke, but they ended up receiving about \$5000 worth of alcohol over the next several years.

SOMEWHERE, OUT THERE IN THE HEAVENS... THEY ARE WAITING...

Bungie may be known today for the *Halo* and *Destiny* console franchises, but they had a rich pedigree as a Mac company in the 90s. Their first game, an overhead-perspective 20-level tank shoot-em-up called *Operation Desert Storm*, was published in 1991 thanks to a home-made floppy disk duplicator and a huge batch of disks that company founder Alex Seropian had swiped during an internship at Microsoft. The game itself betrayed its homebrew origins, with graphics that I’d kindly describe as “programmer art” and a design that was better in theory than practice. It sold enough copies — a couple of thousand — that Seropian could keep chasing the dream of running his own games business.

He joined forces with fellow University of Chicago student Jason Jones a few months later for a multiplayer dungeon-crawler called *Minotaur*, after which they decided to go all-in as equal partners. Their next game, *Pathways Into Darkness* (1993), was the Mac’s answer to *Wolfenstein 3D* — a thoughtful, moody, tense, often-times-frightening, and kind of weird adventure beneath

Pathways Into Darkness



a Mayan pyramid. An ancient god was awakening from its slumber to destroy the Earth, and you — as lone survivor of your Special Forces unit — had to descend to the bottom and set off a nuclear bomb to stop it.

Along the way, you'd use a magical crystal to converse with fallen comrades and dead Nazis, long ago sent there in search of a powerful artifact. Their memories had faded to the point where they could only answer questions, prompted by typed keywords, related to the final hours of their lives. These answers not only



Pathways Into Darkness



added color to the story but also provided hints to help you survive the catacombs, which was no easy feat.

Terrifying monsters filled these dark corridors — as grotesque to look at as to hear, their shrieks piercing through the darkness to scare you out of your seat. You had to spend most of the game conserving the scant pistol ammo scattered around, for fear that you might be left with only your survival knife to fight against the tougher enemies.

After *Pathways*, Bungie again looked to id Soft-

ware for technical inspiration. *Doom* had impressed lead programmer Jason Jones, but he thought he could do better. The resulting game, *Marathon*, offered a compelling blend of *Doom*-like pace and gore with the sci-fi intellectualism of a William Gibson novel. Its dense story of hostile aliens and AI gone rampant was told mostly through messages, logs, plans, and other content found on terminals — a plot so complex that fans are still picking it apart over 25 years later.

Story aside, there was a lot to like in *Marathon*. Its dark, claustrophobic corridors oozed tension, for around every corner there could be hiding a terrifying S'pht Compiler, while entering an expansive room gave an urge to return to the darkness lest you be overwhelmed by enemies rushing in from different doors around you. A moody, atmospheric ambient soundtrack added to the immersion.

There were innovations in the code, too, as it beat id Software to the punch in incorporating native mouse support, multiplayer voice chat, and elements of verticality in the level design — with stairs, lifts, and the ability to look up and down.

Mac gamers went wild for it. Better than *Doom*, they'd say; just as exciting, but way more intriguing. It's no surprise that, once they'd caught up with demand, Bungie broke its "no sequels" rule and made... well, a sequel. That game, *Marathon 2: Durandal* (1995), dug deeper into the rampancy themes, focused on the insane AI Durandal and the reasons for its anger towards its creators, and it also had a fascinating change-up in the story: the S'pht, enemies from the first game, were actually slaves to a greater alien power, the P'fhor — and they suffered terribly under their captors. A third game followed in 1996, rounding out the story and letting Bungie's in-house development tools out into the world.

Aside from ports of the best PC first-person shooters of the 90s (games like *Quake*, *Unreal Tournament*, *Hexen*, *Duke Nukem 3D*, *Descent*, and so on), the genre didn't have a whole lot going on Mac-side beyond these Bungie games and Ambrosia's cult-favorite *Avara*. There are a few other titles worth mentioning. Let's start with *Sensory Overload* (1994), a Mac-exclusive commercial game developed by Reality Bytes.

Visually, it looked like *Wolfenstein 3D*, but as with *Pathways Into Darkness*, the pacing was much more sedate — filled, as it was, with a very twisty, maze-y facility for you to get lost in. Where *Pathways* had been thick with tension, *Sensory Overload* tended more towards frustration — but in fairness it did at least start out strong.

*ZPC* (1996), meanwhile, was one of three non-Bungie commercial games built using Bungie's *Marathon 2* engine. Short for *Zero Population Count*, it sported a hyper-stylized look similar to the more recent Nintendo Wii hack-and-slash *Madworld* — but aside from the amazing, nihilistic black-red-and-yellow aesthetic and an excellent soundtrack, it felt kind of derivative, like a surreal version of the FPS games you'd played before.

*Prime Target* (also 1996) used the *Marathon 2* engine for something more conventional, with generic graphics paired with solid non-linear level design and some cool new features, like movable objects (chairs, plants, flagpoles), swinging doors, and blood splatter. The real highlight was perhaps the fact that its story had nothing to do with aliens, magic or rampant AI; rather, it was about killing a bunch of people in order to prove that you'd been framed for killing an American senator.

The other of the three *Marathon 2* engine games, *Damage Incorporated* (1997), saw Reality Bytes having another go at the genre. A year before Tom Clancy's *Rainbow Six* put tactical FPS games on the map, *Damage Inc* gave the idea an admirable shot — with a squad of up to four Marines, each with their own personality and strengths. It was a solid game, boosted by the novelty of a teamwork element, but it lacked polish and struggled to actually execute on its own ideas.

## NETPLAY

As noted earlier, Macs were home to networked gaming right from the beginning — mainly through variants of the old *Maze War* game. That would continue through the 1990s.

*SPLAT'ERS* (1991) offered a rare non-violent option with capture-the-flag paintball battles, while *Spec- tre* (1991) and its sequels turned the old *Battlezone* arcade game into a pulse-pounding arena shooter.


One of the best games of the era, it involved driving a tank around an abstract playfield — in your choice of first-person, third-person, or overhead perspective, and with either filled or vector-style polygons.

In single-player, you had to collect all the flags in a level while either avoiding or destroying ever-stronger enemy tanks, while in multiplayer you had three different game modes: flag rally (which was the single-player mode with human opponents), base raid (which was a team battle), and arena (which was what we would now consider a standard deathmatch — a free-for-all battle to get more kills than anyone else).

If you were a fan of more cerebral shooters, but still wanted some multiplayer action, *Bolo* had you covered. It was a top-down, multiplayer-only tactical tank shooter published as shareware and continuously updated from its beta release in 1992 until its developer Stuart Cheshire joined Apple in 1998. Tens of thousands of *Bolo* matches were played on public networks each month (and many more on private networks) during this period, each with up to 16 players. Even today many players regularly get together to play the game.

Its appeal lies in the balance between its accessibility of play — anyone can quickly become competent — and its tactical depth, which extended beyond ordinary tank maneuvers to include a little green man who can exit the tank to build roads, walls, and traps.

Pangea Software put out numerous family-friendly shoot-'em-ups. Highlights among these include overhead shooter *Mighty Mike aka Power Pete* (1995), which put you in control of an action figure in a toy store who has to save the cute fuzzy bunnies and their friends from some evil toys. Designed specifically for the original iMac, 3D action game *Nanosaur* (1998) starred a time-travelling dinosaur with a jetpack and fusion blaster trying to grab dinosaur eggs from a variety of species before an asteroid hits the Earth.

So there you have it: a whirlwind tour through the most notable shooting-centric games of the Classic Mac era, from a time when the Mac was not just an alternative to Windows, but also a distinct computing (and gaming!) platform with its own unique quirks and a strong individualistic streak. 

# METAL STORM

BY MICHAEL MERTES

**T**he open elevator ride on the Pluto defense outpost has easily been the worst you've ever taken. Laser shots from almost every direction have almost hit you, and robotic cargo movers have malfunctioned and are blocking your attempts to get down the elevator shaft. Up to this point, you've been able to jump over them; but now you've seemingly witnessed what will be your final moments: more laser shots have cut your movement down from a horizontal space, and two cargo bots have stacked on top of each other, preventing you from being able to leap over them. You realize you are about to be crushed and close your eyes, hoping it will be quick and painless.

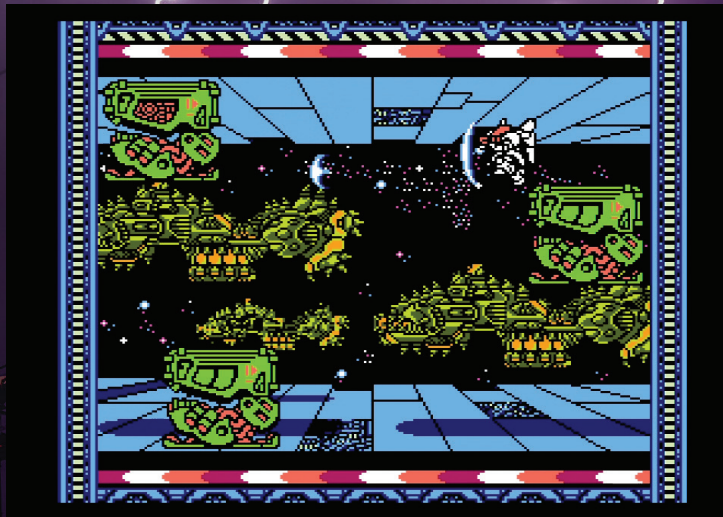
As your vision darkens, you think back to accepting this mission briefing and how you underestimated the difficulty of this mission. No one thought that even though the massive robot-controlled laser system had malfunctioned and was single handedly destroying entire planets in the Solar System, that the rest of the base's robotics would also turn against its makers. Was it a virus or did the artificial intelligence become too smart and saw humans as a threat? The

fact that the laser system was rotating itself to fire at Earth for its next shot seemed to indicate the latter. The people of Earth needed someone to shut the entire base down, and that's when you foolishly volunteered for what has turned into a suicide mission.

The M-308 Gunner suit you were given to pilot has stood up to all the dangers of this mission. Armed with a versatile weapon and the ability to invert the suit's gravity, not even a tall stack of cargo bots should be able to get in your way. Opening your eyes, you manage to punch the button to invert the suit's gravity, just a split second before the cargo bots would have pulverized you. You now stand inverted on the top of the elevator's ceiling and return fire on the sentient robots that were gunning for you. You made it, but you realize you still have three more levels to go before you can pay a visit to the planet-cracking laser cannon.

Welcome to *MetalStorm*, a challenging platform shooter, originally released on the Nintendo Entertainment System in 1991. Featuring seven different stages, *MetalStorm* turned things upside down for the player in a literal fashion by giving them the ability to invert the M-308 Gunner's gravity. Gravity inversion



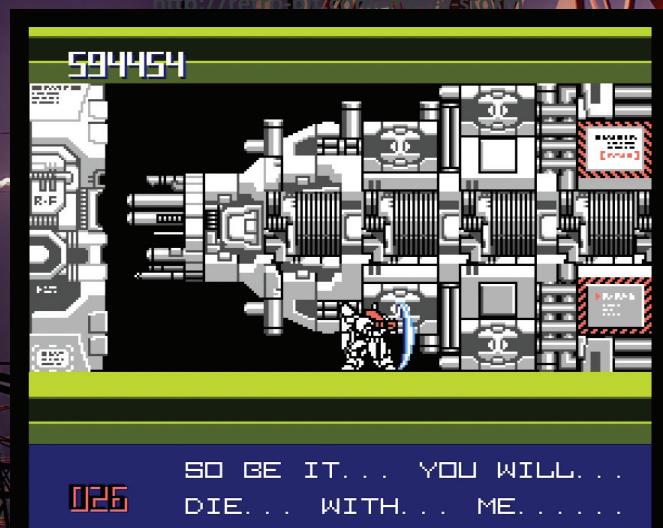


presented a new way to conquer a level's obstacles and made for some great "saved by the skin of your teeth" moments as the challenge factor increased. At the end of each stage, you will face a boss that will also put your gravity inverting skills to the test. If you can't master this feature, your hope for beating the game is minimal. Getting hit once in *MetalStorm* results in instant death unless you happen to pick up a power-up that will allow you to take one more hit. Trying to maintain a flawless run through a stage to take that extra hit point to the boss will take memorization of the stage and cat-like reflexes to guarantee success across *MetalStorm's* seven unique stages.

While *MetalStorm* is known to be one of the most challenging NES games in terms of in-game difficulty, it is also challenging to acquire a copy without breaking the bank. Complete copies of the NES and Famicom versions of this game can cost a few hundred dollars to purchase, and even just a loose cartridge of this game can run you around 75 dollars. As with many high dollar games, it is not uncommon to see unauthorized reproduction cartridges of this game being sold as well. Thankfully, Retro-Bit has come to the rescue and not only acquired the license to reproduce the game for the NES but has taken the extra steps to translate the Japanese release of the game to English. The Japanese version contained an intro sequence and alternate ending script as opposed to the original North American release. On top of that, Retro-Bit has created a slick, limited collector's edition of *MetalStorm* contain-

ing the game along with a poster, art prints, an enamel pin, and a very detailed figure of the M-308 Gunner.

I recently acquired this collector's package, and I can validate that it is high quality from start to finish. The game cartridge instantly booted up on my NES, and I encountered no bugs throughout my entire playthrough of the game. For those of you who want to skip the collector's edition and pick up just the game, a standard version is available as well for \$44.99. If you've never played *MetalStorm*, you are missing out on one of the most unique shooters ever produced. The game has excellent playability, even after so many years.



# INSERT COIN: The advance screening at the Museum of Play in Rochester, NY

by Warren Davis



It was a brisk 30 degrees in Rochester, NY on Friday November 8, 2019. Coming from Los Angeles, the cold was a shock to my system, but well worth it. I made the journey east to attend a screening of Josh Tsui's new documentary about Williams/Bally/Midway... *Insert Coin*. The screening was hosted by the Strong Museum, a highly interactive museum with 100,000 square feet of exhibitions. Whereas most museums are dedicated to things like science, natural history, or world history, the Strong Museum is dedicated to "Play."





**T**he Strong was founded in 1968 by Margaret Woodbury Strong, primarily to showcase her collection of dolls and toys. After her death in 1969, the museum became supported by her estate, and gradually grew in both size and scope. But it wasn't until the mid-2000's that the museum refined its mission to focus on the exploration of the concept of "Play" and to collect, preserve and interpret the history of "Play" in whatever forms it may take.

I arrived in the afternoon and met up with Jeremy Saucier, the museum's Assistant VP for Interpretation of Electronic Games. Also present were Josh Tsui, the director of Insert Coin (and like me, a former Midway employee), and Ken Fedesna, former VP of Engineering for Williams/Bally/Midway and boss to both myself and Josh when we were there making games. Jeremy was instrumental in arranging the screening and along with some colleagues, he gave us and our guests a tour of the facility.

We started in the places that the public never gets to see. Large cavernous basement rooms filled with rows and rows of toys and games of all kinds from decades long ago to the present. Of course, there were video games. Dozens of arcade cabinets standing in rows representing a relatively new pas-

sion for the museum. As Jeremy tells it, around 2006 a number of Strong employees took a serious look at how they might better achieve their mission. One area they felt was lacking was electronic games. This eventually led to the creation of the International Center for the History of Electronic Games in 2009.

Once they started down that path, their collection grew quickly to encompass not only arcade hardware and consumer hardware and software, but game-related magazine collections and the personal and business papers of such luminaries as Ralph Baer, Don Daglow, Jerry Lawson and more. These papers can be made available to researchers with an appointment. One of the reasons Ken Fedesna came to the Strong that weekend was to deliver multiple boxes filled with papers and videos from his years at Williams to add to their collection.

Jeremy had been introduced to Ken while on a field trip to Chicago. In 2014, after realizing that the museum's collection was short on pinball history, Jeremy was sent to meet with that industry's creators and historians, many of whom were still in the Chicago area. Through those meetings, Ken Fedesna's name came up more than once as a key figure who'd been at Williams during some innovative periods in pinball and video development.

Ken explains, "I first heard about the Strong Mu-



Jeremy Saucier admires a few of the museum's oldest video arcade games.

seum and its collections from Larry Demar. Larry and Duncan Brown donated items relating to pinball, including much of [legendary pinball designer] Steve Kordek's memorabilia." Larry also arranged for Ken to meet Jeremy in Chicago at one of the Pinball Expos. That meeting convinced Ken to donate the large amount of his own material which he brought with him to Rochester on the day of the screening. It consisted of, he describes, "much of my Midway and Team Play, Inc. operation and design notes, a couple of coin operated arcade games (a Touchmaster and a PlayPorTT), my collection of pinball and video game advertising brochures, my collection of different trade show brochures going back to 1977, all the original video and pinball advertising and instructional one-inch beta tapes (over 200) we put together at WMS, several coin-op game and consumer game magazines, and all kinds of design documents relating to the Williams, Bally, Midway, and Atari products from 1977 to 2005 when I left Midway to form White Rabbit Game Studios and Team Play, Inc." Ken plans to donate more in the future.

Independently, Jeremy had become aware of the making of *Insert Coin* from its Kickstarter campaign and various online postings. When earlier this year, the Strong held an event in Chicago, Ken facilitated a meeting between Jeremy and Josh. From that point on, the idea of the Strong doing a preview screening of the film whenever it might be ready became embedded in Jeremy's mind.

*Insert Coin* tells the story of video game development at Williams/Bally/Midway from the late 1980's

through the mid 1990's, which resulted in games such as *NARC*, *Mortal Kombat*, *Terminator 2*, *NBA Jam*, *Revolution X* and more. From the Strong's description of the event... "The 100-minute film follows the untold story of a small team of geeks working in the back of a Chicago pinball factory that accidentally created the biggest video games of all time." Many key players are interviewed in the film including Eugene Jarvis, George Petro, Jack Haegar, Ed Boon, John Tobias, Mark Turmell, Ken Fedesna, Neil Nicastro, and myself. (For the record, I worked for Williams from 1986 through 1988, and again from 1991 to 1995. I worked on *Joust 2*, then created the video digitization system that allowed live actors to be incorporated into our games, and I was on the design/programming teams for *T2* and *Revolution X*.)

Ken Fedesna initially declined to be interviewed for the film, offering instead to allow Josh access to his personal collection of notes and papers from that era. Eventually, after hearing from some of the other interviewees, he changed his mind. That was a lucky break for Josh, as Ken's perspectives from his position in upper management provide a nice counterpoint to the antics going on in the trenches.

Josh Tsui studied film in college, but "got into video game development by accident", he says. He experienced first-hand the craziness of working at Williams/Bally/Midway in the mid-90's. Fast forward twenty years later and he decided he wanted to return to his filmmaking roots. Encouraged by the popularity of other videogame related documentaries, he hit upon an idea.

"I realized my time at Midway in the 90's would be a story that I'd be able to have a unique perspective on," he says. "For a first-time filmmaker, I wanted to hit a subject that was low hanging fruit, and this was perfect." Josh spent two and a half years working on the film, which has only recently been picture locked and gotten all of its legal clearances.

"I took a unique approach to this, much like how we made games at Midway back then. I gave myself no real deadline as I knew documentaries evolve during production and I didn't want to give



After the screening, there was a Q&A for the audience. From left to right, Ken Fedesna, Josh Tsui (director of the film), Jeremy Saucier (from the museum), and myself.

myself any constraints. The good of this was that the product grew naturally. I found topics that allowed me to go into different directions. From there I only worked on it when I felt inspired to.”

The film covers a period in videogame history that sits between two historic downturns. There was an arcade industry crash around 1984 which was mostly caused by the extreme growth of new arcades around the world and the immediate need for product to fill them. This resulted in a lot of games of sub-par quality being released. Around this same time, there was also the failure of laserdisc-based arcade games, which many in the industry thought would represent its future. When the disc players inside those games proved to be unreliable in an arcade environment, the debacle that ensued resulted in the loss of millions for many companies who bet big on the new technology.


Williams let many of its game developers go, leaving the video department decimated and returning its focus to pinball, but the industry began to turn around within a couple of years. Coincidentally, Eugene Jarvis, the celebrated co-creator of *Defender*, *Stargate* and *Robotron* – the games that put Williams on the map – returned to Williams around that same time. This is essentially where the film begins. *NARC* was the first game that came out of out that renewed relationship, and appropriately is the first game covered. The years that followed brought an expansion of the video department, populated with an eclectic assortment of characters, and a string of hit games, fueled by an unbridled passion to do something “cool.”

In 1988, Williams bought the arcade game divi-

sion of Bally/Midway to become Williams/Bally/Midway. This merger is touched upon in the film through the recollections of, among others, Brian Colin, who was absorbed into Williams from the merger. Also recounted are the stories behind many of the games that were released during this period. Having shot hours and hours of interviews with many former Midway employees, the number of stories Josh found himself with was staggering. Editing was a difficult task, but eventually a thru-line for the film emerged. Needless to say, he was forced to leave a lot of footage on the cutting room floor. The good news is you can expect a lot of extras on the eventual DVD.

What makes the film truly special, other than the first-hand accounts from those who were on the front lines, is the liberal use of behind-the-scenes footage. Williams had an in-house promotional video department which shot behind-the-scenes video of pretty much everything that went on. Much of this material has not been widely seen before or is being seen for the first time in decades.

Personally, I felt the film presented a nice balance of stories and painted an accurate and entertaining picture of what went on during that period. Ken Fedesna was “extremely impressed by what Josh has created.”

A few days after the Rochester screening, Josh held a family and friends screening in Chicago. The film will have its public premiere this March at the South By Southwest film festival. 

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[museumofplay.org](http://museumofplay.org)  
[facebook.com/insertcoindocumentary](https://facebook.com/insertcoindocumentary)

# STAMP OUT THE TERRORISTS!

by Michael Thomasson

Move over James Bond, there is a new secret agent to save the day!

**B**e warned that the CIA agent in question, Roy Heart, throws stealth and espionage out the door. He is capable of sliding past security cameras to avoid detection, but primarily he is just a bad ass that waltzes through the front door of terrorist camps and arms factories alone with reckless abandon. The Zolge King terrorist group murdered thousands of innocent citizens when it bombed the Southdown's underground subway and now it must be stopped! The radical faction is based in a 16-story skyscraper owned by Tadoya, a car manufacturing company that is actually a front for the terrorist group that designs bombs and other weapons of mass destruction.

The super spy must traverse each floor, collecting detonator and elevator keys along the way, to locate the safe room where the bombs and blueprints are

located. During his quest, Roy battles ski-masked terrorists, gunmen, and a clan of ninja terrorists armed to the teeth with fists of fury, karate kicks, lead pipes, stun guns, and the occasional bomb. Defeating enemies earns experience points which allow the super spy to power up, like many role-playing games (RPG). The protagonist prefers to fight hand-to-hand, throwing hooks and uppercuts. He can kick and knee-smash his opponents or slash them with a knife that weakens with every use. After rescuing hostages or aiding enslaved scientists, they return the favor by healing Roy's wounds, repairing knives, or supplying additional military arms such as brass knuckles.

This first-person beat-em-up becomes a first-person shooter (FPS) when the hero acquires either the 12-bullet beretta pistol or the Uzi machine gun. Either can be used to open fire on opponents or set off explosions by shooting flammable objects within the setting. Furthermore, to conserve ammunition, the handgun can be used to pistol-whip assailants!





Sometimes, a good defense is just as valuable as an offensive assault. As such, the super spy can also attempt to evade his opponents. He can cross both arms to block, as well as duck to avoid oncoming attacks; although this secondary defensive move is re-moved during boss battles. Overall, the game involves a careful balance of timed attacks and blocking opponents while side-stepping danger.

Technically, *The Super Spy* was truly ahead of its time. Before id Software released *Wolfenstein 3D*, the “grandfather of 3D shooters,” Roy Heart was traversing pseudo-3D corridors on Neo Geo hardware. SNK’s equipment was never meant to create such a game. Using clever programming tricks and a lot of large sprite scaling, *The Super Spy* pulls off a coup better than any secret agent ever could!

Can you make it safely to the penthouse floor and take down the kingpin?

## MASCOT TEASER

A few rooms in the *The Super Spy* include framed ‘G-Mantle’ artwork or a poster hanging on the wall. His first game appearance was in *Blue’s Journey* during the summer of ’91, but he is best known as a striker character in *The King of Fighters 2000*. This character later became SNK’s unofficial mascot, appearing in nineteen titles overall, until being replaced by Terry Bogard.



## WHAT'S IN A YEAR?

**T**he title screen of the game lists 1990, but the game wasn't actually released until the following year in 1991.



## FORTUNE-TELLING TERRORISM

**W**atching the ending credits roll in the modern age is quite surreal. While the New York 9/11 attack occurred in the year 2001, the ending screen states, "Terrorist power has increased in our high-tech era. Each country is threatened by this power. There are no boundaries for terrorists. The death toll rises each day." Almost as if the game developers predicted the future, the text is presented over an image of the downtown New York skyline including the famous Twin Towers.





# Breakout: Pilgrim in the Microworld

Book Review by Michael Mertes

**A**s a video game player, you can probably name a few different game titles that intrigued you so much that you could potentially be clinically diagnosed as “addicted” to it.

Thoughts of the game and how to play it race through your mind, even when you’re away from it, and you can’t wait to get back to the game to take another crack at it. David Sudnow, the author of the latest title in the Boss Fight Books series “*Breakout: Pilgrim in the Microworld*”, experienced this syndrome, with the Atari video game: *Breakout*. Initially released in 1983 under the name “*Pilgrim in the Microworld*”, the book has been re-issued and re-edited under the Boss Fight Books label.

David Sudnow’s fascination with video games started with *Missile Command*, as he watched his teenage son save cities from ballistic missile attacks in the game at the local arcade. Not initially impressed with the concept of video games, it wasn’t until he laid his hands on the Atari 2600 port of the game that he realized the hidden depth these electronic games had to them. David ends up buying his own Atari 2600 console, and due to the store not having any copies of *Missile Command*, he picked up *Breakout* in its place. From there, the deep dive into *Breakout* and how the game works, begins.

If you are looking for a book that details the development and background of *Breakout*, you may find yourself disappointed with this book. David Sudnow’s account of what *Breakout* details is, by all means, a personal detail of how he learned to conquer the game. David does take a trip to Atari itself in an attempt to understand how the game’s mechanics were programmed, but that is as historic as it gets. Still, some of the eureka moments that David Sudnow discovers to bend the game to his will are entertaining. While I can’t say that reading this book made me a better *Breakout* player, I can say that I appreciate the concept of the book as a whole. *Breakout: Pilgrim in Microworld* reinforces the fact that people from all walks of life can get hooked by the fun that is video games. 🎮

[www.bossfightbooks.com](http://www.bossfightbooks.com)

# Box Art: A Gaming Documentary

Movie Review by Michael Mertes

**L**aunched after a successful Kickstarter Campaign, *Box Art: A Gaming Documentary* is an eight-episode series that focuses on the artists behind some of the most famous video game box art from such games as *Castlevania 3*, *Mega Man 2*, *Doom 2* and others. This documentary series was produced by Rob McCallum and Pyre Productions, who has created other exciting documentaries such as *Nintendo Quest* and *Power of Grayskull*.

I found each episode to be very educational, but the third episode is my favorite out of the eight, as it introduces us to legendary Konami artist Tom Dubois. Tom was responsible for producing the cover artwork for many famous Konami titles for the *Castlevania* series and other games such as *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles IV, Blades of Steel*, and *Contra 3: The Alien Wars*. Tom shares some fantastic stories about how he got involved with Konami, got sued by Sports Illustrated, and often saw much of his artwork get cropped out due to the way Konami letterboxed the cover art for their NES releases. Other artists such as Marc Erickson (*Mega Man 2*) and Gerald Brom (*Doom 2*) are also featured and share their stories about creating some of the most iconic video game cover art ever seen.

With physical games rapidly becoming a thing of the past due to many gamers opting for digital downloads, it’s great to see the topic of box art discussed and explored in this documentary. I did much of my early 8-bit gaming on a black and white TV, and often the box art I saw at the rental store was what provided me the baseline for what the color could be in the game. If you ever felt a rush of excitement when seeing the cover art to a classic retro video game for the first time, you’ll feel the same rush watching the story behind the artists who created it. 🎮



[vimeo.com/ondemand/vgbaspecialedition](https://vimeo.com/ondemand/vgbaspecialedition)



# Noah Falstein: More Than Words

by Patrick Hickey

**A**ll developers want their games to be remembered, but they don't get to choose how. With super solid gameplay that had everything to do with a fantastic custom joystick, Williams' *Sinistar* set the bar high for every shooter that followed. For that reason alone, it's a special title, but the game offered so much more. With killer difficulty, it ate a ton of gamers' quarters during its heyday. Thanks to one of the most iconic bosses in arcade history, brought alive by stereo sound (a first in gaming history), *Sinistar* is more than a success, it's a huge part of pop culture lore.

The words of the *Sinistar* were sampled in music and more than a half dozen other games; simple phrases such as, "Run coward," "I hunger," and "I am Sinistar," as well as a wonderfully gnarly roar were undeniably unique for their time. It elevated the already cool game to undeniable levels of awesomeness. Helped even further by an amazing look, *Sinistar* not only inspired terror because of its voice, but for its visuals as well. At the same time, judging the game by

the sound and aesthetics alone wouldn't be fair, either.

From a gameplay perspective, *Sinistar* was just as deep. Collecting crystals (which gave you the power needed to defeat the Sinistar), and by destroying objects, the player was stuck in a constant frenetic battle that concluded with a scary boss fight. Add all these elements together and you had a combination with which most other shooter games just couldn't compete. Ultimately, the crash of the video game industry and with no console ports until the Super Nintendo era, it's ultimately a game that didn't get the respect that it deserved until far after its release.

Created by a team of developers that would ultimately have their hand in games such as *The Secret of Monkey Island*, *Joust*, *Uncharted* and *inFAMOUS*, and companies such as LucasArts, Midway, and Sony, *Sinistar* represents not only a one-of-a-kind arcade experience, but for the majority of the team, their entry point into the industry as well.

"I got into the game industry in 1980, before I really knew it existed," Falstein said. "In fact, at that point,



it was more a scattered set of a few dozen companies and many people in their homes contributing without a coordinated center. I was lucky enough to go to Hampshire College, a school that let me create a senior project programming (in APL); a game about mining the asteroid belt as a way to show off my computer and astronomy skills. That helped me get into Milton Bradley's Advanced Research group in February 1980 and from there I moved to Williams in Chicago (my hometown) in mid-1982. My experience at Milton Bradley and the asteroid mining theme of my school project made me an obvious choice to help take over the *Sinistar* project (at that time called *Juggernaut*)."

A great situation to find himself in, Falstein quickly got acclimated and got to work. "John Newcomer was the designer - basically the creative director - at Williams. He and Sam Dicker had taken an idea part-way, called *Juggernaut*, but it had stalled, and they handed it off to me to lead (Sam stayed on as chief programmer on the project). The *Sinistar* team was pretty large, about 10 people who contributed in significant ways. My main job was running the project, what we'd call a producer or project leader now," Falstein said. "Also, doing design and programming tasks, but it was a real team effort."

With plenty of freedom to take the project wherever he wanted and a talented team supporting him, Falstein was focused on delivering something unique. Simply put, *Sinistar* was never supposed to be *Galaga* or *Galaxian*. "I'm a heavy believer in evolutionary reasons for what people find entertaining," Falstein said. "Life and death issues, be they shooters, or movies/books about combat, hospitals, cops, etc., are fascinating to us because we're evolved to be interested in learning safely about dangerous situations, real or imagined. *Sinistar*, at the time, was unusual in having the point of the game being to defeat a boss monster (before that was a common term) who had a real personality."

That personality was brought to

life by American radio personality and voice actor John Doremus (1931-1995). Responsible for *Sinistar*'s trademark phrases, Doremus is essentially gaming's first voiceover star, but it was the *Sinistar* team that ended up truly making the boss stand out. "I never actually met John Doremus. The recording session was handled by one of our sound experts, Python Angelo," Falstein said. "Python did a lot of the work of getting Doremus to do the effects - there was a very funny tape of trying to get him to do the *Sinistar* roar. Despite a fantastic job on everything else, he was incapable of doing anything that sounded menacing. Python ended up recording an animal roar at the zoo and processing it to make it sound more exotic."

*Sinistar*'s stereo sound feature, although iconic, was not to be its only contribution to video game history. Powered by a 49-way joystick (most joysticks at the time controlled in four, or eight-different directions), *Sinistar* controlled differently and more precisely than any other arcade shooter of the era. "That was the brainchild of my boss, Ken Lantz. We wanted a proportional joystick so that instead of the typical up/



Falstein's credits include time at Google and LucasArts after his work on *Sinistar*.



Sit down, strap in, start screaming!

and slid it left to right along the board, reading the lines aloud as he did so. That gave us a very rough graph of how your chin moves to say those words, and to our surprise, crude as it was, it worked pretty well the first time.”

But before *Sinistar* could talk, he had to exist, and he had to look just as good as the game sounded and played, which was no easy task. Falstein credits the diversity of the art team for not only giving the game its signature look, but for changing his life in another unexpected way. “Jack Haeger, the lead artist, was really into Japanese culture and art styles. He often came to work wearing a robe resembling a kimono and the *Sinistar* face was modeled after samurai masks,” Falstein said. “Also, RJ Mical, whom I hired as the junior member of the programming team (his first job in the games industry) went on to great heights, and also introduced me to the woman who became my wife, and was my boss at Google decades later.”

down/left/right choices, you could control the spaceship with more finesse, different acceleration rates the farther you moved the stick and more angles instead of the eight typical ones,” Falstein said. “But to that date, the only games that had done that used potentiometers (like *Tail Gunner*) and they broke very easily. Ken figured out how to make a stick that was both very durable and had not one choice in each compass direction, but three. Instead of the 3x3 matrix of a traditional joystick (eight possible angles plus neutral), this had 7x7 (three levels of motion each in up/down/left/right), which meant 49 possible choices and let us do much smoother acceleration and aiming.”

With stereo sound and top-notch control, *Sinistar* had serious pieces in play to be something special. However, without the excellent execution of the look of the game’s main character, the game might not be as revered as it is today. Getting that final result was far from an easy process, however. “We had a lot of surprises, a lot of long days and nights of work to get it done. One of my favorite incidents is how we figured out the animation for *Sinistar* when he talks,” Falstein said. “We had only three-jaw positions but wanted to synchronize them as best we could. Sam Dicker hit on a brilliant cheap fix - we wrote the phrases on a whiteboard, Sam held a marker to his chin

Ironically, just like relationships, the release of a game has a lot to do with timing. Although it had all the right pieces in place, the industry wasn’t in a place to support such a monumental title. “We launched it just as the famous arcade game slump of (19)83 began, and we’d hoped it would do as well as *Joust* (about 50,000 units) at least,” Falstein said. “Pre-orders were great, but almost overnight, the bottom just dropped out of the market. There was literally a 90 percent drop in arcade revenues in about a year, so I think the total sales were closer to just 5,000 units, including some of the more profitable cockpit models.”

The release of the game wasn’t without at least some drama, however. “We tuned the game originally to be easier and were forced to make it harder because it wasn’t earning well enough, people could play for too long,” Falstein said. “I wish we had simply made earlier levels have fewer parts in the *Sinistar*, letting him be built/destroyed quicker without otherwise changing the game much. That would have been a better solution.”

Despite that, Falstein sees the impact of the game as one that far outweighs those gameplay shortcom-

ings. Simply put, the game changed his life in a myriad of ways. "It was a great stepping stone for me, certainly helped me get hired at Lucasfilm where I made many of the games I'm best known for. In retrospect, the most important lesson was the importance of working with a talented team who wanted to do a great job and worked well together. I had that a few other times in my life and the projects that came from those collaborations were the best," Falstein said. "I was also excited in the late '90s when the first emulator version came out from Digital Eclipse. Until that point, I thought it was doomed to dwindle into nothingness since the machines you could play it on were rapidly becoming impossible to find, but emulators have kept the original code running and it showed me that I need to think about the games I make as artifacts that can last forever, not just a few years of a given computer hardware incarnation. That was reassuring."

With the game no longer a distant memory and available to millions, thanks to re-releases in various Williams Arcade compilations on the Super Nintendo, PlayStation, Xbox 360 and Playstation 3, Falstein understands why people still appreciate it. "*Sinistar* as a character: his voice, his 3D look, his delayed entrance and his size relative to the player (something John Newcomer insisted on from the start, hard to do in those days), all made him into a scary, menacing enemy," Falstein said. "The voice was probably the key thing. It was not the first video game with voice, but extraordinary as a character depicted with a very minimum of visuals and sound compared to what we work with today."

Because of that success and the impact it has had on his career and life, Falstein will always have a soft spot in his heart for the evil celestial that gobbled up ships and quarters. "I love the way it became a cult classic. When I saw it in a Sheena Easton music video (*Almost Over You*) years later, it was great fun, and the *Philosophical Revelations of Sinistar* is one of my favorite fan creations. I'm happy with the fact that I still have people coming to me who are not only fans, but in some cases, digital historians. When I realized some



The design of the game's villain was inspired partially by Japanese culture.

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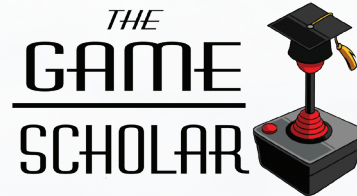
of the most fervent fans today weren't even born when the game was made, it made me very happy," Falstein said. "I was Chief Game Designer at Google for four years, and many people complimented me for my work at LucasArts, but it was more fun when some found out I was the project leader on *Sinistar*, which had a sort of mythic significance to the childhoods of some of the Google team. If it continues to be remembered as one of the more original, landmark early arcade games, I'll be quite satisfied." 🎮



Screen shot courtesy of Moby Games

# War Games

By Leonard Herman  
The Father of Video Game History



**A**strit Begolli, commonly known as Polaki, is just an average video game collector like the rest of us. His niche is rare consoles and he boasts a collection of over 181 systems including some of the rarest and most expensive consoles, such as a Japanese Atari 2800, a Taiwanese Funtech Super A'can and the Tomy Pyutta Jr. Like many collectors, the 44-year old is a family man with a wife and two kids, but this is where Astrit's similarities with most collectors around the world ends.

While Astrit's impressive collection is certainly worth an article in itself, it's the collection of his youth and the way he played them that makes him stand out from most other gamer-collectors.

Astrit resides in Kosovo, a small European country in the Balkans, approximately 750 kilo-

Astrit holding his Tomy Pyutta Jr



meters north of Athens. He claims to have the largest video game collection in the Balkans.

Astrit's first contact with videogames occurred in 1982 when he was six years old. He remembers that the city where he lived had four arcades. Because he was so young and didn't have any money to buy tokens, he merely stood outside the front door and watched other people play all the games. His parents began giving him lunch money two years later, but he used that money instead at the arcades. He remembers playing the classic games including Pacman, Galaga and Phoenix. By 1990 he received his first serious machine, the Commodore 64. Astrit loved the fact that playing video games gave him the phenomenal feeling of escaping from the real world and losing all sense of time.

War began in Yugoslavia in 1991 and spread throughout the Balkans: Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia. Kosovo became involved in February 1999, when civil war broke out between the forces of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which controlled the country, and the Kosovo Albanians, which had air support from NATO and ground support from the Kosovo Albanian guerillas known as the Kosovo Liberation Army.

Throughout this dramatic situation, the arcades still operated. However, it became more difficult to purchase games or consoles, which apparently were only available in the country's former capital, Belgrade.

Games weren't the only things that were in short supply - so was fuel and electricity. The situation outside became dire as paramilitary units patrolled the streets in armored vehicles. A friend of Astrit's left his house after 6pm to get his wife and was picked up by one of these paramilitary units. He was never seen again. Every day they heard shooting outside while he and his family sat together silently in the

Astrit holding his rare Tomy Pyutta Jr

dark in one room, with the constant fear that someone might break down their door and kill them on the spot.

Astrit and his brother found solace in their video games. On March 24, 1999, the day that NATO began bombing Kosovo, Astrit received a copy of Silent Hill for the PlayStation. He and his brother were happy that they had something to do and immediately sat down to play the game. The electricity went out after two hours. Fortunately they had a small generator that they used so they could continue playing the game, which gave them the will to live and allowed them



to forget about the hell outside. However their father suddenly burst into the room and told them to shut off the generator. The glow from the TV amid the darkness everywhere else provided a target for lurking snipers.

Astrit and his brother solved this problem by putting thick curtains on the windows and turning down the TV's volume. Silent Hill hypnotized them and, for the moment, allowed them to forget about what was happening around them. They lived inside their virtual world and didn't even hear NATO's bombs falling around them. The brothers completed the game in three nights.

On March 27, the military began retaliating against civilians over NATO's bombings. As if taken from a scene in The Sound of Music, the family knew they had to get out of Kosovo. They had ten minutes to pack. Astrit didn't take any clothes, but he managed to grab his PlayStation and around fifteen games. Left behind and lost were a few thousand Commodore 64 games and a large collection of software for the Sega Mega Drive and PlayStation.

The family drove to Montenegro where they remained safe for the remainder of the war. Astrit credits Silent Hill with helping him mentally survive the agony and most difficult time of his life.

In the years since the war ended, Astrit has strived to rebuild the collection that he had lost. In that he has succeeded in ways that few of us can even imagine.

Besides amassing the aforementioned systems, he has also accumulated nearly 2,000 games. Not bad considering that he lives in a country where it is very difficult to be a collector. There are few people in Kosovo selling systems on Ebay, and even if there were more, PayPal is not available. Furthermore, there are customs fees on everything that enters the country. So the next time you're upset about how difficult it is to collect rare items, think of Astrit who figured out how to beat the odds. 🇰🇲



Jim Levy co-founded Activision with four former Atari programmers.

## A TALK WITH JIM LEVY

BY BRETT WEISS

In 1979, programmers David Crane, Larry Kaplan, Alan Miller, and Bob Whitehead left Atari to begin creating games independently of the company. They were dismayed with their relatively low salaries, especially given the millions their games were bringing in. With music industry executive Jim Levy, they formed Activision, the first third-party company to create console video games. I recently spoke with Jim over the phone to discuss his days with Activision.

**BRETT WEISS:** How did you get involved with Activision?

**JIM LEVY:** I started it. That's the short answer. Activision was founded by five people. The four game designers who came out of Atari and me. I was the founding chairman and CEO. That's how I got involved. I created it.

# RIVER RAID™

VIDEO GAME CARTRIDGE

# STAMPEDE™

VIDEO GAME CARTRIDGE

**WEISS:** Who approached whom? Could you tell me a little bit more about the genesis of the company?

**LEVY:** There are two parallel paths that came together. The Atari guys began to look for a way to get out of there and do game programming on their own as an independent design group. As I recall, their idea was to do that work and then license it or sell it to marketers or publishers.

**WEISS:** So, their original idea was not to create their own new company?

**LEVY:** No, it was not. First, none of them had the management chops to do that experiment. They were game designers. So, at the same time this was happening, which was the early part of 1979, I was at a company that had been failing for some time but had a little startup division that was working on personal computer software publishing, in the very early days of personal computers. That division of the company reported to me. I was the corporate vice president. I started shopping the idea in the investment community of forming a company to do personal computer software. Around the second week of June of that year, I got a call from a friend of mine who was a lawyer who I had been working with for a couple of years. He had been involved with me, shopping the personal computer software idea. He called me up and said, "I have your design team in my office." And that was the four guys from Atari.

**WEISS:** David Crane, Larry Kaplan, Alan Miller, and Bob Whitehead.



The Activision team in the early '80s. That's Jim Levy bottom/center.

LEVY: They had been referred to him for guidance about how to go about what they wanted to do, which was to form this independent design group. So, they showed up at my house that afternoon. Over the next couple of weeks, we had extensive discussions. I convinced them that the thing to do was to start a company doing game cartridges for the Atari VCS. They would be the design team, and I would run the business. So, basically, I took the core of the business plan that I had been working on and rewrote it to fit the video game profile. At the same time, I had been talking to one venture capitalist who was very interested in backing the personal computer software idea. He was ready to do so when I went back to him and said, "I think we have a better idea here." And they became the primary backers of Activision.

**WEISS: Interesting. Most people seem to think that the Atari guys wanted to form a company from the get-go.**

LEVY: In the summer of '79, most of the guys were still working at Atari, and I was working on a business plan. I eventually got the money secured from the venture capital investors and introduced them to the game design team. We had a deal by September. The two parallel paths were the game designers who wanted to leave Atari and do their own thing, but not form a company like Activision, and me, who was ready to form a company to publish personal computer software. We came together, and that's how Activision was formed.

**WEISS: That's great how that worked out. Activision had a lot of terrific marketing ideas: the color-coded boxes, treating designers like rock stars, having the designer's tips, trips, and photos in the instruction manuals. Was most of that your idea? I know the programmers wanted more recognition, but the actual marketing - was that your doing?**

LEVY: That was all me. If you look at Activision in its early days, the four programmers were in a lab, designing games. I didn't muck with them much. They would come out and tell me what they wanted to do, what they were working on, and I just let them run. I came out of creative industries: the publishing industry and the music industry, so I was used to dealing with creative people at arm's length; occasionally providing general guidance in terms of how marketable certain products might be and so forth. But I was not involved in the process of what these guys did and how they did it. I was only allowed in design lab about once a week [laughs].

**WEISS: [laughs] You let them do their job.**

LEVY: Yes. They designated one of their guys to be the liaison to the business side of things. He was the guy who I would deal with in terms of information flow back and forth. All of the work that created what you have seen as the face of Activision, including the name, which was mine, the logo, the flying V design, and how the packaging and manuals were put together, all that stuff, that was my responsibility in the de-



This patch represents *River Raid*, one of the best shooters for the Atari 2600.



Only high scorers got a *Spider Fighters* patch.



velopment of the company. It was a lot of fun.

**WEISS: Sounds like it.**

**LEVY:** My background was primarily from a skillset was primarily marketing, and entrepreneurial management in development ventures.

**WEISS: Activision was marketed well - very distinctive packaging and everything. Is it true the programmers wanted more credit for their work? I know money was the main reason they left Atari, but were they also wanting more recognition?**

**LEVY:** I don't recall from our early conversations that that's what they came to the table with originally. It was an automatic for me, having dealt with artists in the music industry for most of the '70s. The paradigm was that the artist was, in fact, the brand. I don't know how many people could tell you what label the Eagles are on and whether it matters or not. My whole view of game design was that the programmers were the stars. They were the creators; they were the authors; they were the musicians. And eventually they would have their own brand. David Crane, Alan Miller, Bob Whitehead, Larry Kaplan - they would establish their own identities for the games they designed. Activision itself was a brand within the trade, the name above the title, and was a "presenting and producing" organization, but the work was created by the guys. Pit-fall!, for example, which was the best-selling game in the early days, was designed by David Crane. If you

went and talked to a hundred people who played that game, they could tell you both that it was an Activision game, and that David Crane had designed it. That worked to our benefit the next time David designed a game. So, it was just like working with recording artists, like the next album from the Eagles.

**WEISS: That was a new way to go about things for the video game industry.**

**LEVY:** Yeah. I came to the table with that. I don't recall that it was as big of an issue for the designers early on. I do recall they were very upset with how they were being paid by Atari. They were being treated as if they were just mechanics and had no name value or financial value other than being workers in a lab.

**WEISS: How did the high score patches program come about? Where did you get the idea?**

**LEVY:** Okay, I'm going back 39 years now, when this first happened [laughs]. Of the first four games we released, the big title was Dragster. David Crane's first Activision game. It was a drag racing game. I don't know whether you've ever seen it.

**WEISS: Oh, absolutely, yeah.**

**LEVY:** It was a killer of a game, and it was a joystick breaker. Shortly after the game was released in the fall of '80, people started sending us Polaroid pictures of their scores. Somebody would get a score of 6.9 sec-



The Trail Drive patch was for *Stampede*.



The Bucket Brigade patch was for *Kaboom!*

onds or whatever, and we'd get a picture. This flow of mail from users and purchasers of the game led us to think about how to respond from a customer relations standpoint. How to talk to them. At first, we sent congratulatory thank-you letters. And then we started thinking that maybe we should put a newsletter together and build a mailing list. So, there was a newsletter we put together called "Activisions." I do not recall exactly who came up with the idea for the patch. It was either me or one of the other people in the customer relations marketing crew. The idea was to form a club - a club of Dragster players. I don't think there was a threshold required. If you sent us a picture of your best time, we would send you a patch. You were a member of the Dragster club. Eventually, over a period of time - that first year we were releasing product - not every game was as competitive as Dragster. But if you communicated with us regarding the playing of any of our games, and your achievement with the game, you were going to get a patch. Ultimately, every

game ended up with its club. There was a Tennis club and a Skiing club. Bob Whitehead's Skiing game did have timed results. This developed over time, so every time we released a game, we created a patch, and it was a way of rewarding feedback from game players.

**WEISS: Brilliant idea.**

LEVY: The patches and the newsletter were our primary ways we had contact with customers. This was before the days of electronic communication, so everything was on paper. We were getting thousands of pieces of mail per week. At one point we had an organization - 10 or 12 people who would answer the mail.

**WEISS: Wow, that's a lot [laughs]. Who was in charge of that division of the company?**

LEVY: The leader of our customer relations group was Jan Marsella, who joined in 1980 and built and managed the large team that dealt with our incoming mail, produced our newsletter, and doled out the patches. She was not only a vital part of our relationship with our fans, but she also was one of the finest examples of the heart and soul of Activision and one of my most trusted members of the Family.

**WEISS: Do you recall who manufactured the patches?**

LEVY: No, I don't, but I think it was a promotional products company. Activision was also in the clothing business [laughs]. Not to make money. All of our people had jackets and T-shirts and hats. We were in the luggage business. Our entire sales team had Activision luggage so they could be identified in airports. For a few years, you couldn't go through an airport without seeing somebody carrying or wearing some piece of Activision paraphernalia.

**WEISS: Great branding.**

LEVY: Yeah, and the patches continued as we went into PC games instead of just console games. That era is what one writer called Activision 2.0. That was sort of the redefinition of the company after Atari caved in and blew a big hole in the industry.



Dragster was the first Activision game where you could be sent a patch if you contacted the company.



The Explorers Club patch was sent to gamers who got high scores on *Pitfall!*

**WEISS:** Have you seen the prices of the patches recently on the collectibles market? They go for quite a bit. Around \$20 to \$70 each, depending on the patch and the condition.

LEVY: I've heard about it.

**WEISS:** I think that speaks to people's fondness of the games while growing up.

LEVY: My daughter, who was in her teens when Activision was roaring along, she actually worked for the company one summer as a writer. She wrote manuals. She may have been the best single manual writer we ever had. She was really good. I have a whole collection of Activision memorabilia: posters, games, cut-outs of Pitfall Harry, stuff like that. She has told me in no uncertain terms that I am not to destroy or give away any of that. She wants to come and go through it with me, piece by piece. She told me that complete sets of original games, which I have, are pretty valuable. She hasn't mentioned the patches, per say, but she's made me aware of there being a huge market for original Activision material. I'm sure I have a whole bunch of the patches, but I'm not sure if I have a complete set.

**WEISS:** Around 12 years or so ago, retro gaming started going mainstream, and it's snowballed ever since then. A lot of this stuff has gone way up in value. Now it's just crazy, some of the prices [laughs].

LEVY: I'm not really watching that. I'm pretty detached

from the game industry now because it's so totally different from what it was when we started Activision. But I do have occasional situations where I'll run into someone, and they'll ask me what I did, and I'll tell them I was with this video game company in the '80s called Activision, and they go nuts.

**WEISS:** Oh, yeah, I'll bet.

LEVY: They'll say something like, "Oh, my god, I spent my childhood playing those games. I thank them for helping me build my house."

**WEISS:** [laughs] If you don't mind me asking, what are you up to these days?

LEVY: I'm retired. I'm not actively involved in any business venture, but I am on a couple of boards for small, startup companies. My wife and I live in Sonoma, California now, and we're very involved with some local organizations. I'm on the board of the Conservatory Theater in San Francisco, a regional theater group. She's on the board of the local hospital. That's the kind of thing we've been doing. Before Activision, I had a radio background. Before and after Activision, I had a broadcasting background. I did some local broadcasting work the first 10 years or so I was retired, but things are quieter now. We travel quite a bit and work on the local organizations. That's pretty much life as we know it today. 📺



If you reached a certain score on *MegaMania*, you got this patch.

# You Can't Call It... Stories from a life making video games a book by Warren Davis

Book Review by Ryan Burger

**M**eeting Warren a couple years ago has started out a relationship where I've spent some nice time with him - first talking at E3, then later in Des Moines when he was in town, and hanging out at a couple retro gaming expos. When I first met him he told me he was working on a book about his career in video games and I have been anxiously awaiting it ever since. I received a digital pre-release copy that I read through about a third of and then I finished a printed copy in a weekend reading binge.

While the title of the book talks of his *Q\*bert*, the hugely successful arcade classic, the book goes way beyond that time in 1981 when it consumed him completely developing that amazing game. When I first opened it up, I expected it to be maybe one half *Q\*bert* related, even knowing what I knew of his experience that went beyond Gottlieb. Warren takes us from his first computer experiences in Brooklyn, NY, accessing a mainframe through a terminal at his high school to almost what he's doing now, wrapping up near the end with stints as a Disney Imagineer and working at ILM.

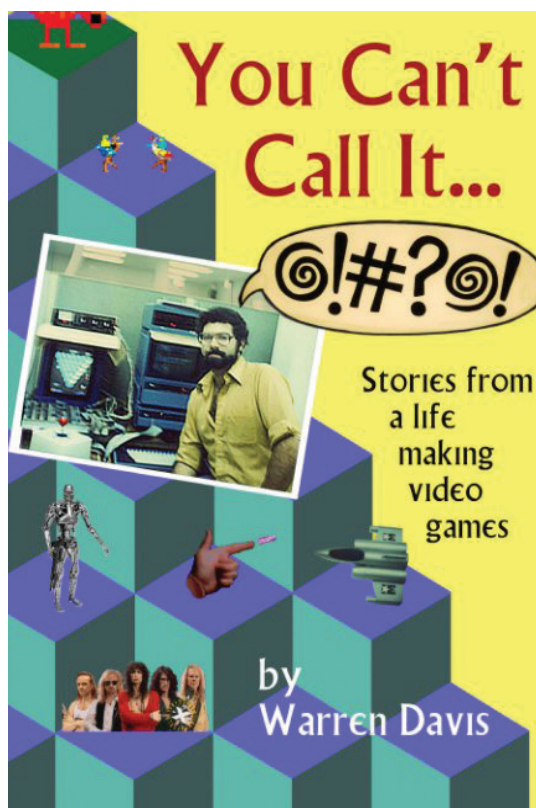
Although not a professional writer, he does a great job at pulling me along to the next chapter, keeping me enticed enough that I read the majority of it over a weekend upon getting the physical book. He provides just the right amount of geekiness and code-related computer things for the video game aficionado to be intrigued, but not totally lost in the code.

In a quick interview about the book, Warren told me "Putting these stories into a personal memoir allowed me to expound on some details of all these projects that I'd never get to touch on if I were just giving a 45 minute talk. I was able to go through the different phases of my arcade game career, including not only the high-profile games I'd worked on like *Q\*bert* or *T2*, but also the rare, and little known games like *Us Vs. Them* and *Exterminator*, which

were in some ways (to me, anyway) more interesting stories." After finishing the book, I decided that the *Us vs. Them* game is one of which I needed to find a remaining copy to play!

My suggestion for all of you is buy the book, and track him down at the next retro gaming expo and have him sign your book and a *Q\*Bert* cartridge from your favorite console (knowing that he programmed the arcade game, not its pale comparisons on 8- and 16- bit game consoles). 📖

[warrendavisshop.square.site](http://warrendavisshop.square.site)



# 2020 OSG EVENTS CALENDAR

STAY TUNED...WE ARE WORKING ON MORE 2020 DATES

2020

APRIL 3-5, 2020

Milwaukee, WI • Midwest Gaming Classic • [midwestgamingclassic.com](http://midwestgamingclassic.com)



APRIL 9-11, 2020

Los Angeles, CA • E3 • [e3expo.com](http://e3expo.com)

JULY 10-12, 2020

Atlanta, GA • Southern Fried Gaming Expo • [southernfriedgamingexpo.com](http://southernfriedgamingexpo.com)



JULY 9-12, 2020

Pittsburg, PA • ReplayFX • [replayfx.org](http://replayfx.org)

JULY 11, 2020

Chicago, IL • Video Game Summit • [videogamesummit.net](http://videogamesummit.net)

JULY 25, 2020

Cleveland, OH • Ccag • [ccagshow.com](http://ccagshow.com)



JULY 25-26, 2020

Austin, TX • Classic Game Fest • [classicgamefest.com](http://classicgamefest.com)

AUGUST 1

St. Louis, MO • MO Game Con • [mogamecon.com](http://mogamecon.com)

AUGUST 7-9

Phoenix, AZ • Game On Expo • [gameonexpo.com](http://gameonexpo.com)



AUGUST 8-9

Garden City, NY • Long Island Retro Gaming Expo • [liretro.com](http://liretro.com)

AUGUST 14-16

Portland, OR • Portland Retro Gaming Expo • [retrogamingexpo.com](http://retrogamingexpo.com)

OCTOBER 14-17

CHICAGO, IL • Pinball Expo '20 • [pinballexpo.com](http://pinballexpo.com)



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# Ultimate Guide to the NES Library 1985-1995

Book Review by Ryan Burger

Knowing of Pat Contri since I started up Old School Gamer Magazine, I knew I wanted to check out one of his books. Recently, at the Retro Game Con in Syracuse, NY, I asked him what book I should start out with. He said while he has the SNES book released more recently, he recommended I start with his Ultimate NES book, so that I did.

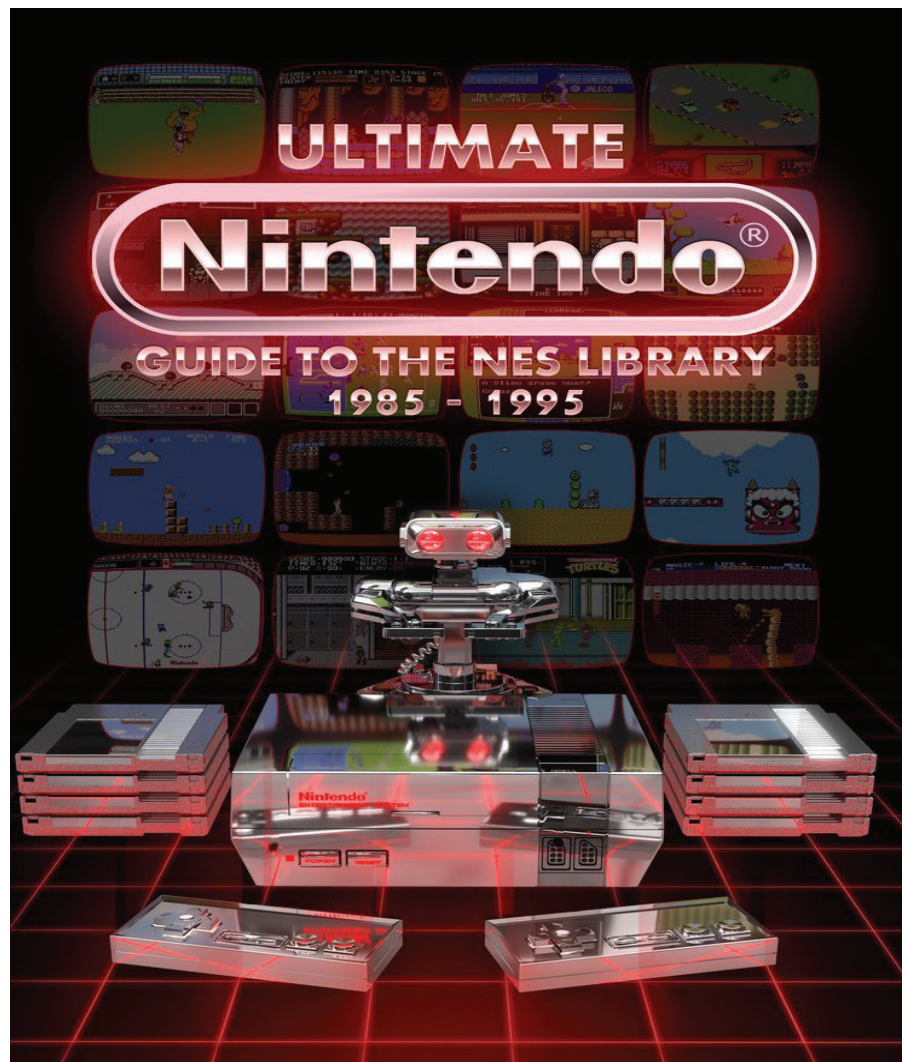
Pat has self published one of the thickest, most detailed, most professionally done books I've ever seen. It's a 420 page-long hardback book, absolutely packed with every NES release he could find including test cartridges, variants, European only releases and more. I think the only area he didn't cover were any Japanese-only releases. Each page of the book usually contains two releases including 4 screenshots, a picture of the cartridge, a full description of the game and a "Reflections" portion where he gives more insights on the game.

While I was more into the early 8-bit Atari and Intellivision generation and will be excited to see someone chronicle such in similar detail as Pat has done in this book (I've heard one is coming soon, and I will update you on it), I'm just amazed at what he has put together. While several other authors that have done similar "tomes", the depth of detail that Pat put in may have topped all of them. The book has every page solidly packed, so much so that the page mar-

gins are miniscule. Some great articles written by both Pat and others finish out the book nicely.

You should get a copy of the NES or SNES book from his site or at the many gamer cons he attends. Otherwise, you'll be waiting until he or someone else writes a book for your favorite console!

[patthenespunk.com](http://patthenespunk.com)



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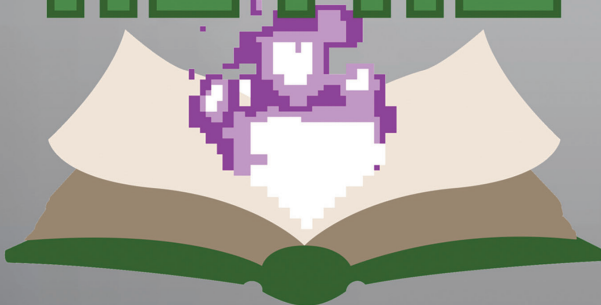
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