

# Doom's Gamer Gallery

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*Hi guys! I am going to be doing reviews of different games!. Read along if you wish to hear about my best, worst, and stupid Adventures around the Gaming Universe. ^ I will review games you request too! For a price!*

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# 1 - Castle Smurfenstein: Wait, WHAT???

You may have heard that the first 3-D shooter title was not really Doom, but a PC game released in 1992 called Wolfenstein 3D.

But that in itself was actually a sequel to an Apple II game.

Apple II titles aren't covered on this site as often as they should be, despite the fact that they're every bit just as weird, if not weirder, than what he witnessed on NES.

There is currently an FTP site from heaven that offers every single Apple II program ever made for download. It is there that you can pick up Castle Wolfenstein, the first game in the series, where you are a US soldier navigating a maze of one-screen rooms and killing all the Nazis you can find before they kill you. In the beginning there was a moral issue involved with the murder of virtual brethren. This is how the first FPS justified killing humans...they're Nazis, and who likes those?

Wolfenstein 3D had its loophole, and that allowed it to be the very first FPS. Or I'm guessing. The Wolfenstein series has had many spinoffs, among them its recent PC sequel, and Super Noah's Ark 3D, which used the same engine and areas but replaced the weapons with apples and the Nazis with angry cooped-up livestock. Much has been made of Super Noah's Ark but really, this isn't the worst hack of a Wolfenstein game that has been sold on the market. There's something even stranger, and it's what you came here to read about.

here is one thing you must understand about the Apple II computer: there are basically 2 kinds of programs: originals, and rip-offs. The originals you will not run into as often as you will the rip-offs, but fortunately, the moochers had some very odd ideas. Prepare yourself for the first product to rise to the challenge of leeching off the big bucks of Castle Wolfenstein...Castle Smurfenstein.

You might be saying, "When he says Smurf, does he mean..." Yes I do. Castle Smurfenstein is basically the exact same game, except the Nazis have been replaced with Smurfs, and you still gotta blow them away. I guess it still works...Smurfs, Nazis, what's the difference...

After a short credits screen, which runs a 10-second Static-like sound clip of the Smurfs singing their happy song we witness the Story of the Game.

And to get it out of the way, let's look at the story:

"During the cold winter of 1946 former leaders of the third Reich met in Argentina to discuss plans for regaining their former glory. They knew that for any plan to succeed other nations would have to lose their will to fight. They decided to create a cartoon character to embody the ideas of niceness and peacefulness and called it a SMURF.

SMURF stood for Secret Military Underground Resistance Force

They planned to infect the children of enemy nations with their peaceful ideas. And so it began. Now in the present their plan is almost complete, and they are starting their propaganda campaign in the bastion of freedom, the United States of America.

You, Smurfbutcher Bob, were captured while trying to destroy the Smurf's precartoon ancestors. You

have been taken to their Ontario headquarters, Castle Smurfenstein, for interrogation You must escape, kill as many of the blue bastards as possible, and steal the plans to operation Smurfkreig. If you fail, hordes of Smurfs will sweep across the world spewing peace slogans and pumping people full of bullets. When you were being brought to the castle you were able to talk one of your Canadian guards into giving you his gun (not too hard, eh). You also saw some Smurfy Security guards with bulletproof vests and some smurfberry bombs which could be used as grenades to blow the Smurfs into infinity. You can't fail:

YOU MUST ESCAPE

YOU MUST WARN THE WORLD

YOU MUST ESCAPE IN TIME FOR DINNER."

If THAT isn't the greatest Story ever Told, I don't Know WHAT is! \*Thumbs up like an Idiot with a Goofy Smile\*

The walls are an enemy because if you walk into one, no matter how slow, even if you touch it, the game thinks you bashed your skull into it and you die. So never touch a wall. The ammunition boxes are an enemy because, again, if you touch one you die. I was thinking, maybe you have to shoot them first, then the ammo will appear and YOU can use it. Nope. Of course, the one you were thinking about is obviously the Smurf, who will notice you and capture you in 1 second if he sees you. If even one Smurf touches your body, you lose the whole game (in all other cases, you get 3 lives). This is why it's so important to use your weapons...no wait; you can only fire them from your right arm! That's YOUR right. And for it to register as a hit, you have to be right next to the Smurf when you fight it! So in order to get rid of this Smurf, you have to maneuver around it while it's marching back and forth, making sure it doesn't see you...then plug it from its back, while it's still moving, before it turns around. Unless you're that little schizophrenic kid from "The Wizard," there's no way you'll ever do that. I don't know if Castle Wolfenstein was this messed up.

So we've established that killing the Smurfs is impossible. We've also established that if one sees you, it blasts over to you in 1 second before you can react. So, with all this said, I think I can excuse the fact that I only have screen grabs for 4 rooms.

Room One is Fairly Simple, Only One Smurf, and then there's walls, Boxes, and the trip out. Simple and not much to say, it's only a level to get used to movement and such.

ROOM TWO: If your run-away skills are good enough, you can make it to the stairs in that first room before the Smurf knows about it. But chances are, 9 times out of ten, that when you enter this next room you will instantly lose. Why? Look for yourself...the stairs end right where that Smurf's vision is. If he's not marching the other way at the moment, he'll get you right at the nanosecond the computer finishes drawing the screen. As you can see, I got lucky here. Of course, now I have to get through that door, which is also in his line of vision. Once I did, I was in....

ROOM THREE: From where I'm standing, I'm in no immediate danger from the Smurf across from me, because he can't seem to get through that blue laser. I'd go see if the laser is friendly or not, but I know better, since everything else in the game has killed me. I haven't talked about the controls, have I? Look down and pick out the 3X3 row of keys: QWE, ASD, and ZXC. Those function as your directional pad as a whole...of course, it's obviously lopsided. The button in the middle (S) makes Smurfbutcher Bob stop walking. You'll be using S a lot since pushing any other button makes him walk that direction forever. Believe it or not, this actually ISN'T the worst control I've had on an Apple II game. Back when I had one, I had a game called Ice Demons where, if you pushed left, the little guy went right, and vice versa. It doesn't get worse than that, people. I haven't seen a ROM of Ice Demons at all, so no screen of that for

you.

Anyway, this screen is rather simple, so let's go to....

ROOM FOUR: Wow, miraculously, there are no Smurfs in here (but still deadly walls). This is the room where I found out the boxes could kill me, as I tried to open one while I was in here. I then went through that bottom opening and entered room 5, but was attacked by a Smurf in .003 seconds, and that ended everything. I didn't have much of a chance of getting back to room four, so that ends this session for the both of us.

I have three deciding factors in whether or not a game ends up reviewed on my Blogs. It has to be either an amazingly good game, an amazingly BAD game, or an amazingly WEIRD game. Castle Smurfenstein, in its infamy, fits all three. The concept can't be beat--you shoot Smurfs here (Even Though I like the Smurfs, the Concept as a rip-off was funny.) The game play is unbelievably bad, and the whole thing is off-da-hook weird. Through all this, though, you might have been asking: "If they were going to rip off Wolfenstein, why didn't they use the Ku Klux Klan instead? Nobody likes THEM either." Silly retro gamer...they couldn't use the KKK because that was already taken.

Klan Cookout (Google it) is a lot more fun than Castle Smurfenstein, albeit in a mindless way. Any game that gives you a flamethrower that flames 1/4 of the screen on every trigger-pull is a good game. This is pretty much all you do...you set advancing Klansmen on fire until one gets fast enough to make it to your side of the screen. This is what anyone who never owned this misses by skipping the world of Apple II.

**BONUS: MINI RETRO MOMENT!**

BRICK OUT (Apple II, 1979) is exactly like Breakout, except the first word is "Brick" and not "Break." Oh yeah, and it's sideways. I've always enjoyed a good Breakout game ever since the days in TAG where we used those clunky 70's computers called "PET" that stored programs on tape (cassette tape...it didn't get slower unless you count punch card). All of us lived for the mythic moment where someone in the computer lab would successfully clear the screen of bricks, and earn 5 extra balls. I witnessed it only once or twice in my lifetime. I have a shot of my screen clear in Brick Out. And don't ask why my name is "BURP."

## 2 - Takeshi's Challenge: Are you Up for It?

There are numerous famous-for-being-infamous video games out there now. We've got Superman 64, ET, Mortal Kombat Advance, Action 52...Some Sites has covered a few already: Bebe's Kids, Shaq Fu, Wand of Gamelon...But here's something you might not have known about. If we were to take all those bad games, line them end to end, and calculate their combined stink factor, it would still not best the most diabolical Japanese Famicom game ever created: Takeshi's Challenge. At least with all those other games, they tried. Takeshi's Challenge was the product of Takeshi Kitano (or "Beat Takeshi" as he refers to himself), a famous Japanese comedian who had his own TV show at the time. Released in 1986, it's one of the first licensed games to suck, but it did so on Takeshi's orders. The title screen contains the translated message, "This game is made by a man who hates videogames." So, is the thing frustrating? Yeah. It's that bad. The game takes place in an overworld city, with many buildings containing the tasks you have to complete to beat the game. The city is also populated with nothing but people that want to beat you to death. Stay outside long enough and you'll start wasting your lives. If you consider yourself an artful dodger and think you can handle it...you're delusional, because you really can't. See, in order to enter any door you must stand in front of it for at least five seconds, and if some guy decides to punch you out of the way, you must try again. You should save your strength for this, because you'll be doing it for a while. Some moron once made the remark that the overworld is like Grand Theft Auto, and that remark has made it into almost every review of the game since (we're all copying from each other, since actually playing the thing is impossible on an emulator). I guess it's like GTA in the sense that you are in a city and you can beat people up. You young'uns think everything is like GTA. Pac-Man is like GTA only the city is a maze and the other cast members are already dead, and the drugs are little pellets that give you the ability to eat them, and the hookers are all cherries instead. When you finally break through, it's time for your first task: singing karaoke for an hour. Didn't expect that, did you? Well, you better have your pipes in tune, because if you don't sing, and remain singing for exactly 60 minutes, the game will KNOW. The Famicom's second controller had a built-in microphone. To pass onto the game's second level, you must sing to the notes the game plays in the bar, into the mike, over and over for an hour. If you're triumphant in this task, the little sprite you control will receive 300 Yen (which should buy a stick of gum) and everyone in the bar will attack him. Again, this is if you WIN. This is the next screen you get. Your next task is to....do nothing for the next four hours. With one catch: to make sure you're really doing nothing, your finger must remain on the A button. Personally, I'd just stack a bonzai tree or a bootleg Tenchi VHS on the controller and go outside. The only flaw in this game's methods of torture was that they couldn't think of a way to enforce this particular one. They could have thought of something if they'd put their minds to it. There was an unreleased Sega CD game starring Penn and Teller that contained a minigame called "Desert Bus." Your goal in "Desert Bus" was to drive a bus from Tucson to Las Vegas in real time. If you manage to pass the plane level, the next and final level involves landing on an island, avoiding everyone and everything that moves, going inside a cave, and doing the same inside said cave. Aside from what looks like horrible jump physics controls, this part is a cakewalk compared to everything else. It's almost like the programmers figured nobody would play long enough to get here and just started making a normal game, thinking Mr. Beat wouldn't find out. But that's not the case. We haven't gotten to the best part yet. And it's coming up next. Once you get to the end of the level and touch a shrine, your screen changes and becomes entirely black except for what looks like Beat's head. All online evidence points to this being the final boss. Which doesn't make much sense; how are you supposed to beat a black screen

with a head on it?

**The answer: by hitting him with any button 20,000 Times.**

Yes, the man's got 20,000 hit points and you have to deplete them one at a time, in nonstop succession. If you manage to accomplish this, then congraturation, you've won Japan's most frustrating game. Your prize is: another text box from Beat, then a frozen screen. After you've beaten it, there's not much else you can do with Takeshi's Challenge except exploit its only bug (yeah, it was programmed well). Jumping over a door in the city's east side will take you inside the game's Minus World, where it's literally raining men, all the time. The game is virtually unknown in America, but in Japan it's legendary, frequently making decent numbers on those "top 50 games of all time" lists. The absence of an anime based on this game, or even a manga, is puzzling to me. Taito actually supported this thing with a full commercial campaign. Youtube Might have the TV ad for Takeshi's Challenge, in which Beat sits around and grates a radish. Makes perfect sense. There is one other Beat game for NES, "Takeshi's Castle" and it plays like a normal game. Naturally, it isn't nearly as popular...

### 3 - Bebe's Kids: It's Animation...And that's About it.

As a youth, I was privileged enough to have ties to several independent video stores, before the coming of the corporate beast known as Blockbuster. As such, I could get my hands on several rented games per week for much less than most people, which shaped a good portion of my vast video game knowledge. The downside is that I often ended up with one or two stinkers that were played once and then shoved under a sofa until I had to bring them back. This is one of those games. Until Someone suggested it, I had only played a little into this game before chucking it under some piece of furniture, regarding it as just another bad game. But now, after forcing myself to get through this entire "game" (I use the term loosely), I can now assure you that the hype is validated: Bebe's Kids is one of the crappiest titles of all time.

Hey, if I had to play through this crap, the least you can do is look at crap like that. I have seen the movie, and it is based upon an old comedian's tale about the time he had to take three kids (It was presumably four at the time) to Disneyland. Someone at Universal FOOLISHLY BELIEVED that THIS would be the next hit. The opening is a tune with digitized "Hey yo!"s and "It's Bebe's Kids!"s coming at you. Level music is crappy 7 note generica that loops over and over. But enough of simply the graphics and sound, let's get into the stinky center of this steaming pile of feces.

At the start, you get to pick from one of these two brats: **Kahlil**, or **Lashawn**.

I wish it was me who selected these awful colors, but sadly, that isn't the case. I take Kahlil, because he moves slightly less awkwardly than Lashawn (Both Characters Walk like they're Swimming Through AIR). But that's not to say that they both don't move like a walrus on a treadmill, because they do. They have these elaborate strut-walks which I guess were supposed to be fly, dawg, but in actuality make them a dog to control. And special moves? Hoo boy. In most Double Dragon ripoffs, you usually execute a move by jumping and kicking, pressing both buttons at the same time, holding one while pressing another, etc. Not here. Y punches, X kicks, B jumps, A crouches(?!). That sounds bad enough, but how about special moves? To do a super punch, you have to hold one of the frackin' shoulder buttons (L or R) and press Y for the punch, X for the kick. And to do a jump kick, a damned simple jump kick, you have to press B, hold L/R, and hit X. Who could have possibly thought this to be a intuitive control scheme?

Now, we'll begin our game, fully aware that Funworld does NOT permit bevis or vibes (There's a Sign that has No Vibe, no Bevis, No Bevis, No Vibes). Speaking of Be(a)vis, the way you pick up items in this game is the same stupid way as the SNES version of Beavis & Butt-Head (though that game, while not great, was not nearly as bad as this), in that you have to crouch on top of it. But that's just a needle in this putrid haystack of horror.

Upon entering the outside of Funworld, you'll come upon some giant mice and security agents. Then more. Then more, until you realize they're the only two enemies in the entire level. And they don't even ATTACK you, all they do is bumble around aimlessly. Seriously, the only way they hurt you is if you hold still for several seconds right near one and he grabs you, in which case you have to rapidly hit left/right to escape. Use some of your super moves to knock off their heads/toupees in order to make it to



something that makes this level look like Final Fight: The House Of Glass.

OK, now I consider myself a fairly resourceful gamer in that I can usually get out of a confusing situation or solve a puzzle in a decent amount of time. But then, I usually apply sensical logic, which has no place here. Assess the situation ... a filthy baby dropping glass on the head of a pumpkin-headed black version of Gomez Addams, who may or may not be Bebe himself. OK, I'll try to help out Bebe by trying to subdue the baby. No luck. Hm, well maybe Bebe is attempting to attack and/or eat the baby, so I'll attack Bebe. Nothing. All right, perhaps I'm just supposed to save the glass from hitting the floor. WHACK - there goes some energy. Many tries later, I figured out that you have to break the glass that the baby tosses down. :Ahem: WHAT'S THE frackING POINT? I mean, the glass breaks anyway when it hits the floor, yet the only way out of this level is to break 10 pieces of glass yourself. And even that took awhile, because the control and hit detection is so off. And Bebe help you if you can't do it within the time limit, because then you'll be sent back to the beginning of the PREVIOUS level, and have to battle through the mice/security hoard just to return to this stupid level. Yeesh.

That right there is about enough to use your Bebe's Kids cartridge as something to throw at the neighbor's dog, but I'm pressing onward. After another level exactly the same as the first one, with the lone exception being that the hot dog guys now throw stuff at you, you'll soon come upon one of the most vile and downright annoying levels ever created by anyone: The Haunted House.

The level basically consists of walking through extremely similar rooms, and going through doors and bookshelves to find more similar looking rooms at random. (Oh, yeah...there's a Secret to the Bookshelves, you see, depending on which side you walk to on the Shelves, you go through ANOTHER ROOM??? THAT'S IM POSSIBLE! IF YOU GO THROUGH A BOOKCASE, THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY TO ONE ROOM! NO SENSE AT ALL!!!!) And of course, these things seem to actually open about every one in four times. This goes on until time runs out. You may find a trapdoor in your wandering, but all that does is drop you on a ledge that has a 1-Up and a stupid chain weapon. Unfortunately, this ledge is also back at the beginning. There's only one way to escape this Haunted House - see that little penis at the top of the screen? It's actually supposed to be a thermometer, and the closer it gets to red, the closer you are to the end. Luckily for you, I can't express in words how mind numbingly monotonous and frustrating this stupid level is. One stupid room with stupid mummies and stupid paintings that shoot stuff at you after another. It just keeps going until you're practically praying for the time to run out. Even with the thermometer, it's just random walking from room to room until you're lucky enough to find a new color for 200+ seconds. My head hurts.

Next comes (you guessed it) more levels with micemen and bald security guards, until you board a pirate ship for some reason. Then, all the pirates, who are supposed to be employees of a really crappy amusement park, all run and attack you. Even if the security guards had put out an all points bulletin, it seems to me that hucking swords at two ugly kids is a bit excessive. However, they do drop their pants when you attack them. What that means, I have no idea.

Eventually you'll come upon a giant, horribly mishapen Pirate Boss that can shoot cannonballs at you, but he's just as easy to take out as any other enemy. This leads you to the most amazing part of the game: a side-scrolling beat 'em up level that actually has NO mice or security guards! Yee ha!

No, instead it has slimeballs in McDonalds outfits and sinister corporate executives. After this section, which is just like all the others except with a different background and 2 or 3 parts where you actually

have to make use of the jump button for the first time in the game, you'll come upon a short area with hooded nerds draped in raincoats. Then ... the final boss. He looks like what would seem like a Fag-like T-1000 from Terminator.

Up until now, while some levels like the House of Glass and Haunted House were so mind-numbingly awful that they gave off the illusion of being tough, this entire game is very easy to get through (minus the emotional strain) if you know what you're doing. However, this stupid robot is nearly impossible. First off, you have to shake the feeling of claustrophobia in the little space you have to maneuver. On top of that, you need to block out the "Too Strong!" "Too Strong!" "Everybody!" vocal samples in the background music. Then, you have to hit him in the chest, and this battle features some of the worst hit detection I've ever seen. You might hit him once every 10 tries, and that's while avoiding his prancing around and his lasers. After you knock his head off, it hangs from the ceiling and spits fireballs at you, giving you even less room. After a long, extremely tedious fight, you get to watch the horrible two frame ending. "Funworld! Funworld!" "Peewee,Dont!" And it ends.

At this point, I burned my Bebe's Kids cinema reel so I'd never be tempted to use it in another review. The worst play control this side of Rocky & Bullwinkle, brain damaging goals, annoying heroes, repetitiveness, painful music, and everything else I just talked about truly make Bebe's Kids one of the worst games ever. I think there's only one thing left to say at this point:

If there's any justice in the world, Kevin Wilkinson (The Man behind it all) is currently flipping burgers.

## 4 - Jackie Chan's Action Kung Foo: Here's To Butt Whoop.

Long before he teamed up with an obnoxious Chris Rock wannabe, before he battled the Dark Hand in cartoon form, even before the majority of American people knew who the hell he was, I had heard of Jackie Chan. I wasn't quite sure what he did, or why he was fighting spear throwing pot creatures in this odd new game I rented, but there he was nonetheless. Now, ten years later, I can say that I, Doom, knew the coolness of Jackie Chan before the lot of you, thanks to his wacky @\$@ obscure NES platform game!

As far as the in-game story, I haven't seen the manual in over a decade, and I remember two versions. That chick with Chan is either his date or his twin sister, and the old guy is either his sensei, or both of theirs. Or Santa's skinny Chinese cousin. Anyway, one thing the stories have in common is that an ancient evil in the form of a grumpy looking green Chan clone returns after 3,000 years, zaps Jackie, and steals the chick. You must rescue said chick (after Jackie stops twitching) and defeat the ancient evil of doom and pestilence. Eh, at least this plot beats Legend of Drunken Master.

The Items and things are Based on Chinese things:

**FROGS:** I'm not quite sure why, but beating the crap out of frogs in this game makes them spit up useful items. It probably has to do with ancient Kung Fu discipline of frog whacking or something; don't try to figure it out, just snag the item and be off.

**BELL:** The Bell does not get barfed up by frogs, but rather appears in random spots to throw off your concentration. If you ring it, the old guy rides down on a cloud to kidnap you, and you play one of four wacky bonus games that help refill your fireball power (explained later), energy, and continues/lives. There's a cloud jumping one, one where you beat up robots, another where you stop bubbles from destroying a floor, and finally, everyone's favorite, the falling fish whack. This game rules.

**FOOD BOWL:** Looks more like an upside down cake to me, but you do what you can. If you can get a frog to cough this up, resist the thought of downing regurgitated frog dinner and get it, as it refills two ovals of health on the Life Bar. Although the special moves are random, usually a frog that spits a cake will spit it every time.

**ORB THING:** After killing most enemies, they'll leave behind an orb thing. If you collect (I think) 30 of them, your life and fireball power are fully refilled. I should probably get to the fireball thing, huh? OK, see those 5 little dots on the right of the subscreen? If you hold and release B, Jackie shoots a hadoken. These are pretty effective against bosses and the like, so you may want to conserve them.

And of course, in addition to these lovely items, there are the super Chan-like wacky moves that you can use either 7 or 9 times after you steal them from a frog and they occupy the middle of the subscreen. All of them involve holding up and pressing B, and here they are:

**180 Degree Kick to the Crotch:** This is the one you'll find most often, mostly because it's generic and dull, but gets the job done. By getting the job done, I mean killing the tougher, "human" enemies in one

hit instead of two. Also good to have if a tiger jumps at you, which will happen. As you can tell by the look on Jackie's face, this kick is so boring that it makes him sleepy, so we'll move on to the better ones.

360 Degree Pretzel Kick: This is actually pretty similar to the last one, except that Jackie goes all the way around, taking out enemies on both sides. Plus it looks better. And look, the little guy on the icon is all twisted up like a pretzel, ain't that wacky? ...Fine, this kick is as boring as the last one; it just covers both sides. Happy? I tried.

VERTICAL WAZOOLA: Not too effective against normal drone enemies, but great for anything that attacks from above. Case in point, evil birds. I'm sorry, but I hate birds. Ghosts 'N Goblins, Metroid, Ninja Gaiden, countless others; why the hell do birds hate you so much? I really need to look into this. Or not. Anyway, the Wazoola is also good against big bosses that you'd normally have to jump up and kick. Yep...

THE FLYING TUMBLE: Has its strengths and drawbacks. When you activate it, Jackie does a sustained series of flying somersaults. If you smack into an enemy during this process, they bite it. The most use I get out of this move is doing long somersaults over extended lava/spike pits. And that's where the weakness comes in; 9 times out of 10, the somersault will wear off just before you reach the end of a pit. When that happens, Jackie jumps and grabs his @\$\$ in pain.

JACKIE JUMPING AND GRABBING HIS @\$\$ IN PAIN: ...Sorry, couldn't resist.

You have 5 stages loaded with traps, nutty enemies, and frogs, and damned if you're always gonna have a Vertical Wazoola at your disposal. Therefore, you'll need to know the basics. A jumps, B punches. Those are the basics. Well, there's a little more; if you press B in the air, you'll perform a jump kick, which is the best non-special move you can do. Likewise, pressing B while crouching makes Jackie cower like a pussy and flail his foot around.

And now, you're ready to travel into the uncompromisingly weird world of Jackie Chan.

Doom's Favorite Enemy: Nunchuck-tossing Pot Creature

As with most platform games, Stage 1 is the typical "grassy area with enemies about as smart as a parking meter to get you acquainted with all the moves" level. Eventually, the terrain will vary into lava pits and spikes, and you'll move into a large temple. From here, you must pass the trials of jumping over water and hostile fish and water snake things, super spin kicking the numerous attacking bald guys, and surviving the evil scrolling mad dash of doom. If you have the super kung pow skills to accomplish this, you will face off the evil jolly hippie-god himself, BIG BAD BUDDHA.

Usually a promoter of inner peace and relaxing meditation, Buddha has evidently been corrupted by the Ancient Evil; either that, or given a swanky new pair of extendable boxing gloves as a bribe. He isn't exactly mobile, and all he has is his extendo gloves, so if you can steer clear of those, hop up on the platform, and hadoken him right in his pudgy face 5 times, all will be good. If you've foolishly squandered all your firepower, use the tried and true Vertical Wazoola to connect, taking more caution to avoid the hands of doom. If you're out of both, then you suck, but can redeem yourself by hitting jump kick after jump kick without getting smacked around.

## Doom's Favorite Enemy: Evil Christmas Trees

Falling through the floor after defeating Big Bad Buddha, Jackie finds himself in a fiery hellpit, which ultimately changes into an Ice level for no apparent reason. When in doubt, see the Scroll. After some standard jumping and killing of floating fire things and bald devil men, you'll come upon another scrolling area, only this time it's rising lava just waiting to singe your slow moving @\$\$\$. Once you jump around for higher ground, you'll inexplicably enter an ice portion where you can slide around, avoid Xmas trees and falling spikes, and battle the same evil bald guys, only blue ones that shoot ice rather than fire.

Soon, you'll make it to GENERAL POTATOHEAD. As far as beating him, you'd think that the lava below the ice would melt it and force Potatohead into falling to a fiery death, but this game defies your puny laws of liquidification. Instead, you'll again have to go for the face. Although Potatohead has legs, he's still as planted to the ground as Buddha, so all you need to do is employ the same strategy while he pounds his canoe oar of death into the ground. After a bit, he'll stop snoozing and toss the oar around, just run under it and keep kicking him into submission.

## Doom's Favorite Enemy: Pickle-tossing Hawaiian Monkey

Every platformer needs a "jumping skill/floating platform" level, and you're looking at it; or at least half of it. But platforms? No sir. You'll be hopping across ROCKET POWERED TURTLE SHELLS, of course. This takes up about half of the level, avoiding airborne enemies, trick shells, and the like. Soon, you'll come into an area rivaling that T&C Surf Designs game with the Gorilla: log surfing! Granted, you don't need the log to get past the level, but up yours; it's fun and it makes things easier when monkeys are tossing pickles at you. As the sky darkens, you'll soon come upon an innocent, item-producing frog ....OR IS IT?

Apparently tired of getting stomped on for food bowls the whole game, the leader of the frogs has managed to morph himself into some kind of winged demon creature. This battle is a tad different from the last two, and Froggy can fly up and down, and is situated on the right of the screen over water. Even if you have 5 hadokens, that isn't going to cut it - even if you avoid the tadpole projectiles and manage to whup up on Froggy, he'll turn red and start firing bubbles at you as well. Probably the toughest of the regular bosses, I would try special kicking him at the onset, then firing on his frog @\$\$ with some hadokens after he turns red. Oh, and after you beat him, feel free to continue knocking the hell out of frogs to get items for the rest of the game .... they've learned their lesson.

## Doom's Favorite Enemy: The Abominable Snowman

Stage 4 is a darker version of Stage 1 with enhanced difficulty and flying pink skulls for awhile, and then it's back to the sky. This time, for the most part, you get to bounce around on clouds (literally; the clouds let you jump twice as high). And there's one other VERY important difference: when you fall down from cloudland, you don't lose a life. That would be fine for your average platform game. In this level, the stage boss KICKS YOU IN THE @\$\$, right back up to where you fell off, taking away one hit. Beautiful. After avoiding this predicament and navigating the clouds, you'll be able to exact vengeance on the perpetrator himself - PURPLEY THE DEMON.

Purpley actually turns out to be a total puss, probably because he doesn't get to kick you this time. All you need to do is avoid his sweeping arm, and kick him in the eye. He's toast with a Vertical Wazoola,

but pretty much any attack is good enough for Purpley. If you can't beat this giant turd, especially after taking the Frog Demon, please don't talk to me. Make Ben proud.

#### Doom's Favorite Enemy: Demon in the Boot

Here we are, the token last castle. There's one annoying part where you have to vertically jump past these circular ray gun things, which can be a pain in the Shendu, but otherwise, it's pretty straightforward. There's another scrolling area, a buttload of enemies, and much more length than the previous 4 levels. Eventually, you'll take a skullavator to the top floor, where you'll fight a bunch of Dragon minibosses. Conserve your hadokens. You'll eventually free a frog (for a kick powerup), and the Old Man (who was somehow captured after whisking you away to the bonus rounds, I guess), who restores your life. You know what that means - time to face the LAST BOSS.

As stated, Mr. Last Boss is basically a green, evil version of Chan, and likewise, he has the same moves, only predictably amplified to "quickly beat your sorry @\$\$" proportions. He can be tough, but once you get the timing of his jumps down he isn't too bad. Depending on the manner and direction of his jump, you can usually tell if he's going to kick or hurl a fireball. After you beat on him for a fairly long time, he'll turn into a zombie, and then die ... OR DOES HE? OK, this is a platformer; we know damn well the lot of these, or any game for that matter, has a last boss with a second form. And after rescuing the chick, the Old Man will helpfully provide a cloud which you can ride to battle on. I had no idea what the hell was going on the first time.

You can't fall off the cloud, so don't worry about jumping around like a loon. The Evil Spider has two attacks: multi-fire, and homing claws. The claws are the only one that a blind 6 year old couldn't avoid, so take extra care in maneuvering. Also, beware when using close attacks. Same deal as always, beat his @\$\$ until he turns red, beat it some more, kill, walk into a forest clearing as the sky changes color with the girl.

ONE MORE THING ... this is a game that most definitely falls into the "typical platformer" genre, but in the same respect, it does a damn fine job of it. Pinpoint control, decent enough graphics, nonsensical bonus rounds, Pickle Monkeys, and so on. Plus it's Jackie frackin' Chan; what the hell else do you want?

## 5 - Friday the 13th: Jason's 8-Bit Mess...

I don't really think I have to go too deep into the Friday the 13th story, or lack thereof, so I'll just give you the gist of it: Two camp counselors are doing the nasty on a dock when they're supposed to be watching a retarded kid, kid drowns, comes back many years later in the second movie as an unstoppable evil guy, after his mom walks around saying "Kill her, Mommy" a lot in the first one. He gets his hockey mask in the third one, if memory serves. Eventually, he makes it to New York City, and most recently, a spaceship. Many stupid teens are killed each time, except usually one. The end. I'm not sure if it's a blessing or a curse that this game sort of incorporates only the first few movies. On one hand, those were the tolerable movies that came before the series went on far too long. On the other, a city or spaceship level really would have helped break the monotony.

As far as the game is concerned, your job is to lead 6 of the aforementioned stupid teens on a three-day crusade against Jason himself, along with a slew of lesser bad guys never before seen in a Jason movie, but in fact hired straight out of other games such as Ghosts 'N Goblins and Castlevania. In addition, you have to keep little kids from being brutally slaughtered. Don't worry though, this game would still probably get the "E" rating by today's standards, as no horrific blood or violence is actually shown. Even that might have helped this game, but no such luck. I always thought it'd be better if you got to actually play as Jason, so at least you'd be able to take out the fact that you foolishly paid for this game on a bunch of innocents, but good luck getting THAT kind of (licensed) game on a Nintendo system way back when.

The first thing you'll see is a Game Map, which can be accessed at any time with a press of the Start button. You'll be seeing this map quite a bit more during play, that is, if you want to get anywhere, as the "cabin path, forest, lake" motif starts to get repetitive even quicker than everything past the 30-minute mark in a Friday the 13th movie. It may not seem so, but there is quite a bit of strategy involved in this game. First though, I should mention that we're also introduced to our heroes; the fat goof, the athletic guy, the token black, the compassionate chick, the girl that always gets killed while naked in a shower, and the one female that makes it to the next movie.

It's probably not worth noting that Laura's and Crissy's hair colors switch for no reason when you actually pick them, but I already did, so nuts to you. Mark and Crissy are the only ones worth using, as the other 4 are slow and can't jump, and are best served as Jason bait. Now, the map takes a little getting used to, mostly because the direction you're actually moving in has nothing to do with your position on the map. You could row left for about 5 minutes, and still end up on the far right side of Crystal Lake. And Pinhead help you if you get caught in the forest. Most of the game consists of trying to protect the kids while avoiding, or eventually fighting, Jason. Of course, Jason isn't picky, as he'll also go after the other counselors, especially if they have low energy. As tempting as it is to not care, the next time you look at your map and see that you only have one guy left, oh yes, then you'll care. Or not.

Before we get to Jason, there are some other minor enemies to deal with. Most of them are Zombies who got tired of popping out of the ground to attack Sir Arthur, so they changed color and started pulling the same act in this game. The best enemies come while you're rowing, you get the one-pose jumping water things, and the gigantic evil birds. And really, what's an NES game without evil birds? At first, your

only weapon is an unlimited supply of rocks, but luckily, weapons, medicine, lighters, and other fun crap appears when you kill enemies, or even out of thin air, it's all good.

Of course, none of these enemies compare to the greatest enemy of all, indeed the saving grace of this game, **Jason's Mom's floating severed head.**

I remember the head being in one of the movies, but never floating around and dive-bombing people. The head is the only enemy besides Jason in the game that you can fight in an overhead Punch-Out style, so I guess she counts as a boss. Beating her usually nets you a crummy weapon of some sort, unless you beat her on a certain day, then you get her sweater. And not only can you parade around the campgrounds in a dead woman's sweater, it also causes Jason to (sometimes) not attack you. Maybe I need to rethink my "E" rating.

Speaking of the overhead perspective, there's one other area of the game I didn't mention, and that's inside the cabins. The sad thing is that this type of perspective was once called "3D" by developers, and people bought it. I personally can't stand it, and sure enough, it spawned the genre of First-Person Shooters, my most reviled of all genres next to RPG's. But enough of that tangent, as the only real point of the cabins is to rescue people from Jason in them, collect weapons/items, and find useless notes. When Jason is nearing a cabin, it blinks on the map, and you have a limited time to get there to save whoever's in trouble. Sure, the kids are all happy....but did you forget about someone?

\*Slow, heavy rhythmic breathing\* shoot. Jason looks like he's seen better days, but he can still put you down way quicker than anything else in the game, so be afraid. You have to employ sort of a duck and attack motion while flinging your weapon at him, until he gives up and says "You win ... for now." Then when you exit the cabin, he sneaks up behind you and throws a big axe into your back.

One other thing I should note, is that this game did the "three days to complete the game, time passes, etc." way before Majora's Mask, although it's far more primitive, and all sunset/dusk accomplishes in this game is making enemies attack you more, ala Castlevania II. The only problem was that at the time Friday the 13th came out, figuring out how to make this kind of game somewhat fun to play was still about 10 years off. Can't blame them for trying to cash in on the franchise though, it's not like this was the first, or last, movie-based game that sucked @\$\$.

Interestingly enough, LJN released an NES game based on the Nightmare on Elm Street series of movies right after this one. Although it didn't have nearly as much to do with the movies (aside from Freddy), it was far better than this game, likely due to it being developed by Rare, and also had a far more interesting title screen. So if you need your fix of horror gaming, grab Nightmare, which is an above average platformer, as opposed to whatever the hell this game is trying to be. There are definitely some good ideas here, but the tediousness, confusion and crappy control of anyone not named Mark or Crissy makes it a real pain to play. But if we've learned nothing else, we now know that the one way to revive this tired franchise is to film a Friday the 13th movie in which Jason forces a bunch of fat 12-year old nerds to play his boring game for an hour and a half. It'd scare me, at least.

**YOU AND YOUR FRIENDS ARE DEAD. GAME OVER.**



## 6 - Jekyll & Hyde: A Book Gone 8-Bit...

Licensed games are rarely good. NES games made by Bandai are rarely good. [Except this one! =P] When you throw in 19th century British literature, things go straight to hell.

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde was one of the first five NES games I ever owned. I was never any good at it. My brother was never any good at it. My father couldn't get more than a few feet into the game. We labeled the game a lost cause and set it aside for more exciting and playable games. A year or so later, we came into possession of a Game Genie. Since one of the codes was an invincibility code, I tried playing through the game again. Even when the game suddenly became beatable, it was still an awful game. I don't think our family ever touched the game again. The cartridge, depicting an unusual cross between Two-Face and Freddy Krueger, gathered dust for a long time.

I was not alone in my sentiment. If you do a search on GameFAQs, you will find reviews by a good number of people. ALL OF THEM are 1/10. Flash forward to today, when I played through the game again while looking for review fodder, since it was one of the more awful and obscure games I remembered playing. Not only can I beat the game without cheat codes now, but I've also discovered two things:

- \* This game is one of the least enjoyable games I've ever played
- \* This game has a worse reputation than it deserves

Great, now I'm starting to sound as bipolar as the game's protagonist.

The story "The Strange Case of DR. JEKYLL and MR. HYDE" was written by the famous Scottish author Robert Louis Stevenson. "DR. JEKYLL and MR. HYDE" became a best seller as soon as it was published in England in 1886, and is now famous throughout the world. Now, in this Nintendo game pack version, you can experience firsthand the struggle between Good and Evil for control of the human personality. Who will triumph - DR. JEKYLL or MR. HYDE?

When the manual spends more time explaining the novel's creation than the plot of the novel, one starts to wonder if the plot is any good. And what's with boldfacing both characters' names?

Then the manual gets to the actual storyline. Dr. Jekyll the scientist has crossed a line that man was not meant to cross. He has split the good and evil portions of his personality. Thus, when Dr. Jekyll becomes angry, he turns into Mr. Hyde. Although the plot originally examined this in terms of the battle between good and evil, the game doesn't really capture that theme as well as it claims. Mr. Hyde feels like nothing more than a powerful alterego, much like The Hulk, Amagon/Megagon, Bert of Monster Party fame, and the like. Some have told me that this is remarkably similar to Dr. Jekyll's portrayal in the movie "The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen." I never saw that film.

It gets worse. When Dr. Jekyll finally succumbs to his anger and becomes Mr. Hyde, it is the world that changes most of all. Much like Monster Party's first level (how many times am I going to reference that game in this review?), the world becomes much more dark and sinister. The generally normal townsfolk

are replaced by demons, making Hyde's rampant violence seem almost benevolent. Or, at the very least, self-preserving. I guess no one would want to play as Mr. Hyde if he was a murderous felon. Actually, they might. There's a market for those kinds of games now.

FINALLY, after two pages of fluff text, we actually get to the plot of the game. Oh. Jekyll's off to marry Miss Millicent, and it just so happens that a lot of people are around to piss him off. Also, the demons want Hyde dead, but that's normal for demons.

The game says NOTHING about this. The opening sequence features a long-armed hand that shows up nowhere else in the game, images of Jekyll messing around with chemicals (hasn't he learned his lesson?), and the Hermit music from Rygar. If it wasn't for the manual, how would anyone be expected to know what's going on?

The instant you start controlling Jekyll, you know it's going to be a lousy game. He can do nothing but walk really slowly, jump, and poke uselessly with his cane. Amazingly, his jumps have decent non-platformer height and distance, and Jekyll can change his trajectory slightly in midair, so he manages to outjump the NES Castlevania Belmonts.

Once you get going, the goal of the game becomes apparent. Walk to the right and dodge things. Listen to the one song that plays through EVERY LEVEL, changing only when certain interesting characters appear. Repeat. When things hit you, they decrease either your Life or your Meter. If you run out of Meter, you turn into Hyde. If you run out of Life, you turn into Hyde and then drop dead. It must be great to be Jekyll. He doesn't have to be present at his own death.

Once you are turned into Hyde, you can jump a lot higher, punch, and throw a really weird oscillating ball the manual calls a **PSYCHO-WAVE** (with bold) by holding up when punching. Hyde's goal is as simple as Jekyll's. Get scrolled against your will to the left and kill things to relieve stress so that you can turn back into Jekyll. Hear a different song that is also repetitive, while waiting for interesting song changes. Occasionally pick up the coins that the enemies drop.

Remember that whole "Good vs. Evil" thing I mentioned before? It only exists in one form. According to the manual, if you travel more distance as Hyde than as Jekyll (which is tempting, since the Hyde parts are usually more fun), it counts as "Evil Triumphant Over Good", which leads to "Smiting Hyde With Lightning", which leads to "Game Over".

You know, I don't think I've read a single review that knows why Hyde gets struck by lightning and falls down and dies. It is a stupid gimmick, but it's not as random as people say. And, even more amazingly, there's a substantial reward if you circumvent the gimmick! I'll explain in due time.

I'm impressed by the instruction manual. Despite the somewhat generic characters Jekyll meets, it manages to give the names and details of about half of the entire cast of the game.

You see that blond-haired little urchin that keeps running around and occasionally shooting you with his slingshot? His name is Billy Pones, and he's annoying you because he has a crush on Miss Millicent. Yeah. Too bad the manual doesn't explain why you run into him at least 20 times during the game.

Anyways, I'll Just Stick to the Interesting People...

The Bomb Maniac - Don't you hate it when that happens? You're just walking to the church one beautiful day and things aren't going your way, what with the cats and dogs and occasional people bumping into you? And just when you think everything's going to get better, a guy walks up to you, plants a lit bomb at your feet, and runs off? Then the bomb explodes and kills you if you don't get out of the way? Yeah, I've had days like that. Fortunately, if you're just barely within range, most of the damage will be psychological. Still, there are apparently 50 of these guys walking around, and in some places you can't go a few feet without meeting another one.

Those Maniacs are clever. In the first stage, the bombs have fairly short fuses, and your best hope for survival is to backtrack. In the next three stages, the fuses get progressively longer, allowing you to walk past and get out of range that way. Then in the fifth stage, the fuses become shorter than they were in the first stage. If you try walking past the bombs at this point, you die. Bastards.

Rosette Ranright - She's a nice lady and the daughter of one of Jekyll's friends. She spends her time waving out the window of one of the buildings you're walking by. If you stop inside to meet her, she'll... well, we never do see what happens, but the end result is that you get a bagful of money, your wounds are healed, and you become completely calm. One can only speculate about what prompted this effect to take place. Then again, sometimes when you meet her, she'll take every cent you own and make you so mad that you instantly become Hyde. Pfft. Women.

Elena McCowen - She's a fat lady, and she sings! Unfortunately, she's completely tone-deaf, so her cacophony makes the game's music worse than it already was. This also sends a large volley of notes into the air for you to dodge. The easiest way to get past her is to walk up to her and give her about 8 coins so that she will shut up. And people say this is one of the worst games of all time.

If you poke her with your cane, you automatically get pissed off and become Hyde, taking no damage in the process. I'm not sure why this happens. Did your cane get stuck in her folds of fat? Did you cause her to scream, breaking your eardrums? The world may never know.

Arnold Ebetts - He's got a hunting rifle and he's pointing in your general direction! This would be bad if he wasn't a well-trained hunter. He'll never end up shooting you. (The manual suggests otherwise.) The problem is that when he shoots, birds fall out of the sky. And onto your head. It can be tricky trying to dodge dropping birds and bird droppings at the same time. What do you mean, you'd rather hear about the bird droppings than Arnold?

Bees - Actually, these tiny insects are pretty normal. They simply fly around and do damage if they hit you. So why are they here? \*loud fanfare\* They can be killed by Jekyll's cane! They're the only reason for that completely pathetic move to be in the game! Sorry. That cane really gets to me.

Barrels - I guess someone decided that it wouldn't be a true "dodge the obstacles" game for Jekyll if he didn't have to jump over barrels that were thrown at him. Well, we see how well that worked! Mario's starring in games on the Gamecube, and Jekyll's gotten no further than a couple of licensed games! Thank goodness.

Maybe it's just me, but this game seems to have a worse problem than the traditional "slowdown" when there are many objects on the screen. This game suffers from "speedup". Everything starts going really

fast, and Jekyll loses a lot of invincibility time that he normally enjoys when he takes a hit. I've been hit FOUR TIMES by a single barrel before. This is bad for the life bar.

Rachel - You remind her of her late husband, so she stands on the balcony and throws hearts in all directions. The stupid timesaving programmers couldn't even make her NOT look like Elena and NOT sing the same godawful song while attacking with the same pattern.

The Urinating Statue - No, it's nowhere within range of your fine tuxedo. I just wanted to bring it up.

Shepp - The most common enemy in the game is a hopping brain with legs named Shepp. Are you sure this is one of the worst games of all time?

Onoria - An old woman walks up to you and the music changes. There's a reason why the music changes. If you don't hit her fast enough, she hits you as she passes by. Yeah.

Actually, she gets a better move in later levels. She sheds her skin (which can do damage) and becomes a large snake that looks like it was ripped directly from A Nightmare on Elm Street. Now THAT'S worth a different theme song!

Nunu - A crawling baby that suddenly becomes tall when you get close. It's surprisingly weak for having such a nice gimmick.

Corum the Skull - It's a skull. Its special attack is opening its mouth so wide that it takes up half of the screen's height and dashing forward. Too many of Hyde's enemies leave me without any good punchlines. Oh well.

Eproschka - Okay, a small winged demon that blows bubbles through a trumpet while it flies around is a good idea and all, but could someone please tell me how to pronounce his name?

Letule - One of the last enemies in the game, it's a head that appears out of nowhere, spins around, and spits three flames at you. It doesn't seem to move, though, so if you dodge the first volley, you can hit it before it appears again. Come to think of it, this one isn't really all that weird, but I need to reference this guy later.

Compounding this game's crimes is the large number of glitches that occur during an average game. I'm pretty sure it's not the ROM I'm using, since I've seen a lot of these before on the NES.

-At several points in the last stage, Jekyll has to jump over a pyramid-shaped set of large steps. The collision detection on this thing is atrocious. Most of the time, Jekyll accidentally falls through the stairs and off the bottom of the screen, reappears at the top of the screen, lands on the stairs, and continues walking as if nothing happened.

-I've had a Bomb Maniac plant a bomb that never explodes. It follows Jekyll at the bottom of the screen and never does anything. This is actually interesting, since the odd thing about these bombs is that Jekyll never turns into Hyde until they've exploded. You can stay as Jekyll forever! In fact, you can run out of life bar, continue walking as if nothing happened, find Rosette and get healed, and then have the bomb go off when the next Maniac comes along and survive the whole encounter!

-In the fourth and fifth levels, when Jekyll moves to higher ground, the Bomb Maniac continues to appear at ground level. As a result, his bombs never reach you. It's a good thing, but it seems sloppy.

-Hyde autojumps when he reaches ground that's higher than the ground he's walking on. I guess this is to prevent him from getting crushed off the side of the screen, but it causes some weird multiple jumps at times, especially in places where there are pits. (I forgot to mention that. Some of Hyde's levels include fatal falls. This is a single life game, so falling means Game Over. It's Battle of Olympus all over again!)

Once you've successfully traversed all six levels with Jekyll, he reaches the chapel. As he enters, the camera cuts to the chapel, the Wedding March plays (in a really annoying loop), and the word "END" appears.

That's it.

I have heard many people complain about this. They're right to do so. That may be one of the biggest letdown endings I've seen.

But hey! Did you know there's a better ending? One that I haven't seen anywhere on the Internet? It's true!

As I've mentioned before, if Hyde gets to the point where Jekyll last left off, he gets struck by lightning and the game ends. I've also mentioned that people (including me) hate this. But there's one interesting stipulation.

Early in the sixth level, Hyde's path suddenly takes a turn upward. After he makes a few forced jumps, he goes to a completely different stage where he jumps across the rooftops of several buildings. Once he reaches this stage, he'll never get struck by lightning, so he only has to worry about his life gauge (and possibly becoming Jekyll again).

As a result, it is possible for Hyde to arrive at the chapel before Jekyll ever does!

If Hyde makes it there first, the Meter fills entirely to the Hyde side, and a red Letule (you know, the spinning flame-spitting face) starts teleporting around. As Hyde hits him with his attacks, his Meter slowly goes back to Jekyll. If the Meter reaches Jekyll before Hyde runs out of life, the red Letule explodes 46 times and dies, Hyde turns back into Jekyll again,...

...and Jekyll awakens to find that **THERE ARE NO MORE ENEMIES IN THE GAME**. The remainder of the walk to the chapel is a breeze now (although painfully boring), and he can easily make it in time to see Millicent waiting outside the chapel, which she never did in the other ending.

The game cuts to the front of the chapel, the Wedding March becomes annoying again, and we see Millicent and Jekyll in fine white outfits walking toward each other (with ridiculously slow frame rate) and entering the chapel together. Then we see a spotlight scene where they kiss, the screen fades out, and the word "END" appears on a black background. Then after a short period of time, you hear the sound of a bomb, lightning strikes, the "END" inverts and you see Hyde's silhouette holding a cross of some kind.

Okay, it's not THAT great of an ending, but it certainly beats the crappy excuse for a regular ending. And you heard it here first! (Assuming that I didn't miss an obscure website that actually mentions this ending.)

This is the kind of thing that makes me realize that this game might have been okay, if only it didn't suck so much!

### **WAIT A MINUTE...**

I believe I have determined the reason why this game isn't as bad as most people say, and as I remember from my youth. I've been playing the Japanese version. After finding the US version, I notice that there are quite a few differences.

-The title screen looks different, and includes ONE JAPANESE PHRASE! The only one in the game!

-The Japanese levels have a lot more variety. The US levels are Japanese levels 4, 5, 4, 2, 5, and 6 in that order. Two entire level designs have been lost for no reason!

-Since the fourth and fifth levels are overused, the Bomb Maniac appears weak early on. He's frequently dropping bombs where they can't reach you. On the other hand, his fuses start long and become steadily shorter as you progress, losing the whole "tricky fuse length" thing I mentioned before.

-A large number of enemies are missing. These include the two people in windows who throw objects at each other, Carotta the bow-wielding mermaid, and the entire character of Rosette Ranright (effectively eliminating your main source of income and healing, as well as the main reason to enter doors). In addition, all instances of Rachel become Elena, but I have no problem with that. Rachel was essentially Elena anyway.

The only thing these enemies have in common is that they have alternate themes. Could the version change be because the US version couldn't handle the music? Well, that's just great. They just made the US music MORE BORING.

-Hyde enemies deal a lot more damage than before. Jekyll enemies tend to deal either stress or damage, but not both. (Exceptions include bombs, notes, and barrels.) In the Japanese version, damage was spread out between the two meters.

-By the time Onoria shows up in the US version, she's always turning into the snake. The early moments in which she shows up and does nothing are gone.

-The "fall through ground" bug is largely removed in the US version.

-Millicent isn't waiting outside the chapel after you've beaten the red Letule. Once you enter the chapel, the improved ending continues as usual.

Amazingly enough, the urinating statue remains in the US version. Even more amazingly, the 5th level (the graveyard) includes a large number of crosses in the background. Some of them are covered in

blood. These were NOT removed in the US version. Given this fact, I have no idea why the versions are different in the first place, other than the music thing.

Hopefully you've learned something from this review. I have. Reading reviews of unusual and awful games can give you a really bad impression of them. But even the worst game isn't as bad as many people make it out to be.

Don't play this game. Stay as far away from it as possible. Then again, if you're willing to play a mediocre game, go ahead and play it. You might be surprised by how unawful it sometimes gets!

Of course, that's more likely if you come across the Japanese version.

## 7 - Sonic Spinball: Let's Have a Pinball Party.

As we're all well aware of, Sonic is to Sega what Mario is to Nintendo. But every popular video game mascot usually has one or two equivalents to "Mario Is Missing", and the furry blue Hedgehog is no exception. While Sonic Spinball isn't necessarily that bad (or supposedly educational) of a game, although it can be insanely frustrating at times, it just doesn't seem to fit. But that's OK, if it weren't for games like these, I'd probably be out doing something with my life.

The story does in fact fall into traditional Sonic lore: Dr. Robotnik is up to his evil schemes once again, which usually pretty much pertain to turning cute little animals into evil robots. The Veg-O-Machine is what's doing it, and Sonic's duty is to bust it up and free the animals. However, it's not as easy as running through loops and collecting rings this time; oh no. This time around, Dr. Robotnik constructed a magnificent PINBALL FORTRESS. I'm not even going to begin to try and guess what was going through the egg-shaped bastards head at this point, because unless your name is Dr. Wily, your guess is as good as mine.

Starting off, your only help is a marquee mounted to the top of the screen that shows your score, which is occasionally replaced with inspirational words, sarcastic jabs when you screw up, and generally useless text. At this point, the controls fall into those of traditional pinball games - mostly. A and B control the left and right flippers, C flips up both. A couple of things should be noted. First, not all (though most) of your time will be spent in pinballish mode. Occasionally, you'll end up on solid ground. Sonic can make use of his patented spin dash (hold down, repeatedly tap A, B or C) or jump (tap any button) to better his situation. Also, unlike most pinball games, you can control Sonic's movement in the air and ease him in different directions without getting a damned "TILT" message. This is extremely helpful when trying to get into all the wonderful nooks and crannies you'll need to enter to help you find the Chaos Emeralds.

Yep, that's right, after collecting all 7 in the last game, Sonic must have had a hole in his pocket or something, because they're all gone again. If my math is correct, there are a total of 16 in this game, and not collecting them all is not an option. Oh, and they're all blue. Lazy bastards. Anyway, you need to collect between 3-5 Emeralds per stage to gain access to the Boss Room, then defeat the boss to move on. Simple, no? You're damn right "no". Let's see why that is.

**STAGE 1: TOXIC CAVES** - After flying toward the Fortress on your shoddy plane and promptly getting shot down due to Tails' horrendous flying abilities, you end up in the drink. From there, it's off into pinball land. The Toxic Caves are relatively simple; a main area with two tubes leading to identical acid-filled areas, a mine cart in between, and the boss above that. What is it with video games and mine carts? The first thing you'll notice is that there's a tiny platform between your flippers. Yeah, like that's gonna help. First of all, if you fall at an angle, you'll miss the platform completely, and Sonic will flail his arms like a pansy. And even if you land on it, you'd better get used to the "jump" buttons real quick, or else a giant mechanical dragon thing will eat you for lunch.

Here's where placement first comes in. You have to squeeze into two separate upper chambers, bounce off three grey worms, and knock yourself into switches that drain the slime in a big tub that houses and



Emerald. Once this occurs, you can shoot Sonic into the filthy pipes that lead to the acid rooms. There's no platform here, just a steel barrel with an oar. Yes, a steel barrel with an oar, and one that moves around on top of that. Your job here is to shoot Sonic into the loop where he can grab the switch that lowers the mine cart track, then either bust 3 barrels or loop 3 laps to gain access to the tube that leads to the mine cart area. Press left or right to choose your course, and DO NOT go in a direction in which you didn't lower the bridge, because you'll crash, have to start over, and feel like a real dumbass. Doing it right twice will net you two emeralds, and getting to the cart the third time will send you plummeting, as someone seems to have stolen the cart. Never fear though, you'll fall right into the now-drained tub that contains the third Emerald. Onto the boss:

SCORPIUS: One downside to this game is that all the bosses, although impressive looking, are complete pussies. The only problem is falling through the flippers; do that and you'll have to make your way alllll the way back to the boss room, which is a real pain in the Robotnik. To beat Scorpius, all you have to do is jump inside his tail and bounce around until he loses it. Then, bounce off his back until he eats it. You can trigger the four switches above his head to release a barrage of falling rocks, but it really isn't worth the effort. After his demise, you go on to the BONUS ROUND! It's a neat little gimmick pinball game that Sonic himself plays, where the board will shout slogans at you as you gain points such as "Hog Wild", "Grand Slam", "Master Your @\$\$", etc. I might have made the last one up or stolen it from The Simpsons, I'm not sure. All the Bonus Round gives you is points, but it's a fun little interlude. The point of this one is to free your animal friends from those tubes, then slam into Robotnik. Level 2 awaits.

STAGE 2: LAVA POWERHOUSE - The music in this one kicks @\$\$\$. LP is a bit more complex than the previous level, but I actually think it's easier. The only really bothersome part is the steam area, where you have to use blasts of steam (triggered by the A, B, or C button) to blast Sonic up into a tube. However, the steam is not nearly enough; you must boost yourself up off of an evil robotic chicken, and even if you hit it slightly wrong, you bounce all over the damn place for 20 seconds before regaining control. Grugh.

Basically, all there is to this level is busting through doors, using the chicken & steam room to get to the upper levels, busting corks, entering steam vents (rapidly press any button to propel Sonic up), and collecting the 3 Chaos Emeralds. After that's taken care of, move up through all the Chicken rooms to fight the ROBOILER.

ROBOILER: It's a big boiler with four floating Robotnik heads floating around in it. Please, don't try to make any sense of it, that's EXACTLY what Robotnik wants you to do. Instead, fire your little blue buddy up the sides, bust through the doors, wait for the steam to stop blowing, and jump in. Bounce around until one head is destroyed, then the others will vanish as you fall out the bottom and repeat the process 3 times to beat the stupid-@\$\$ boiler and move on to a level that you might actually have trouble with if you were plastered and your controller was covered in mustard. But don't forget to play the "bash in Robotnik's teeth" Bonus Game!

STAGE 3: THE MACHINE - Now, I know you're tempted to jump into this incredibly originally-titled level, but hold your horses there, Charlie. You must now collect 5 Chaos Emeralds as opposed to three, and it'll take a lot more luck and skill than the previous two levels did. Well, that's a lie; you just need to keep from pulling your hair out while trying to figure out what the hell a Flipper Catch is.

The Machine isn't really all that difficult, just a bit more complex and frustrating. Your first job is to grab

onto this moving platform, and then timing your jump into this little space between electrodes. At this point, Sonic will proceed to get the living crap shocked out of him, but it's all good, as these will stop the big wheels and allow you access to other areas and some Emerald goodness. You'll probably end up in the Piston Room, which bothered the holy hell out of me for insane amounts of time, because I couldn't figure out what the marquee meant by fracking "Flipper Catch". It's like that damned cylinder in Act 2 of Carnival Night Zone in Sonic 3 ... argh. I digress. Anyway, you have to use the flipper to hold Sonic in one place, and then the wall-mounted flipper will rise, allowing you a better shot at the little chutes. Once you get through this part, collect the stray Emeralds, and find another Emerald after bouncing around the Animal Prison for awhile, you'll be all set.

VEG-O-MACHINE: This is the bad boy that's turning all the little animals into evil robots, and it also kinda looks like a jukebox with a swimming pool inside. In any event, you have to bust it the hell up to move on. Use the electric beams to propel Sonic into the glass tubes, and keep smacking poor Sonic into them until they break. You can use one electric beam to break both; the momentum will be enough. Then, just shoot Sonic right up the Machine's @\$\$ to crack the glass. After a few times, the Veg-o will be gone-o. Then you can bust up one of those Sonic end-level things in the bonus round, and watch Robotnik make his \*completely unexpected\* escape to the last level.

STAGE 4: SHOWDOWN - Since Robotnik couldn't afford to repair the Death Egg in time for this game, you'll attempt to catch his getaway ship in the fiery remnants of the Pinball Fortress and the skies above. This one can really piss you off if you don't know what you're doing, so it's a very good thing that I do know what I'm doing.

The easiest Emerald of the 5 to snag is one at the opening screen, though it's protected by several steel girders which need to be eliminated one by one by hitting a switch several times. Soon, all hell breaks loose as you plow through the "chimney" and into the wild black yonder of space. Then it becomes a free for all of breaking through girders, triggering rocks to blast up your @\$\$ so you don't fall into the boiling lava, and finding your way into the right Launching Socks. Yes, you read that correctly, I'll explain later. The thing about this level is that the upper half is essentially open space with Robotnik's ship hovering amidst some odd looking space balloons, and the bottom part is practically claustrophobifying. Polas words are the best words, folks. After using all your wits and reflexes to complete your Emerald collection, you can enter Robotnik's Ship through one of two side entrances, or go straight up the bottom after bouncing between descending platforms. And now, it's party time.

ROBOTNIK'S SHIP: Now, I can imagine some intimidation here, as Robotnik has inexplicably become ten times bigger than Sonic. But fear not, all you have to do is shoot up the chutes and slam into the glass part of Robotnik's inner ship 10 times. Unfortunately for you, there are claws and Launching Socks protecting said chutes. The claws will drop you in little compartments that you'll need to spin dash out of, and the Socks will shoot you at a window. Hit it three times, and you're sent flying into space. Good luck getting back up there. The only way to neutralize all these wacky gizmos is to hit the switch on the underside of Robotnik's inner ship 5 times. You'll have to count this yourself, and if you miscount and shoot Sonic through the chutes, it's the window for you. After the obstacles have been taken away, you'll have a limited time to make as many laps over and into Robotnik as possible. You'll know your time is up when Robotnik takes over the top marquee and yells "SMELL MY SOCKS!". No kidding. That means that the Socks of Doom are indeed back in place, as well as the claws, so you need to go for the 5 spot on the switch again. 10 laps into Robotnik and victory is yours.

I'm thinking this game was a dare from Mario, who spends countless hours ramming his poor head into bricks to free powerful plant life. Because after all the crap I put Sonic through, as well as into, in this game, he must have one hell of a headache. It's not a long game (unless you suck at pinball and critical thinking), nor can it really be considered a "true" Sonic game. But it's a satisfying little number with everyone's favorite Hedgehog, and it's definitely an original concept. Pinball Adventure, Pinball RPG ... what's next?

## 8 - The Commodore 64: Wierdest Stuff you'll find...

One day, My friend gave me a CD, but it wasn't just ANY CD, It was a Commodore 64 CD! It's a CD with a Commodore 64 emulator and a load of ROM's. Not sure whether or nor it's legal, the only mention of copyrights is a readme file saying "The manufacturers and/or distributors/resellers hold no responsibility (sic) for the contents of this CD ROM. If your work is included within this production, and you wish for it to be removed, you can write to the address below, and it will be removed from the next version", and providing a link to the emulation site that the ROM's were downloaded from.

As you probably guessed, there's some downright weird stuff here.

### SALIVA KID

This one's a bit dodgy. The main character looks suspiciously similar to Sonic, and the tortoise monsters seem to have been ripped from Super Mario. Saliva Kid's attack is, erm, spitting, but this doesn't seem to hurt the bad guys at all. You start off in a grassy place with palm trees (much like the Sonic games), where you're up against crumbling bridges, motion-sensitive coconuts that fall on you when you get too close and birds. Evil birds from the ninth circle of hell. Level 2 pits you against high-speed snowmen, level 3 sees Saliva Kid underwater, robbing him of his spitting power. I can't get past level 4, the space world. Oh well. You also pick up pink gems. Pinky gemmy gems. Pinky pinky gemmy gemmy.

### THANATOS

Burninating the countryside, burninating the peasants, burninating all the people in their THATCHED-ROOFED COTTAGES! THATCHED-ROOFED COTTAGES!

The graphics are good for a C64 game, but I can't work out what you're supposed to do. You play as a dragon and start off flying over the sea, occasionally seeing ships go past. You can breathe fire, but that doesn't hurt the ships. After a while you reach dry land, where blue people who look like toilet-door signs fire arrows at you. You can take THEM out with your fire, but their arrows don't seem to affect you in any way. A bit later on you reach the sea again, and so forth. That seems to be it - you just fly back and forth burning blue toilet-door signs. Maybe the programmer had a bad day and wanted some stress relief.

As a side note, Thanatos is the Greek god of death. His other notable video game roles include his appearance as a snake in Kid Icarus and a large headless woman in Final Fantasy 2.

### THUNDERCATS

I loved Thundercats, dont get me wrong, but there was some stupid things about it... I mean, the hero was called "Lion-o", the bad guy was called "Mumm-Ra" and the catchphrase was "Thundercats, ho!", which will never rank alongside "Cowabunga dudes", "Go, go, Power Rangers" or "PiiiiikaaaaaCHUUUU". And what was it with the bald blue guy?

If it had been ThunderCOWS, on the other hand, it would've been a classic. Think about it - Guernsy-O! Holstein-Ra! Thundercows, ho! There aren't enough cartoons about cows - but Thundercows would change all that.

In the game you take control of some prat who I'm guessing is Lion-o. You run left hitting tip-toeing pigs with your sword, and eventually you meet these killer midgets which you can only kill if you use your sword while crouching. Level 2 adds bats and fat pink aardvark men to the mix. If only the cartoon was more like the game...

## **POPEYE**

No, that's not the title screen - the in-game graphics in Popeye are quite large. This just makes them scarier, though. Olive leans out the window and her face convulses grotesquely, her eyes looking back and fourth and squinting as she silently mouths. Popeye struts around in slo-mo, and when he gets hit the Popeye theme plays and a tin of spinach appears out of nowhere and empties itself into his mouth, as if held by an invisible hand. Poltergeists? I always knew that there was something suspicious about that spinach (I think it has additives, if you know what I mean), but I never suspected anything supernatural. This explains Olive's problem, too - she's possessed.

As Popeye, you have to avoid Brutus, big bird things, flying saucers and dragons, while climbing on ropes and breaking into houses to steal keys. He's Popeye the sailor man, he's Popeye the sailor man, his criminal tendencies are strong to the finich, 'cause he summoned the forces of Satan himself, he's Popeye the sailor man!

## **BIOGRANNY**

This one's just weird. You play as an old woman who has to whack children with her walking stick as they come home from school, while avoiding signs hurled at you by a lollypop lady. Don't you just miss bedroom programmers?

Probably the most disturbing thing about this game is that the senseless carnage is accompanied by cheerful, plinkity music and graphics resembling children's drawings. Brr.

Oh, and when Granny gets killed, some kind of demonic mask appears over her corpse...

## **DIZZY: THE ULTIMATE CARTOON ADVENTURE**

Now this one IS a classic. No, really. Dizzy uses the using-objects-to-solve-puzzles formula of King's Quest and Monkey Island, but it's a platform game. The idea was pretty successful, as Dizzy got a load of sequels, and fan games are still being made to this day.

Dizzy is an egg whose mission is to collect ingredients for a potion with which to defeat the wizard Zacks. It sounds cute but, for the "ultimate cartoon adventure", Dizzy is really grim, man, and the cute main character and references to Wile E. Coyote, Ghostbusters and Dangermouse don't change that. I'm guessing that, by "cartoon", the creators were referring to the stuff Chanel 4 used to show in late-night graveyard slots or squeezed between children's blocks (like Fist of the North Star or that creepy thing with the origami ducks). The perpetual black sky and lack of music - Dizzy's footsteps and the occasional crunching of fallen apples are pretty much the only sounds - give the game a rather dismal mood. Dizzy's village is an eerie ghost town with no signs of life. Aside from Dizzy and Zacks, the world is inhabited only by animals and a ghost. Amongst the potion ingredients are a leprechaun's wig and a troll's brew, but trolls and leprechauns are nowhere to be seen, their possessions apparently long since abandoned. There are, on the other hand, an awful lot of gravestones and skeletons.

And there's a load of floating banners quoting The Green Eye of the Little Yellow God, a poem about a guy who gets killed while getting a present for his girlfriend. Cheery stuff.

## SAVE NEW YORK

If there was ever a morally ambiguous C64 game, Save New York is it. Ostensibly, you're supposed to protect the Big Apple from alien invaders - but the aliens aren't posing a threat. They only do damage if you fly into one of them. Sure, on level 2 they start shooting back, but that's just self defense - by then, you'll have killed a number of them. Conversely, your shots are all too capable of damaging the skyscrapers. Out of curiosity, I decided to completely destroy New York. My punishment? Nothing. The poor aliens were still the "bad guys". Your allies also need to get their priorities straight. For some time I thought that the blue planes that fly past providing me with extra fuel were bombers and gunned them down on sight - but they still kept on coming, eager to help me out. Even after I'd totally levelled the Big Apple, they still happily provided me with fuel. What a twisted world we live in.

Another oddity is that you start out on foot, and are able to either climb into your fighter or explore the subway - where you apparently can't do anything other than get run over. Maybe the designers were subtly making a point with this - if you choose to fight the alien tourists, then you "lose" long before your lives run out. If you opt to get killed by a train without hurting any innocents, then you are a true winner. Deep, man.

So, what's New York like when it's not being shot to pieces by a crazy fighter pilot? This game lets you find out! Yes, this could be the world's first tour-em-up. You play as a guy in a car, but you can freely leave said car to visit areas such as the Empire State Building. And getting out of your car isn't a bad idea at all. See the crumpled-looking cars in the screenshot? Yes, those are crashes. NYC is home to some of the worst drivers in videogamedom. Not only that, but driving on the pavement and up the wrong side of the road is practically the only way you'll avoid them.

And here we have the Empire State Building. Once inside, the game turns into a Donkey Kong-esque platformer where you have to get a pretzel while avoiding two evil dudes. Grant's Tomb and the UN building are much the same, but there is some variety. The mart sees you smuggling a pretzel past sliding doors and big-headed people with no trousers, while the zoo has the hero caging in escaped animals and the bank forces him to make his way from one end to the other, avoiding streams of bullets fired by bank robbers.

I haven't yet managed to finish the mart or zoo, so I don't know what happens in the end. Precisely what is the hero planning to do with the pretzels he's so desperate to find? Go to Washington DC and assassinate George Bush in a titanic boss fight?

## YETI

This one sees the bold hero trekking across Tibet to capture the abominable snowman, sampling exotic Eastern mysticism and bizarre enemies along the way. Don't expect the National Geographic - this one portrays Tibetan Buddhism about as accurately as Neon Genesis Evangelion portrays Christianity. Upon starting the game, the first enemy you encounter is none other than Buddha himself, who practices the famous Buddhist practice of hurling whacking great lightning bolts at you. To progress, you must dispatch him with a single well-placed grenade. Later on you're confronted by some Buddhist monks, who are decidedly dischuffed with you. You can gun them down, but more keep coming out the monestary. How do you deal with them? KABOOM!

US/Tibet relations were somewhat shaky in the 80's.

## HUNCHBACK

Bizarre manglings of Victor Hugo's novel didn't start with the Disney movie. This platformer starts with Quasimodo skipping along outside Notre Dame while "Teddybears' Picnic" plays in the background. He then climbs up the wall and the game begins. Your task is to make him walk back to the other side. But, uh, why on Earth didn't he just climb up there in the first place? Quasimodo, you clueless oaf. You won't be finding any tragic historic romance, but you will go up against pits, arrows, ridiculously out-of-scale soldiers and fuzzy purple balls. 19th century French literature at its finest, I'm sure. Hunchback was popular enough to spawn imitators such as "Quasimodo" and sequels such as "Hunchback at the Olympics". Sadly, a Commodore 64 adaptation of Les Miserables was never produced.

## HERCULES

Bizarre manglings of Greek mythology didn't begin with the Disney movie, but while Hunchback was

cool, this one... isn't. Before you begin one of the randomly-chosen levels, a screen of text tells you the story of one of Hercules' labours, following the original legends to a T. The actual game, however, doesn't; each labour involves Hercules jumping around platforms, climbing on ropes, dodging bad guys (crabs, pterodactyls, one-eyed tentacled creatures - that kind of thing) in pursuit of a level-specific object - the hydra, a golden apple, etc.

But there's a twist - not all of the platforms are solid. Some of them disappear underneath you, others burst into flame when you tread on them, killing Hercules in the process. And guess what? There's absolutely no way whatsoever to distinguish between them and safe platforms. You've just got to use trial and error.

I couldn't be bothered to finish a single labour, really. Sorry, Herc, looks like you won't be forgiven for killing your family any time soon.

## **BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA**

It's primitive side-scrolling beat 'em up time - with Kurt Russell! Or, er, a blocky thing that's meant to look like him. Digikurt must travel through a faithfully rendered interpretation of Chinatown (i.e. a series of sub Hana-Barbara looping backgrounds) battling powerful supernatural enemies (i.e. a bunch of blocky guys who politely attack you one at a time). Mr. Russell is aided by Egg and Wang, but once you get into a fight they run offscreen - they only actually do anything when Kurt dies, at which point one of the other two will fill his shoes. Brave, brave men.

Some of the artificial intelligence is a little questionable. If you get behind a bad guy, then you just need to keep punching the air - he'll then "advance" to the right, off the edge of the screen. Great stuff.

Fact of the day: at 3,696,100 square miles, China isn't that little.



## 9 - Hotel Mario: It's No Holiday Inn.

There isn't anyone out there that's picked up a game controller without knowing the name of Mario. I don't care if you're 6 or 60, or what your favorite type of game is, even if you're sick of Mario's smiling, mustached face, you must recognize his iconic status. I can't blame you if you are sick of him, though - I mean, it's common knowledge at this point that he'll accept a new Nintendo game in just about any genre imaginable, but recently, he's been seen whoring himself out to every company that comes calling. However, there was a time when Mario made these types of deals under the table, thinking no one would find out, just like when Bruce Willis goes to Japan to film a BBQ Sauce commercial. Back in the mid-1990's, the N64 was still years away, Baby Mario and Yoshi were getting all the play on SNES, what was a fat, Italian plumber to do?

Contrary to what you may believe, Super Mario Sunshine wasn't Mario's first foray into an evil hotel. And those of us who pine for a simpler time can rejoice in the fact that Super Mario World wasn't the final appearance of the Koopalings (aside from a recent cameo appearance). While many Zelda fans are painfully aware of Link's lamented CD-I appearances, far fewer folks seem to remember Mario's deal with the devil/Philips that came a little while later. Of those who do, even fewer actually know what the hell the game is all about. Fear not, Retroholics, for your old pal Doom is here to serve as your tour guide through the scenic, two-star facilities of Hotel Mario.

Wow. All right, I'm gonna try to do this story justice, but you'll have to take my word that it's far worse to actually watch and hear it. A trend you'll notice with Philips games is that they weren't exactly what you'd call "high budget". Or "medium budget". In this case, it's somewhere around "You can probably find better animation at Newgrounds ". For example: Mario regularly fluctuates between 150 and 400 pounds depending on the way he's standing. Then there's the voices. The few times you hear Toadstool (Peach, you younguns), she sounds like the late Julia Child. If you don't know who that is, and you probably don't, either google it or consider yourself lucky, one of the two. Mario sounds like the token fat, bald, old guy from any 10-15 year old Nyquil commercial. You know, where he sits up and says "Ohh, my achin' schnozz!" in a deep voice and thick accent while his wife (wearing curlers) looks on disapprovingly. Luigi is actually the closest to what Nintendo and Charles Martinet eventually made him sound like - sometimes. You see, there are times when Luigi seems very distinctive. There are other times when Luigi sounds like the Mario guy doing a higher voice while holding his nose. My guess is that the \$25 fee and deli sandwich could only be paid to one of the male voice actors, and Luigi therefore walked soon after the intro scene. Speaking of which, let's get to it.

We begin with Mario and Luigi happily entering the Mushroom Kingdom. All is well, as Mario thinks aloud about how nice it was of Princess Toadstool to invite them on a picnic, and Luigi hams it up by saying "I hope-a she made lotsa spaghetti!" while practically smiling and winking at the camera. But hark! From a distance, the nefarious Bowser laughs to himself, as the Bros. are about to discover his evil plan. Indeed, Mario finds a curious note pinned to the ... next door to the Mushroom Kingdom, I guess. You'd think by looking at the "Klub Koopa Rezort" sign that Bowser isn't the most literate giant turtle thing, but he was able to write an entire "Dear Pesky Plumbers" letter. Mario reads out loud, informing Luigi and the 6 people who have played this stupid game that Bowser has turned the Mushroom Kingdom into his own personal luxury resort, and that Mario and Luigi have been dared to siege his

hotels and rescue the Princess. A plot worthy of Captain Lou Albano himself. Seriously, this could have gone in between the "Bowser dresses like a cowboy" and "Bowser dresses like Napoleon" episodes of the Super Show, no one would have noticed.

So Mario exclaims that he and Luigi must rescue Toadstool, then Luigi really does point into the camera, and says "And-a-YOU gotta help!" In a final, egregious breach of video game kayfabe, Mario slyly raises his finger and also looks into the camera, then helpfully tells you to consult your manual if you don't know what the hell you're doing. Sadly, I do know what to do, and that's begin the journey through the seven hotels seen in the above map screen. To quote Mario from a slightly more popular game, here we go!

All things considered, this game falls into the old-school puzzle genre more than any other. Remember Elevator Action? That's the best comparison I can give you. Of course, it's that type of game completely Mariocized. To be fair, despite some funky designs, Fantasy Factory did a decent job with the source material here, as there are no glaring errors or misrepresentations of the characters or major Mario themes. Although, rumors persist that Nintendo had more involvement in this game (and the Zeldas) that they're willing to admit.

First of all, you can clearly see some Mario World influence in the background design and font. I can assure you that this is as close as the actual gameplay gets to SMW. The object of the game: close all of the doors. I'll give your blown mind a few moments to recover .... good? Okay. You're supposed to ride the elevators between floors, shutting doors (Button 2) all the while. I'm pretty sure there was a half-assed rationale to this, something about checking every nook and cranny for the Princess, but one, that makes no sense if you're closing the doors.

If you're able to accomplish your lofty goal, Mario will perform a happy dance and you will advance to the next stage. But as you're running (riding) between floors, Bowser's minions are, you guessed it, attempting to undo your hard work by opening all of the doors. Some emerge from within, forcing you to either stop the enemy flow or be quick with the other doors before a new enemy can pop out of the occupied one. They also like to emerge right as you walk by, which usually results in death due the shooty analog control of the robot dildo controller. Either that, or they'll come out four floors away just as you're about to close the last door. Some enemies are already walking around closing doors, and can usually be taken out with a standard Mario hop (Button 1). Best of all, there are times when you'll ride an elevator to a certain floor for the first time, and four Koopas will emerge from four doors. It's just that type of game. Hey, wait, is that Fire Mario doing the happy dance? Indeed - more on items soon, but enemies can be dispatched with a fireball just as well as a hop, and some enemies can only be beaten with flame.

Standard Mario damage rules apply: Fire Mario -> Super Mario -> Normal Mario -> death. As seen above, Mario can open a door and cower inside, avoiding damage from most normal enemies. However, if you take too long or fall asleep, the bad guys will succeed in opening every door on the stage, which is the same as a "Time Up" or dying. On later stages where every door except one is open, this proves to be a decisive pain in the tokus. There's one other good reason to open doors, and that's the precious items that are sometimes contained within. Just make sure that you're facing the opposite direction you want the item to move when it escapes the door, or it'll quickly glide off the screen and be of no help. If an enemy opens an item door on the floor above you, you can leap up and touch the item to grab it, which is good. Of course, touching an enemy in this fashion, despite defying several universal laws,

results in pain. The game is about 50/50 on whether an item pops out of a door when you open it, or if you get the item's effects once you actually enter a door. There is no reason why.

COINS: Defying the Mario tradition, it only takes 30 of these to get you a 1up. To make things easier, the multicolored coin = 10. To make things even easier, 1ups are essentially useless, as you just have to put up with a "Continue?" screen when you run out of lives to start at the same place you died. So yeah, don't go out of your way for coins, even though they're plentiful and a good number of doors yield them. Still, it's fun to open a certain door, go inside and get a rainbow coin, and repeat 5 times. Another unexplainable item glitch.

SUPER MUSHROOM: Makes you Super. Since Mario doesn't begin this game as a freakish midget, the only indication of "Super" is Mario's eerily glowing overalls. All it means is that you can take an extra hit.

FIRE FLOWER: Now we're talking. Not only do you get to shoot fireballs at enemies (by pressing buttons 1&2 simultaneously ... ugh), but your overalls continue to glow in a show of ultimate power and fashion.

STARMAN: Man, he looks positively alarmed about having to be seen in this game. Probably why you hardly ever see him. Randomly pops out of a door about 3 times in the entire game, and grants the usual invincibility for a limited but fair period of time.

Sometimes a stage will contain one (non-coin) item door, sometimes three, sometimes none. They'll always be in the same place, however. If you're normal Mario, a Mushroom will always appear, a Flower if you're Super. If you're Fiery, a Mushroom comes out and moves really fast. The smelly manual calls this "Toad", despite the fact that it looks exactly the same as the regular 'shroom. That's a 1up right there. Good luck finding the star. Items do carry over, so feel free to go back to Level 1-3 every time you want some easy power-ups in order to tackle the tougher stages.

Ah, the stages. Seven hotels/levels, each (most) containing 10 stages each, a stage consisting of a single-screen with doors and enemies as seen above. You'll see later on why this is misleading. The most important part now is that before every new hotel, you get a cutscene like the one where Mario reads Bowser's poorly-written letter. They vary in length, and purportedly give you advice about the upcoming area. Since the first cutscene's "advice" is Luigi telling us that "looks can be deceiving when Koopas are involved", and the only other occurrence is Luigi and Mario alley-oooping into Morton's Treehouse, it doesn't even get posted. Fear not, there's more goodness to come. Oh, about Luigi. Take a good look above, because that's the only time you're gonna see Luigi outside of a cutscene in this review, as he only appears in the 2-player game. That could be why they decided not to pay his voice actor. In any case, Morton Koopa Jr. is waiting for us in the first hotel: MORTON'S WOODOOR-HYSTERIA HOTEL.

Yes, all the hotels are :cough: clever plays on the names of real hotels. Morton decided to build his in a giant tree, but I gave up asking questions like "Why don't Mario and Luigi just get a big @\$\$ saw?" long ago, so we'll have to do things the hard way. Through the ten stages of all the hotels, the background art and music will shift slightly, the number of doors will increase, the layouts will become more complex, etc. You'll also get to meet new and exciting enemies, by which I mean the same enemies you see in every Mario game that may or may not resemble their actual design. Let's meet the bad guys that debut in Morton's level:

GOOMBA: Forever and always, these large-footed evil mushroom things will slowly bumble at Mario. That's pretty much what they do here, except they're taller and can open doors. Even if you're on the same floor as one, it'll just keep aimlessly walking in whatever direction it was going.

KOOPA TROOPA: What would be good is if you could stomp one of them and kick the shell to take out the rest of the enemies on the floor, or even better if it ricocheted down through the floors. Well, you can't do any of that. Stomp and die, just like a regular foe. Koopas move quicker than Goombas, are taller and therefore harder to stomp, and will pursue you once you reach their floor.

WIGGLER: There's a reason the Forest of Illusion was saved for 5th in earlier times, and that's because Wiggler is a pain in the @\$\$\$. To beat him, you must stomp on his head. Much like a Pokey, which does not appear in this game, the head will fall off and the next segment will become the head. If you touch a non-head segment at any time, you will die. Very bad if he corners you.

One thing I'll say for the game is that the pacing is pretty good. The hotels obviously get tougher from 1-7, but the 10 stages within each one also have a nice flow. Hotel 1 is very straightforward; elevators that go up/down a floor at a time, not too many doors, and few enemies. Also, the serene jungle motif. One problem is that if you run too far in either direction, you fall out of the stage and die. This only occurs in the hotels with no walls, which while bafflingly realistic, isn't terribly consistent. The other problem is those damn Wigglers in the later stages. Fire Mario's a nice thing to have.

Stage 10 brings you to Morton's Tree House 'O Pain (seriously), and indeed, as long as Mario gets out his seat and jumps around before getting down, he'll be fine. That's the reason ol' Morton's picture up there is largely unspectacular, there's really not much to this battle. The elevators will switch directions on you, and will from this point on continue to do so in every level. Morton moves between floors trying to open doors and eat you. If you are in an elevator and a boss uses it, you will be eaten. I'm not kidding, Morton, or any boss, will consume Mario and spit out his poor red "M" cap. This is the vicious streak that's been missing in the Koopa Clan lately, considering Bowser's killer strategy in Sunshine was to lounge around in a giant hot tub. While we're on the subject of awful plots, let's check back in with the dynamic duo now that Morton's been defeated.

Morton falls out of the tree and apples begin to grow, which is as everyone knows how trees express their gratitude. There's still the pressing Princess problem, as Mario and Luigi's "stand around and look clueless" strategy doesn't seem to be paying off. Up in the tree, Mario Bros.! As Toadstool is waving, unfortunately, the branch she's standing on snaps, and she falls into the waiting arms of Roy Koopa, who whisks her away to the next level, with the plumbers in pursuit.

As we approach ROY'S HARD BRICK HOTEL, the lights begin to flicker, and Mario mumbles something about finding a light switch, then does the trademark "you're an idiot so let me spell it out for you" glance into the camera and says "remind me ta check!" Don't worry, I will, but let's first find out who we'll be facing for the next 10 floors.

BOB-OMB, PARA-BOMB: What's better than a Bob-Omb strutting around a floor with a lit fuse? If you were gonna say "Bob-Omps that parachute into the stage at high frequency and take forever to pick a floor to land on in order to screw up your jumps", you're either a damn liar or one of those fortune-teller chicks from Paper Mario. Good timing can take them out with a jump if they're still falling below you.

Once they lose the 'chutes and become normal Bob-Ombs, they'll automatically go off after a length of time. If you stomp one, that'll immediately trigger the fuse, at which point you need to awkwardly run like hell. The resulting explosion can take out enemies as well as set off surrounding bombs.

NINJI: A firm believer in affirmative action, Roy hired all black enemies to debut in his stage. Of course, you'll still encounter some enemies from previous levels along the way for the entire game. The manual says "Mini-Ninja", but we know better. He does perform very Ninji-like hops, and other than that doesn't really do too much.

The stages where Bob-Ombs keep dropping on you at a frantic rate are kind of nasty, and for some reason I really hate the goofy expression on Ninji's face when he's opening a door I closed 3 floors ago, but otherwise the Hard Brick Hotel isn't too hard to dispatch of. But while Roy may employ equal-opportunity hiring practices, he must be late on the electric bill, which causes the lights to flicker on and off in strategic parts of a stage. If you have a very good eye and are lucky, you can catch some miniature lightning bolts coming out of a random door. Enter this door, and you'll find the real reason behind the lighting problem: A BUNCHA TOASTERS IN A SINGLE ROOM.

Sometimes the simplest explanation is the best one, as any sap could figure out that the real dilemma is that Roy had about a dozen or so toasters plugged into one outlet, something expressly warned against by the signs posted in every decent hotel's toaster room. A simple problem requires a simple solution, so Mario obviously finds a loaf of the Mushroom Kingdom's third most popular wheat product laying around with a glint in his eye - "ya know what they say!", says Mario, then he proceeds to rattle off some parable that includes the word "toast" about 6 times that I've certainly never heard them say. After overloading the appliances of doom with surplus sourpuss toast, the lights will be fine for as long as you continue playing without quitting. Don't you wish the electric bill explanation was the real one?

Amazingly, there's another good point about this game, and that's the fact that the bosses keep getting more and more off the wall, "off the wall" being a synonym for "fracking cheap", but at least it keeps things interesting. Here on Roy's Rowdy Rooftop, Roy isn't too out there, but is a step up from his freaky little brother in that he can walk on the ceiling (didn't he [and Morton] do that in Mario World, too? [probably coincidental] CONTINUITY~!) and drop down on Mario. He also boasts one of the most feared, tried-and-true bad guy moves of all time, the dreaded extendo-punch. This can go above or below, so it's best to jump into a door or elevator rather than walk past him if you're on a floor adjacent to him, as long as you don't stay there long enough to get chomped. It helps to get on the same floor as Roy, rendering his horizontally-challenged punch useless so you can stomp on his head. By the way, one stomp will temporarily immobilize Roy (or any boss), two will send him out of the stage, although he'll reappear in a few moments. Once the doors all get closed, Roy goes down and we move on.

Look at these two nimrods. They're so proud of themselves, putting up their cute little "Condemned" sign, that they're too busy to notice the Princess screaming and waving to get their attention ... on top of a huge warp pipe. I have to give Toadstool the "worst judgment" award on this one. Mario and Luigi use their favorite strategy to figure out what to do next...

...until they somehow stumble upon a dark, old, abandoned mine. I'm guessing the giant engravings helped on this one. With some trepidation, our heroes enter LARRY'S CAVE HOTEL.

The "hint" here is Luigi wondering if you can steal a light from a bad guy. I played through the entire level

without figuring out what the hell he's talking about. Damn Luigi. On the bright side, Larry reluctantly agreed to go along with his siblings, changing "Larry's Cave Hotel" into something more befitting the running theme.

When I think about the Hilton name these days, "chilly" isn't exactly the first word that comes to mind, but that's neither here nor there. Larry's level starts to ramp things up a bit, and this includes a few new enemies to make Mario's life even more miserable as he slips around trying to shut refrigerators.

BUZZY BEETLE: I have absolutely nothing even remotely interesting to say about Buzzy Beetle. He's only here for completion's sake, and is the worst enemy in the game. That's right, Buzzy Beetle. Sit there and cry.

MONTY MOLE: Here we go. Monty digs out of the floors (even though they appear to be about 4 inches in height) and pops up at Mario. After that, he slides with reckless abandon until he smacks himself into a wall, stands there dizzy for a few seconds, and starts sliding again. My theory is that his objective is to cause you to laugh at his stupid antics so you don't notice Spiny slowly approaching on the ceiling.

SPINY: It appears that the drab confines of the Chillton were wearing on Spiny, so he decked himself out in lovely Christmas colors. Either that or the programmers decided anything with a shell had to be green underneath, period. Annoying either way, Spinies are protected from jump attacks, and its spikes are long enough to hit you when it's crawling on the ceiling, meaning you get to duck for about 15 seconds as it slowly passes. However, if you're far enough away, you can jump onto Spiny's underbelly from above, which still doesn't make sense, but gets the job done.

See? Told you those old enemies would show up again. The only reason you can see them in that first shot is because Mario just bought the farm. During actual gameplay, you can only see whatever floor you're currently on. I hope that's not what Luigi meant in the opening cutscene, and that I'm missing a bonus cutscene where Mario finds leftover pasta sauce in one of the fridges and somehow uses it to turn all the lights on. In addition, the elevator system starts to get a bit wonkier in these stages, meaning the floor progression can go something like 1-4-2-3-5, so if you hear a door ... er, fridge open and it wasn't you, you'll have to remember which elevator leads where. And as the level name indicates, the Chillton is colder than a witch's teat, so get ready to slip and slide all over the damn place.

Larry Koopa's weapons of choice in Larry's Scary Lair are miniature bowling balls that he rolls at Mario with the utmost precision. It's a good thing that Mario was a 3-time Champ down at the Brooklyn Lanes before getting zapped to the Mushroom Kingdom, or sucked down a shower drain, or whatever the hell that song was about. You'll have to rely on all of your bowling prowess- ....what's that? He's Holding something with a fuse?

All right, fine, they're bombs. Spoil my fun. He just rolls them at you one after another till you hop on his stupid bird nose and make him look like even more of a goof before getting around to closing all the doors/fridges. Stick with it for one more level, I promise that the next boss will have a jetpack. But there's still the business of what happens to the mine.

It's pretty funny how much slapsticky abuse Toadstool takes in this game, but nothing tops getting blown out of a mine. No one bothers to explain what caused the big boom, let's say a stray bowling bomb from Larry maybe, but you can bet it causes Mario and Luigi to yet again stand around with no clue, until

Lemmy takes pity on them and moves some clouds to reveal his floating, crystalline hotel in the sky, which is where the Princess was blown to. Luigi kicks a nearby vine block that happens to be laying around amidst some jerky animation, and all that's left is a hint from Mario...

Egad, look at that pudgy, impish little plumber and the firm grip he has on that vine; I'd sure like to plunge his ... oh yeah, you're still here. That fake bowling ball crap didn't drive you away, huh? Very well, I'll save my deranged Mario fantasies for prank letters to Gamepro. What Mario is sexily whispering in the above shot is "get da hint?", after wondering if there's a way to blow away the evil clouds seen in the first screenshot. That question and whether or not I was kidding about the jetpack will be addressed as we climb up to the "High-ate".

Indeed, we now head to the skies, and the levels with the blurriest backgrounds due to the bright-\$\$\$ colors, at least until I finally got decent video capture. The elevators get really annoying here, switching directions constantly, usually just as you're about to enter one. Oh, and enemies that didn't have wings before will in fact have wings.

PARAGOOMBA: The best part about Paragoomba is that all his wings are good for are this sad little hover jump he can do. Seriously, that's the best part. Wings or no wings, still easy to kill.

BANZAI BILL: I thought Banzai Bills were supposed to be gigantic? In a flagrant display of false advertising, Bullet Bill has been renamed, probably because I'm the only person who gives a shoot about this type of thing. They fly onto the screen and move diagonally to the edge of the screen; the farther you advance through the High-Ate, the more at once. Can be beaten with a well-timed stomp.

KOOPA PARATROOPA: These wings actually do something, and that is allow a normal Koopa to also fly diagonally across a stage. However, they don't fly off the screen like Bill up there, but rather bounce off the edge of the screen, change direction, and keep going till you stomp them. A nuisance when a lot of them gang up on you and prevent you from going where you need to.

Of course, there are still regular Koopas running around, and those damn bombs keep coming. Even worse is the evil (yet happy) cloud, helpfully shown above. He follows Mario around and obscures him from your view, and let me tell you, it's hard enough to control Mario when you can see him. Luckily, there's a way to vanquish Mr. Cloud. Once again, household appliances to the rescue!

Again, you find a random door with miniscule little things coming out of it, in this case fog puffs. Again, it all makes perfect sense, as Mario finds a giant button that says "I'm Your Biggest Fan", and hilarity ensues as a giant fan blows all the evil clouds out of Lemmy's Hotel. As you might imagine after that, I'm sick of this level now, what we need is Lemmy and his jetpack of doom to fly in and steal the show.

Fine, fine, propeller pack. That's actually funnier. Regardless of what you call it, Lemmy is going to fly around his Sky Hideout like a drunken Albatoss, shutting doors on random floors rapidly and turning this into a war of attrition. Since Mario does not have a tiny copter on his back, he'll have to quickly go back and forth to keep up with Lemmy. Add this to the fact that Lemmy can fire out deadly paper planes, and that paper cuts cause as much damage as a giant bullet up the gonzo, and you've got quite a fight on your greasy little hands. Hopefully, our resourceful plumbers can figure out a way to beat him (NOTE: You still beat him by shutting all the doors, I just needed a segue)...

Best as I can tell, Lemmy just kinda hops/flies in front of the giant, benevolent fan for no apparent reason, and gets blown away, along with the entire building. Ever see the episode of Family Guy where Peter complains about FOX at the end, and leaves the room to get a beer in about 5 frames total? Pretty much the same story here, except Mario actually goes Mick Jagger on us with a "hey, you, get off of my cloud!". The logic train continues rolling, as Princess Toadstool hops out in front of the fan, does not get hilariously blown away, which is what everyone wants to see, but vanishes into thin air. Just as suddenly, a new hotel pops up on the ground.

It's now quite clear that the brilliant "hotel-naming" idea was enacted at the last minute. Mario and Luigi stand in front of the Castle, attempt to enter, and the door vanishes, then reappears. It keeps on going like this for, just guessing here, about 45 minutes or so until they finally somehow get inside. Don't look at me, I stopped paying attention after their first 5 tries.

Everyone goes for the cheap Trump heat these days. Or 10 years ago, as it were. Ludwig turns things up a notch to make up for his lack of creativity - for one thing, that vanishing door trick wasn't just cutscene filler. In addition, the doors and enemies keep growing in number, and the enemies are by far the worst yet.

BOO BUDDIES, BIG BOO: Ye gods, look at that monstrosity. All kinds of Boos will annoy you to no end in this level. First we have the transparent Boos. These guys just kind of float around aimlessly, minding their own business, until they stop being transparent. Not being transparent means they can now hurt you. You can probably guess when they tend to shift. Next come your more standard Boos, who will bashfully cower in shame if you face them, and pursue you otherwise. The freakishly mutated Big Boo acts the same way, despite the fact that he takes up 1/6 of the stage. If a lot of little guys and Big Boo gang up on you, it'll take some clever peeking and hiding to save yourself, just like in the Girl's Locker Room back in high school.

DRY BONES: Manual says "Skeleton Koopa", but my hands now smell like old orange juice, so I don't know why I keep bothering to get the names they used from it. Typical of these guys, you keep stompin', they keep comin'. Unlike previous appearances, however, a fireball will now remove them permanently. If you are Fiery Mario, make sure you eliminate most/all of the Dry Bones' on a stage before doing anything else. You will be sorry if you don't.

PAT THE BAT: I guess it's supposed to be a Swooper, but it looks more like a flying turd to me, so Pat will suffice. It doesn't matter, because Pat the Bat is a dirty SOB and easily the most nauseating enemy in the game. At least Buzzy Beetle just mopes around uselessly; this guy flies around opening doors on every floor, and if you fail to take them out, you'll end up with 5-6, spread out across every floor, making your life miserable. But then, if you were already playing this game, I can safely assume from experience that you're way past misery already. Luckily, there's a trick - there's a set number of Pat Bats hanging underneath the lowest floor. It may take awhile, but you can hang out down there and take them out one-by-one as they fly up. It'll cost you time, but well worth it as long as you can avoid the other distractions.

I learned the "don't let multiple Pats get off the ground floor" lesson the hard way. Again, Ludwig's stage is where the game's challenge factor really shoots upward, and it gets much worse from here on out. But you didn't forget everyone's favorite freaky-haired Koopa Kid, did you? Because he's waiting in Ludwig's Frantic Lab on the tenth stage, and drank 3 bottles of that Bubble Bobble lightning potion before Mario



arrived. Luckily, he doesn't fire it from the same place as Bub and Bob.

Considering the rest of the level, Ludwig isn't too bad if you use the tried and true "dirty coward" strategy. His lightning bolts, though they fry across the entire screen, only move diagonally and can't hit you inside a door, so just timing your running between blasts is the main thing. Ludwig can also poof into electricity and teleport to throw you off, but hopefully if you've gotten this far you're not gonna fall for a trick that even Raiden barely uses anymore. Onward, ho!

If it seems like I'm getting lazier with these, it's because, well, they're getting lazier with these. Ludwig's castle crumbles to dust and wireframe, and the Bros. just move on to the next hotel. You do get to hear Luigi (in his "nasal Mario" voice) say "ova daaarrrrrre!" when Mario asks him where the Princess might be. If that was painful for you to read, imagine how I felt. To make up for this unwarranted eardrum assault, Mario offers us a helpful tip:

Remembuh, if ya pinch Wendy's pennies, dey pinch back! Hyuk!

At first, I thought Mario was sharing a sordid, disgusting personal problem with us that I wanted no part of. Sadly, I would soon find out myself that Wendy's pennies do indeed pinch. And it hurts. Oh does it hurt.

The Snarlton is a classy joint, very rat pack, so you're going to meet some of the strangest and best-dressed enemies to ever set foot in the Mushroom Kingdom. I apologize now.

EVIL COIN: Yes, this is what that deviant Mario was referring to. If you open a door in this level and coins come out, get your @\$\$ in gear, because they will turn into Evil Coins. No coins for you! They move extremely quickly, two at a time in most cases, and are almost as bothersome as Pat the damn Bat. You'll think twice about searching doors for items after getting jumped by a few of these. Even worse, some of them start outside and proceed to help their evil friends escape if not stomped.

RHINESTONE GOOMBA: All right, I guess I'll give Buzzy a reprieve. After all, he isn't walking around dressed like Elvis. Or, more accurately, "Fat Elvis". While this hotel isn't exactly a star-spangled rodeo, Rhinestone Goomba can leap like a horse due to the powers of his mystical Elvis cape, suspiciously the exact same distance as a Paragoomba. There also seem to be about 3-4 behind every enemy door, meaning return trips to floors are in the cards. Dude, an Elvis Goomba. No matter how much you've seen, you haven't seen it all.

MECHAKOOPA: About 75% less wacky in this game, grabbing them is not advised this time. They're actually more of a Dry Bones variant - a stomp will immobilize them for a bit, but not take them out. Then a strange thing happens: after about 3/4 of the clock runs out, every Mechakoopa in the stage will break down into junk. This is all well and good until you find a junkpile right in front of the last door you need to shut, and have to hop on it 6 times to get it to move slightly right before the last 10 seconds run out. Better again to just waste them for good with a fireball.

BELLHOP GOOMBA: The Goombas that aren't visiting the Graceland Convention are working part-time as bellhops. As far as evil plans go, this one had to hit Bowser in the wallet pretty hard, at least for the hotels that weren't just slapped together in trees and caves. I wouldn't pay the Goombas either. These guys are like normal ones, except they move a little faster, and will not carry your luggage, as there are

no real coins in the level to tip them with. Damn Wendy.

Z KOOPA: Okay, I can deal with a few recycled Goomba enemies, but when they stick the Koopa Troopas in tuxedos, I draw the line.

So far, so good. Except for the fact that the elevators aren't labeled "up" or "down" anymore, but at this point you should have the gameplay down enough to adjust, and they've been switching for awhile now anyway. Elvis Goombas, all right, not too bad. The stage is soon beaten ... but there is no happy dance. Rather, that odd-elevator-out that you couldn't enter on the top floor suddenly lights up, and the clock keeps ticking. Enter, and you get to scroll up and see the REST of the stage:

WAGH. Yes, basically another stage, I suppose this would be Level 6-1-2. And if you die there, you'd better believe that you're starting all the way back at 6-1-1. So instead of 10 stages in this Hotel, it's really a total of 20, half of which can't be continued on since they're technically part of a bigger stage. That's way too many Evil Coins for even the most jaded gamers to take. But still I trudge on, not only to face even more of them, but the queen of the penny-pinchers herself.

A painful level, a painful boss; Wendy O's Sweet Suite is probably the hardest boss stage in the game. Unlike her brothers, she remains perched on the top floor. Unfortunately, her pennies are pinching on every floor including hers, and you'll have to worry about them all while avoiding her attacks, not to mention avoiding jumping into her @\$\$ if you're on the floor below her. Once you (hopefully) reach her floor with all other doors closed, she'll get angry and start charging you, so a quick stomp 'n shut is in order. Didn't I say 20 stages total? That's right, once you beat Wendy, you scroll up to 6-10-2 and get to do it all over again.

That's one fugly Koopaling. No candy rings of death, but Wendy has two equally bothersome attacks. First, she throws out little hearts with wings that fly in loop patterns. They don't actively attack Mario (though they will kill on contact), but don't worry, they'll definitely open random doors as they fly around, and unlike Pat the Bat, you can't take them out, they just vanish eventually. Same goes for the kisses of extreme prejudice. They won't open doors, but they will home in on Mario until he gets his husky @\$\$ in a door. Sometimes they go away quickly, sometimes not. It's a long, tough battle, but Mario (and Luigi, I guess) can't get tired now! One more to go!

I'm getting a little tired of hotels and Princesses simply vanishing into thin air every time the guy in charge of the story couldn't think of anything better, which has been the case for the past 2-3 levels. At least the next hotel shakes itself out of the foreboding mountain at the northern part of the map, because mountains are always north on the map. Don't "Zelda II" me, I don't care what they called it, it was a cave maze and that's that. Oh right, the last level.

That is one hell of a hotel, although I don't know how many tourists one would attract with it. Then again, Kid Niki 2 taught us that people aren't exactly picky when it comes to attractions. The Bros. are rightfully scared, as Mario has put on 100 pounds in the span of 15 seconds, and Luigi is very clearly soiling himself in fear. Both plumbers are well aware, however, that this review isn't ending until they get in there, and so we enter the FINAL HOTEL. Damn, "palace", "dungeon" and "castle" sure sound a lot more intimidating.

See, now that's better, add a "palace" and you're golden. Plus, Hotel Mario predated the Pokemon TV

show giving all those kids the epilepsy by a few years, so Bowser narrowly avoided lawsuits from those families as well as Julius Caesar. The only tragic part about this situation is that poor Iggy didn't get his own hotel. Either that, or the amount of analysis I've given it. Mario and Luigi's final tip is "when dere's smoke, dere's fire!" Thanks guys, really. Smokey the Bear has nothing on you.

What our hapless heroes refer to is the only new enemy introduced in this level, and it's not even really an enemy. When you see a little puff of smoke at the end of a floor- no, scratch that; you won't see it, it appears for about half a second. Instead, listen for the accompanying "match striking" noise, because together they mean that a fireball is flying down the hallway. In earlier stages, it'll just be the top floor, until you're dealing with 5 rows of fireballs later on. The "cower inside a door" tactic is indispensable, as I'm sure you've noticed by now. If Mario and Luigi weren't bumbling idiots, they'd have instead told you "fight fire with fire", because not only can a Mario fireball take out the bad fireballs, if you nail one (it's tough, they're quick), the fireballs will go away for good just like the evil clouds or the flickering lights. But obviously, I had to figure that out for my damn self.

About the only good news here is that the elevators no longer switch directions on you, and the difficulty seems to fluctuate randomly rather than get progressively tougher. How about some bad news to counter that?

You knew something like that was coming. Bowser's resort features the same maddening "double stages" as Wendy O, but more importantly, every enemy in the game appears in at least one stage. My only regret is that I didn't get a shot of the Elvis Goombas and Tux Koopas confusedly moving around, knowing they're completely out of place in this level. Mechakoopas and Wigglers, Koopas and Dry Bones, Moles and Boos, Pat the fracking Bat and every other enemy, the combinations are cruel and endless. It's a damn good thing that once we reach the tenth stage, we can finally- ...I said, it's a damn good thing- ...what?

Oh, you've GOT to be kidding. Yes, Bowser dangles that "Stage 10" carrot in front of you as you scrape through his all-encompassing hotel, only to throw an extra five stages at you. One of which has the "Pat the Bat/endless Tux Koopa" combination. Bowser sucks. That makes, with the double stage bullcrap quotient factored in, a grand total of 30 stages that stand between you and the Koopa King. Did I mention that I started working on this in February the first time? Even with the ability to save after every (two) stage(s), I don't know if there's a single one of you who could pull it off without going mad, or at least talking like nasal Mario for awhile. Speaking of mad, Bowser can't be happy that we've finally reached Bowser's BBQ Room. Actually, that's a lie, he'd probably point and laugh at everything I've written so far. Regardless, here comes the pain.

Er, uh, gasp! It's ... giant tiki-head Bowser! Seriously folks, I'm at a loss here. Despite the bizarre appearance, Bowser has a wide range of attacks at his disposal.

In addition to his oblong head nailing you from below when he jumps, you have to worry about fireballs he spits in your general direction, as well as lightning bolts that rain down from the ceiling. When you hear the crash, where you're standing is where the bolt will hit, so put a move on. Luckily, if you think you have a good angle, the standard double-hop will knock Bobble-Head Bowser for a loop long enough for you to slam some doors. In fact, the entire battle is a bit easy ... maybe, too easy?! And is Bowser's head falling off quicker than you can say "mardi gras"?! Let's see who you REALLY are...

Credit where it's due, only the most cynical Scooby Doo/Dr. Wily followers could have foreseen such a development. Yes, we lamented poor Iggy Koopa not getting his own hotel, but it was all an insidious plot, as Bowser sent his nerdiest Koopaling, in a giant replica head of himself mind you, to fight Mario in a last ditch effort to save himself the trouble. This, ladies and gentlemen, is why Bowser is the best there is, putting out his A-game even in a title in which the Koopalings outnumber the people who have played it. Unlike the Iggster, Bowser comes at you full force.

That's the two-story behemoth we know and love. Bowser basically has Iggy's attacks with a lot more oomph behind them - instead of a few fireballs, he sends out a cavalcade of flames that burn for a few seconds before sputtering out. Instead of one bolt, he rains down a storm upon you. During both of these attacks, there's only one thing to do, I don't think I need to tell you. While fireballs don't seem to cut it here, you can still stomp out Bowser if you're extremely careful. When he's not using his special attacks, he likes to continually leap between floors like there's no tomorrow. Once he's safely below, you can position yourself so that he jumps into Mario's magic feet. But beware; Bowser is obviously huge, and if he corners you there's almost no escape, as evidenced above in the shot where he's devouring poor, cowardly Mario in his hidey door. Make sure you grab some power-ups in easy levels before heading off to fight Iggy and Bowser.

As the tale always seems to go, Bowser is defeated for another day, and we're treated to the ending.

Always the friendly peck on the cheek.

Mario, Luigi and Toadstool escape the crumbling castle confines, then Toadstool mutters something about being able to rule the Mushroom Kingdom again. The average is about 1 in 3 as far as words you can understand. Mario and Luigi both get kisses for their efforts, and judging by their facial expressions that'll always be good enough, 'cause they sure haven't gotten any farther than that in the last 20 years or so. The Princess turns to the camera, and while I was expecting a 3D kiss, all I got was a measly "and thanks to YOU too!", just like those damn Mega Man games that incorporated me into the cast. The three happily send you off, as Mario and Luigi yell that I am the best player ever. And it's true. Because somehow, some way, I beat this game and reached the Conclusion.

Funny thing: this is the CD-I game we almost got: Super Mario's Wacky Worlds, The Sequel to Super Mario World.

You can read more over at the Black Moon Project, but the gist is that it was intended as a "true" sequel to Super Mario World. For many reasons, some outlined in that article, some unknown, the idea was scrapped near completion, and instead we got Hotel Mario. HOTEL MARIO. Still, there's a reason this was the first CD-I game I covered.

Why? First, take a moment to soak up everything you've seen here today. Now consider this: as of this writing, Hotel Mario is by far the best game I've played so far for the CD-I.

Look up "foreboding" in the dictionary. If the Hotel Mario title screen isn't the accompanying picture, it will be someday.

=Yes, I'm aware of the rumor of an eighth hotel, as well as the entry on GameFAQs that outlines how to reach it. I have reason to believe it may exist. Number 1, there's a small space on the map screen to the

right of Bowser's Hotel where an eighth one could ostensibly fit. Two, the other trick listed on the GameFAQs page does work; there really is a warp zone in 3-5:

Going through the ISO files, not one I found on the net but my actual Hotel Mario disc, that's what I found. Unfortunately, my obscure early-90's fringe system hacking skills aren't what they used to be, and I was unable to get any further after a few dead ends. Now, you might say, "Polas! Why don't you just try to beat the game in under an hour?!" To which I would ask you to please press your face firmly against the monitor. If you feel a sharp stinging sensation, my AIM Transfer Slap-o-matic is finally operational. I've done many maddening things in the name of bringing you to corners of gamedom you would otherwise never dare to travel, but even Polas has his limits. Not only is the task itself daunting, but there's no in-game clock that actually informs you if you're beating this damn game in the time required.

If anyone figures out how to access the fabled 8th Hotel, or can disprove its existence, by any means, by all means, let me know, and you'll be enshrined here as big a hero.

## 10 - Gitaroo Man: Playstation 2 Gold!

By now, you've read a lot of reviews on this site; most of them being for very weird games, produced in a very weird time for very weird people. If you've been to a game store lately, you might notice something different. You can't buy something where you must run along platforms and stomp on living noodles or a guy playing a flute with a pot on his head. Nope, not anymore. That 3-pound cart for The Badical Adventures of Mohawk the Yellow-Bellied Sapsucker has been replaced by slick discs starring today's contemporary video game stars, such as Guy in Race Car, Football Guy, Guy in Army Fatigues, Woman in Bikini with Gun, and Polygonal Version of Movie Star. Nothing but normalcy and conformity as far as the eye can see. There is that offbeat idea that comes along every so often, but it's quickly beat into the ground by bad sales and disinterest. Beyond Good and Evil really was a great game to play, I mean, COME ON! TALKING PIG! But if today's gamers can't take a talking pig, how would they react to a drunk Russian man shooting fireballs from his gut at skeletons riding ostriches? There would probably be riots in the streets, many mass murders, and President Obama would have to push a Constitutional amendment defining a video game as something free of muscular overweight warriors.

So, that said, maybe it's a good thing no one discovered Gitaroo Man, although they missed out on a lot. What you're about to see is one of the rarest PS2 titles in existence. It also has to be one of the weirdest, and I mean on the level of the craziest stuff seen here. But you know what? Unlike all those others, Gitaroo Man is actually GOOD. Yes, we won't be making fun of the bad play control or the terrible music, because there's no such thing as that in this game. When it first appeared, the magazine EGM panned it, but then they changed their minds and praised it, then chastised everyone out there for listening to them and not buying it. Game Informer did the exact same thing, and I'm not kidding. What was it about Gitaroo Man that made gaming editors so attached to it anyway? Well, for one thing, here's a teaser: in your first level, you'll be battling a devil in a diaper named "Panpeus" who eventually drives a TRAIN at your head. Intrigued? You should be...

Let's start the game! After a tutorial level in which the hero learns he is the last in line of the Legendary Gitaroo Men, we begin. On the left is Panpeus. The screaming weenie on the right is our hero, strangling his dog ("Puma") in fear. You'll never guess what the hero's name is. Seriously, I could make an easy million off you if you were willing to bet. "Is it...U-1?" What the...okay, that was a lucky guess. You get nothing.

Puma throws U-1 his Gitaroo, and with a lightning flash and a woman cooing "Oooohhhh, Gitaroo Maaaaan!" he transforms into Our Hero. By the way, you'll be hearing that woman a lot. She also says "Oooohhhh, Gitaroo Maaaaan!" on the title screen, and if you win any battle, she says, "Youuuu wiiiiin! \*small laugh\*" If you lose, she says "Aw! Youuuu loooooose!" Anyway, as for HOW YOU BATTLE...well, it's one of those music rhythm-response games you've been hearing about. To fire an effective blast from the Gitaroo at the diaper-wearing devil, you have to follow a track and hold down any button where red stuff slides by, usually to the beat of the song (picture 1). To block the attacks of Panpeus or any other, you have to push the button indicated at the precise moment it glides through your little center circle (picture 2). This can get complicated in later levels when those things are coming from all four sides, but in this game, it's actually fun and the songs are catchy. Anyway, you have to block Panpeus's attacks, which include but are not limited to a pig with a giant sinister head, a walking evil TV, some stick

figure apparently made of donuts, and the train you've been waiting for.

Once you win, U-1 thrusts his Gitaroo in the air in victory and lightning thunders from the sky. Ready for level 2?

It's time to meet more of the cast. The redhead is Pico, U-1's secret desire...yet she spends all her time with Kazuya, the token macho jerk. U-1 is reminded of his crummy life once more, but before things get too depressing, they have to get weird again...

The dialogue for this scene goes exactly like this: "IT'S A BIRD!" "IT'S A HAMBURGER!!" "NO, IT'S A UFO!!!" This is one of my favorite levels in the game. The song and scenery are just too darn fun; I have a blast every time I play it, no matter how many times I have. You blast your Gitaroo at the UFOs to the tune of some untranslated Japanese pop song that's really snappy; meanwhile the city dwellers who were panicking and screaming in the beginning are now dancing like maniacs in the background. It's something you have to experience for yourself; really. I can't describe the whole thing in words.

Long story short, a grumpy old lady knocks U-1 onto one of the UFOs and he finishes the song spinning atop it while blasting the other ones. Then after winning, and doing the lightning-thrust again, he realizes he's got nothing stable to stand on anymore and he and Puma crash into the wilderness. While they're trying to find their way out, we catch a brief glimpse of the sinister persona behind all the recent attacks on Gitaroo Man. He's an evil man, with an evil cat. The diaper-devil and the UFOs were sent by him, and they didn't work out so well. Evil Man is going to have to pull out all the stops if he's going to stop U-1 from getting any further. So he called up his greatest servant; the most spectacular warrior he has the power to dispatch.

**MOJO KING BEE!!**

I think this actually tops anything Data East ever had to offer. It's some guy wearing an Elvis costume and a bee costume AT THE SAME TIME. And platform shoes, and sequined sunglasses. He's got it so going on, U-1 is dead meat. He steps out into a spotlight and someone boldly shouts, "Are you ready for this? The King is in the House...it's MOJO MOJO MOJO KING BEE!!!" And Mr. MMMKB gets right down to business.

Mojo starts playing some kind of jazz/disco mix while his trumpet shoots deadly laser blasts at Gitaroo Man. GM counters with some of his own, but it's up to you if he succeeds. Meanwhile, all the nighttime forest creatures are getting into the groove too, with bopping bats, swaying frogs with eerie grins, and a giant bear in the background scratching his rear on a tree to the beat. By the way, Gitaroo Man DOES have a multiplayer mode, and in this level not only can you play as Mojo, you can play as the bear, which is even better.

After beating Mojo, U-1 gets a hologram message from someone named Miranda. And Miranda is an old man. "Miranda" explains that he is an elder of Planet Gitaroo and U-1 must head to that planet and defeat the plans of the evil Zowie(pronounced "Zoe"). Puma pulls a spacecraft from out of nowhere and he's off, dragging along a reluctant U-1, who's actually been whiny about all the events in this game. "NOOOO PUMAAAAAA I DONWANNA GO TO PLANET GITAROO AAAAAHH!!!"

So they're off and running, but Zowie sees it and commands, "Release Ben K!" Ben K turns out to be a version of a hammerhead shark that can breathe in space, as well as defy the laws of inertia by

swimming through the empty nothing. This brings you to Level 4, in which you don't do anything but block attacks. If you've been doing good so far, this is the first level where you'll trip up. The goal is to just survive, but it's pretty hard...buttons come sliding at you everywhere.

Then they land on a space station and who knew, Ben K transforms into a giant robot. Luckily, U-1 and Puma also have their own robot, the "Woofier-Mazing." I couldn't come up with a better name if I tried. Ben K turns out to be a fan of reggae and you play Level 5 to the tune of his single, "Nuff Respect."

U-1 and Puma land on Planet Gitaroo...unfortunately in the water part. To dry out, U-1 builds a fire and then sits there sneezing while holding a guitar. Wherever he got it, it's a good thing he has it, because along comes...PICO??? Actually, no, it's someone from this planet who looks exactly like her only with shorter hair. Her name is "Kirah," and U-1 sees this as a fresh start...if he doesn't mess up. Your goal for Level 6 is to successfully play a slow relaxing song on the guitar. Succeed, and Kirah falls asleep on your shoulder(hot dog!) Lose, and...well, I've never lost this...it's not that hard.

After U-1 gets done flirting, he notices...Puma is gone! Racing out to find him, he finds....Zowie, with Puma tied up beside him! And three more lackeys...the "Sanbone Trio." If you're guessing they're three samba-playing skeletons with laser-shooting maracas, you'd be right. Unfortunately Puma has U-1's Gitaroo, so you can only dodge the Sanbones' attacks until Puma breaks free. After you win this, the townsfolk are convinced you are GITAROO MAN and they direct you to the only other person on the planet who has his own Gitaroo. It's.....

Gregorio III, who looks and acts a little too much like Michael Jackson for comfort. He spends the whole battle jamming on his gigantic pipe organ while his chorus of ghosts sings along. Waste Jacko and you've hit the big time, because it's time for the GITAROO ARENA!! It was built for U-1's defeat, though...and Zowie introduces U-1 to the person who has been specially raised and trained to defeat Gitaroo Man. It's...KIRAH! OHHH NOOO PUMAAAA!! How awkward....

U-1 battles for a while, but it doesn't take long before he can no longer do it. He throws his Gitaroo down and refuses to fight. Kirah is still baffled, but U-1 gets through to her by playing the same song that he played to make her take a nap on him. Then they start playing it together while the crowd cheers and...wait a minute, this story is actually starting to make sense. What's going on here? Zowie, where are you???

There he is. He's ultra-peeved, and...

**HE'S GOT A MECH!!!**

This leads to the climactic soaring fight above Planet Gitaroo, with Zowie in his robosuit and U-1 in his...wait a minute, where is he getting all this stuff from? Actually, this one's explained--every time he defeated someone, one light lit up on his Gitaroo. Now all eight lights are lit up, and he transforms into Gitaroo Man Version 2.0. As would be expected, this final battle's hard, but the song is something like grunge rock(minus some lonely guy screaming) and it's pretty cool.

Gitaroo Man saves Planet Gitaroo, changes back into shrimpy U-1 and Puma drives him back home while the people of the planet wave goodbye. It's back to U-1's miserable life again. But this time, as Cap'n Crunch says, sometimes you just need to crunch up your confidence. He stands up to Token Jerk



and runs off with Pico, and Puma sticks his head into the closing end iris and grins. As for Mojo King Bee, he grows up and marries you. Isn't that what you wanted to hear?

I judge the bragged "wide selection" of most video game shops on whether or not they can sell me Gitaroo Man. Because if they can sell me this, they can sell me anything. If you're going to look for it, good luck. Your best bet is online, but try Amazon or Gamespot.com before you do something crazy and go into Ebay. It's well-worth it, though; I've never regretted buying Gitaroo Man. And yes, this isn't exactly a "retro" title, but sue me, because a website like this needed a Gitaroo Man page.

## 11 - Panic! You Should Do that...

Ah, Sega. If any game company fits the "best of times, worst of times" mold, it's them. Most gamers have fond memories of the Sega Genesis; even if you were a Sega hater back in the days of the 16-bit wars, you have to admit it was one of the most prominent systems of its time, and rightfully so. The lesser-known Master System was an underappreciated gem full of wacky games that really need to make it to this section sooner or later. I can't even begin to extol the wonders of the Dreamcast, Sega's final gift. And lest we forget Sega's classic franchises like Sonic and Virtua Fighter, as well as their creative one-hits like NIGHTS. And of course, Kid Chameleon. "So why, Doom", you may ask, "did Sega leave the hardware business in shame just a short while ago?". Keep your pants on, numbnuts. There are some very good reasons.

Yes, the "Se-ga" voice actually says "Gah-sey!". The Sega CD. The 32X. The mere mention of these abominations are enough to make even the biggest Sega fans wet themselves in disgust. I've got a review to do, so I'm not going to sit here and tell you why these "systems" were horrible, because that'll take an entire review itself. If you need to know the gruesome history, Mars just wrote an article about the whole thing for his site. An excerpt:

...So thusly, the majority of titles released for the Sega CD had heavy emphasis on video, little emphasis on actually playing a game. In other words: the titles were kind of like a DVD menu, except they were actually marketed as games. Add to this the price of the CD add-on itself...and few people bought it. There you have it, and that's exactly the type of game we'll be looking at here in this review. But this is the Retro Caf, so we'll of course be checking out the screwiest one of them all. And who would you think was behind it, if you had to guess?

What a shocker. Let's get started On the Game Not alotta people know of, Panic!

If you've googled Panic! Up already, and saw the Opening Scene, I'm fairly sure that a few questions have entered your curious little noggin. Well, first and foremost, yes, yes, there is early 20th century big band swing music with wacky Japanese sound effects thrown in playing throughout the whole minute and a half or so. But as for why all kinds of vehicles are shooting flowers or warping their own tires, appliances the world over are vomiting, and midget animal robots are dancing with reckless abandon, that's a little much for me to cover. So I'll let the game's story text do it for me.

Now, I realize that a lone computer virus probably can't cause the trunk of a car to flip up and hit a guy in the head, cause vending machines to fly up into the air leaving a rainbow trail behind, or get just about every electrical device in the world to puke. I'm fairly certain that there isn't a giant Mother Computer located somewhere in Greenwich that controls every device in the world. And I'm absolutely positive that a mission of this magnitude wouldn't be handed out to an ugly kid wearing pink overalls (named Slap) and his stupid dog (named Stick). Well, buckle up, because plotheles and logic gaps are going to be the least of our worries where we're going. That's right - it's time to play the damn thing.

As we begin, Slap is sucked into his TV with no explanation, armed only with his trusty remote. I suppose if Plutonium can make it happen on The Simpsons, an all-encompassing computer virus can

get the job done here.

It's the next screen you should get to know, and get to know real well. For it's time to reveal the true object of this game: pressing buttons. That's the ballgame, folks. I'd post a shot of the in-game text to prove it, but I learned my lesson last time, so you'll have to take my word for it. Basically, you're supposed to work your way to the Mother Computer by pressing the right button with the cursor.

What's that? Press one, you say? Actually, you could have said "why the hell are you reviewing this piece of crap instead of Sonic CD?" for all I care, it doesn't matter, I'm still going to press a damn button. It'll be fun, and you'll get to use things other than remotes to press buttons. Doesn't that sound fun?

What'd I tell you? One button press later, and Slappy ends up in a Frankenstein lab. Best of all, we've got a whole new set of buttons to try out. Once you enter a new scenario and press a button, two things can happen. One, you'll just move on to another new area. But more importantly is the second option, and that's something stupid happening. Take a look.

Left Eye: Frank is horribly electrocuted.

Right Eye: Frank is turned into a pouty midget.

Nose: Frank pukes bubble gum.

As soon as one of the above three situations occur, you go back to the original button-pressing screen. No alteration in gameplay, and if you want, you can press the right eye 50 times, and every time you'll get the Frankenstein midget that walks off in a huff. Obviously, this game was made purely for people who get a rise out of idiotic things happening for no good reason. That's why it's here.

Of course, there's always the progression part of things. It may not be much, but it's the closest we're going to come to gameplay, so I'll just press the right mouth button...

GAH. Eight buttons? That's way too much pressure. And what the hell is that thing, anyway? And where's that smooth jazz music coming from? Now you know why this game's called Panic. Well, only one way out of this one.

(Several dinosaur cameos, deadly Tetris blocks, and vomiting Easter Island heads later...)

I should have been happy with eight. Oh, and the Easter Island heads are a recurring theme. They're used in all sorts of ways, most of which end up with someone getting horribly crushed, usually you. Now, before I end up repeatedly bashing myself in the face with a phone, then pressing the pound sign to try to warp to the bathroom, I'm going to stop hitting random buttons and figure out how to reach the end, if such a thing exists.

Those voice samples that I typed out for you are all real (aside from my editorial comments), and are all mentally crippling. So, did you get all that? Trust me, what I just showed you is nothing, there are hundreds of other fracked up scenes, which mere screenshots could not do justice. My favorite part is getting through about 50 of them, then hitting a certain button and ending up back in the stupid Frankenstein lab. And obviously, there are some things you'll have to take my word for, like just about

every scene having a button that summons a genie that hums the bar from the Princess Cashmere episode of the Simpsons (and a doody-do-do to you too, kid!).

The thing I wasn't quite sure to make of (even moreso) were the booby traps. There are some buttons that blow up landmarks for no good reason, with no apparent bearing on gameplay. As you can see, I blew up a dam, and the game just told me that I had indeed blown up a dam, could blow up 28 more things, then returned me to the current scene. Other things I blew up included the Eiffel Tower, New York, and the Golden Gate Bridge. If there are any government officials reading this review, this game needs to be classified under the red zone of the crayola terror alert system, or however the hell that works. All you had to do to blow up a major metropolitan area in 1994 was press a button with a squid on it, if this gets out, we're boned. After further inspection, activating a booby trap may just be how you save your game. Don't try thinking about it, it hurts.

I'm pretty sure I mentioned that the buttons do the same thing every time, so if you record which buttons do what, eventually you'll reach the end. But let me tell you, that's a lot of recording. Of course, if you have a high tolerance for machine vomit and scratchy cartoon voices, you have nothing to fear. Eventually, you'll reach the Mother Computer, which may or not be a giant head.

You get 9 buttons for the final boss, and as far as I can tell, 8 of them send you through several screens of pipes (with an appearance by the genie). The other one WINS THE GAME.

Ever ask yourself what kind of games you missed out on, having never experienced the Sega CD? Thanks to me, you'll probably never want to ask again. Granted, they weren't all point and click adventures, and some games were actually good, and they didn't even have sumo terminators doing the hula. But that's a story for another time. At least we got to take a disturbingly hilarious look at the zaniest Sega CD game of all time. Don't believe me? If, somehow, this review wasn't enough to convince you, just ask the Oct/Nov 1994 issue of Sega Visions magazine. Unfortunately, I don't have a copy or a link to show you, so nuts to you.

## 12 - Karnov: Vodka! Vodka!

In my time, I've heard two stories behind the legend of Karnov. One is that his real name is Jinborov Karnovski, and that he lives in Babylonia. One day, a big dragon swung by and blew up his little town, then made off with some princess, or treasure ... bah, it's all the same. Sounds like bullcrap to me. The version I tend to believe is that Karnov is a fat Russian pimp that got incredibly stoned one night, and then got really, really lost. He also knows how to shoot fireballs from his belly, which is, of course, common to all fat Russian pimps. But make no mistake - Karnov wouldn't hesitate to make any one of them his personal dog. And now it's time for you to help Karnov get his fat @\$\$ through 9 varied levels full of nonsensical enemies and other funky shiznit on your way to defeating the bigass dragon and gettin' back to pleasin' da ladies.

**KARNOV:** Our fat, topless hero. Wears baggy pants, don't take no shoot from no one, and jumps like he has a piece of plywood stuck in his @\$\$\$. I wouldn't say that to his face, though. If there's a cooler video game hero out there, I haven't found him.

**FLOATING YODA:** Sadly, one of the most beloved Star Wars characters of the series fell upon some hard times in the 80's, and was reduced to taking a role as an annoying sub-villain in Karnov. Since Yoda is overweight and green, the Karnov bi-laws clearly state that he too must be topless. This game is severely fracked up.

**MASTURBATING FISHMAN:** The Boss of Level 1. He was a fish that couldn't control his sexual sea urges long enough to provide much of a threat. He appeared as a sub-boss later in the game in most of the levels. Beware his green gooballs of questionable nature.

**EVIL DRAGON:** The grand poobah, and the last enemy you'll face. Pops out of three windows his minions built in his room, and shoots fire at Karnov's @\$\$ while you're trying to run. When you hit him with enough navel fire, he gets pissed and turns red. Then, when finally defeated, his room blows up. What happens then? Read on...

### THE ITEMS:

**THE BOOT:** Lets you jump twice as high. Useful? Yeah, I'd say so. From plywood to a lit match for a little while. We're off to a good start on items ... but trust me, that certainly won't last.

**CRAPPY BOMB:** Blows up some floors/walls in obscure locations on various levels. In short, the bomb sucks.

**LADDER:** Shoots upward to get out of reach items. You'll find in most cases it goes just high enough so that a well-timed jump will send you sailing right beneath the item, and probably down to your death into a bottomless pit. Also, if you climb up but don't climb down, you lose it, and Karnov laughs at you for being such a shoothead.

BOOMERANG: Small and annoying, but kills the Caterpillar Slut (Lv. 4 Boss) in one hit. Can't argue with that.

SPIKE BOMB: Explodes, kills all enemies on the screen. Swanky.

MASK: Damned if I know what the hell this does.

SCUBA HELMET: Lets Karnov swim slightly faster in the water level, so he can slam right into an endless stream of piranhas. I hate this item more than the pussy little bomb.

WINGS: Let you fly in the ... level where you can fly. Otherwise useless.

SHIELD: Best used against the T-Rex that's the boss of several levels, who shoots lots of tiny fireballs at you that seem to kill you if they come within 6 inches.

K's: Collect enough, and Karnov will gain an extra life, and may even give your sorry @\$ a little respect.

Fairly simple: jump with A, shoot belly fire with B. If you find a colored marble, Karnov will gain the ability to shoot 2 or even 3 belly fireballs. However, if you take a hit, Karnov will come down with a nasty cold and turn blue. Your attacks do more damage, but one more hit and your fat can is toast. Never fear though, for another one of these miracle marbles will fix you right up.

But that's not all. Karnov also features the stupidest sub-screen in history.

Sure, looks pretty normal. But say you want a ladder. If you're highlighting the stupid little bomb, you have to tap right to get to the ladder. So if you're four boxes away, that's four taps in the direction of the ladder. Meanwhile, chinamen in their underwear and evil birds are descending on you and you're surrounded by pits, your death is imminent, and all you wanted was a fracking ladder. Sure, you can pause the game, tap 4 times, and unpause, but trust me, in a game this screwy, that's just as disorienting.

Anyway, now that you know how to survive in the wild world of Karnov, Karnov himself has agreed to pose for you in several of his wacky worlds, provided you agree to dance at least 2 hours a day to his ultra-funky game music (that plays in every single booty-shaking level):

After jumping, swimming, and flying through the most notorious of worlds, your reward is perhaps the most invigorating you can receive. And since I'm willing to bet no one reading this will ever become worthy of beating Karnov, I'll show you exactly what you get: THE WORST ENDING EVER:

Yep ... that's it ... OR IS IT? You see, while staring at this blackened screen of hollow victory, a new funkified Karnov groove comes pumping at you out of nowhere. And you thought Karnov would let you down. Shame...

It should be plainly obvious that this game should be the foundation of your very existence from this point on. A fat Russian pimp shooting fireballs from his fat gut at the stupidest enemies this side of Monster Party to the grooviest game music of all time? Yeah, your life beats that .... loser. All hail

Karnov.

## 13 - Karnov The Arcade Game: Karnovpalooza!

If you've read my original Karnov review, and if you haven't may he have mercy on your soul, you may be asking yourself a few questions, especially if you're a newer reader. For a game that holds higher esteem to Polas than any other, why is the review so paltry and disjointed compared to some of the longer and better ones? In fact, the whole thing seems like nothing more than a drunken, obscenity-laden rant about why Karnov is superior to you and your belief system in every way possible. While this of course remains true, these are some valid points. At the time, I had made a topic on a message board about classic video games, and since it got a huge response, it inspired me to make a screwy Story about one of my favorite ones, something I figured I'd show to some friends and forget about after 3 weeks like most things I do.

Little did I know that I'd develop a taste for it, and continue to take fond, cynical looks back to all kinds of blasts from gaming past, from cherished favorites, to requests, to generally screwed up ones I'd encounter while tooling around online. And lo and behold, a year later, I'm still at it for reasons that escape me. Since I felt like doing something special, yet ultimately meaningless, for my first anniversary, what better way to celebrate than by giving my #1 video game hero a brand new review deserving of him? Here's to another year of classic gaming irreverence, and here's to Karnov.

While the Arcade version of Karnov is essentially identical to the NES version with better graphics and sound, there are a few notable differences. In addition to actually sucking in his gut for once, one main difference is the story, as Karnov is actually hunting for treasure, as opposed to rescuing some broad or trying to walk off a buzz.

That's how the game begins, and it's not going to be easy, as an arcade game can handle a lot more on-screen/varied enemies than an NES one. Luckily, Karnov still has his trusty arsenal of wacky and bafflingly useless items and powers at his disposal. It's you and Karnov against 9 levels of all the crap I'm about to cover - the hunt ... is on.

**POWER MARBLE:** It's going to take a lot of belly fire to get Karnov through this one, so collection of Power Marbles are a must. To be fair, the fire does actually look like it's coming out of somewhere closer to his mouth this time, maybe his armpit. However, I can think of worse places for it to be released from, so let's drop it. Marbles change Karnov's paltry row of wuss flame into waves of two or three roaring fireballs, and the effects last until the K-Man bites the dust.

The fireballs may be bigger and more powerful in the Arcade, but unlike the NES Karnov, a hit from an enemy doesn't give Karnov a cold and turn him blue, which can be cured by a Marble. No, this time, one hit simply does our hero in, making things a lot tougher on ol' tubby. Let's hope some of this other crap will prove helpful in some way, shape or form.

**SUPER BOOTS:** These, like most of the items here, are better than the ones in the NES version. Not only do they let Karnov jump higher, they also make him much more nimble, so that equipping them marks the only time in the game when Karnov doesn't handle like a beached whale. PLUS, they give him new, stylish blue pants.



**STILL CRAPPY BOMB:** The bomb has about two practical uses in the entire game: blowing up a tree to cross a gap in Level 3, and blowing up a floor in Level 7. That's it. And they're all over the damn place too, especially at times you could use a Ladder or some Super Boots. They also kill some enemies, but have no range and usually end up killing Karnov instead. Therefore, to quell my silent rage, enjoy this hilarious picture of Karnov trying to cross a pit, but blowing himself up in the process:

**LADDER:** The most useful item in the game, but not always the most practical. You can use it to access higher ledges and out of reach items, but in most cases, you'll get squashed between the ladder and ceiling and have to climb back down anyway, or you'll just miss an item and get killed by an evil crow. You do get to reuse it if you climb all the way back down, but you can guess how often that works out.

**BOOMERANG:** Since the damn thing is broken, it's best used on enemies above or below Karnov that his lard @\$\$ can't reach. You see, instead of coming back to Karnov like a good, old-fashioned Australian/Hyrulian one, it homes in on enemies upon return. While this may seem dandy, you only get to use it once, so up yours.

**SUPER FIREBALL:** Yes, here's the good stuff. Exclusive to this version, once you get it, you have the ability for the rest of the game. However, you must collect refills in sets of 30, as these fireballs are longer than Karnov's normal ones, kill most enemies in one hit, and most bosses in only a few. Thus, using them leaves Karnov tired and out of breath, and since you won't be seeing him on a treadmill anytime soon, you'd best get you some more ammo.

As you can tell, the final four items appear in a different section of the subscreen, as they're only usable when they flash. They NEVER flash.

**WINGS:** Remember last time, Level 8 was the "in the sky" level where you needed to keep getting wings to progress through the level? Here, Level 8 is some sort of enchanted forest. As such, I didn't encounter a single point in the game that the wings were of any use. Now, I did finally find out what the mask is for, but given that, I'd much rather have found a place for the wings.

**SCUBA HELMET:** Does pretty much the same thing as it always has; lets Karnov swim like a gazelle in the water. This time, in keeping with his enhanced blue clothing line, the helmet and mysteriously appearing flippers are blue, just like Karnov's ... special pants.

**MASK:** After never knowing what the hell this stupid thing does, I finally found out: it lets you see a couple of crappy items in Level 7 that weren't visible before. Boy howdy, I'll sleep easier tonight. At least we now know what Karnov looks like on Halloween.

**SPEED SHOES:** I'm guessing that make make Karnov go faster, and I say guessing, because I found these damn things on the 2nd level, and never once found a use for them. I suppose Karnov's girth prevents him from gracefully rollerblading through a level, and watching Karnov slide through the stage even slower than he walks while grabbing onto the walls for balance is probably something we don't need to see. Besides, the time limit would probably expire five times over. But don't worry, if I find a use for them between now and June 2003, we'll be all set for the re-re-review, won't we?

**THE K:** 50 of them give you an extra Karnov. Somewhere equivalent to Mario collecting 1,000 coins

based on difficulty and availability of these stupid things. But hey, there's always the Mask.

One area in which the previous Karnov review was lacking was the enemy section, or lack thereof. You'll get to meet a lot more of them this time, including ones not seen in the NES version, such as the ostrich-riding skeletons. Don't ask, we'll get there soon enough. But there's only one proper way to introduce the cavalcade of villains, and that's with everyone's favorite...

FLOATING YODA: Ah, everyone loves Floating Yoda. He doesn't fight with a lightsaber, but he does float around and annoy Karnov. I've since learned that he only took the job because he was promised a nude part, which is why they gave him the nest. So enjoy, all you lonely Star Wars fans, it's not Princess Leia or Natalie Portman, but it'll have to do. The real question is, can you handle THIS:

Let's see, your typical assortment of annoying flying things, including but not limited to the Anorexic Demon, Stoney, my favorites the Ostrich Bone Squad, evil one-eyed swordsmen, Golden Man, Plantus Moveyourassus, the crying woman that turns into a green thing, the armor with no one in it, Mutant Zeus/Abe Lincoln statue, and finally, the Ambiguously Gay Egyptian Duo. What a game.

These are the villains that are introduced in the first few levels. They will show up later on in greater numbers, but since there'll be more new ones to cover then, enjoy them now. Among the most notable are: Golden Man, who can split up into 5 parts and shoot himself at you, the freaky statues, because you can take out individual sections, and if you blast the head you can use it as a platform. I also think I need to explain Plantus Moveyourassus. Whenever Karnov starts to wheeze and stands around doing nothing for awhile, a green blob falls from the sky, then turns into a plant that begins firing on his lazy @\$\$. What a game.

At this point, I have no idea whether this game takes place in Russia, Babylonia, Newark, or what. I'd have to guess that it's Russia, since the game starts here, Karnov lives in Russia, and everyone knows that in Karnov's heyday, skeletons riding around Russia on ostriches was commonplace. There's nothing different about this level that I haven't said before, just running in front of buildings and over concrete, blasting everything in Karnov's way. But you didn't think I'd forget about the boss, did you?

That's right, Horny Fishman is back in all his glory, although this time, his "sack" is thankfully a different color than his skin. Still seems a bit suspicious though. His predictable attack patterns and icky gooballs aren't much to speak of, so I'll just mention that after you beat him (or any boss), you get a new piece of the treasure map. That said, Ancient Ruins ... BEWARE!

This is the first place in the game where you can choose a route. It happens a lot later, which is the only explanation I can think of for why I never found a use for the damn wings and roller skates. Anyway, once you get past the evil Abe statues, you can use them as a platform to take the easier roof route, or go down below, to an area filled with Golden Man, traps, bats, and the dead chick/monster. Do not go down below. The boss is twofold, the Evil Sheik first sics his alien lions at you, then tries to knife you. Luckily, his twig @\$ is no match for Karnov, as he has even less energy than a normal enemy.

I'm sorry, but this is the sorriest excuse for a "forest" I've ever seen. And since I doubt this is some sort of metaphor about how pollution is bad, since Karnov can't really be concerned with crap like that, I'm putting my money on "whoops, forgot we already have a forest level for later". As mentioned, this is one level where you can actually use a bomb to progress. I mention it again because this level doesn't really

have much to it. The boss is the giant T-Rex, who still blasts a bunch of annoying little fireballs, only the shield didn't make it into this game. Since Karnov is a sitting duck as a result, it's best to plant a boomerang upside the damn thing's head and move on.

Rocky hills actually would have been a more appropriate name for the last level, as this one is more like "Through the caves with the strangely out-of-place conveyor belts". You never know just what to expect next in the weird world of Karnov. This is a relatively short level, but there are plenty of volcanoes to get roasted by and holes to fall into. The boss is Caterpillar Slut, and quite clearly, Karnov isn't afraid to get his freak on by slappin' around those demonic funbags before wasting the crazy dog. Big Pimpin', Karnov style.

Before we tackle the tougher levels, let's meet some more fun-lovin' Karnov adversaries:

There's good old Dr. Mudman and Mr. Rock, the happy Demon Diver, Mer-Man, the freakiest looking owls I've ever seen, that chain of weird fuzzballs that chases Karnov around, Mummies that turn into tombstones when you hit them, really pissed off Floating Yoda, and of course, the Ambiguously Gay Tree Monsters. Forward, ho!

Ah, the water level. Karnov dons his swimwear, dozens of weird little guys try to hit him in his giant bullseye of an @\$@ with harpoons. There are places where Karnov can hop out of the water, but for the most part, it's dodging underwater baddies, including that dastardly clam. I should note at this point they started getting tired of coming up with new bosses, so instead, they just threw all the enemies and Horny Fishmen at Karnov they could find. This becomes all too evident in the next stage.

Yeah, these townfolk sure look happy to see me. Karnov, blinded by his aspirations of treasure and finding a bathroom, wanders right smack into Enemy Town, which is where all the bad guys hang out until they get sent into lesser levels to get smacked up by K-dog. This is what I'd consider the hardest level in the game, simply because the attacks from all directions don't let up. The "boss" is two caterpillar chicks at the end, but that isn't too bad compared to everything else Karnov has to plow through. And, them owls is spooky.

Karnov's ready to walk like an Egyptian, as the Pyramid level approaches. Not only is this level mind-numbingly bothersome in that it's confusing, there are lots of traps, and rocks tend to drop on Karnov's head out of nowhere, but as seen above, you'll have to deal with some new explodey dragon minibosses. On the bright side, there's a small stretch towards the end of the level where you can put the Mask on Karnov and make him look like a doofus, but don't blame me if he kicks your @\$@ later.

To put it quite bluntly, this level is shoot compared to the last two. Maybe every four levels you get a reprieve or something, because this is another short one with a T-Rex boss. In the NES version, this was where the wings came in, but here, it's some sort of evil forest. Or "The Hollows", as it were. Thank goodness for odd statues and gay trees, or this one would be a total bust. BUT, and I underline but, the last level approaches.

You can pretty much tell what you're in for, based on the last boss leaving all that crap out for you right at the beginning, cocky bastard he is. The Fortress is a big maze, full of almost all of the non-sucky nightmares profiled earlier, bosses included. Using the Ladder, Super Fireball, and other items strategically needs to be done, and since Karnov isn't exactly known for his smarts, it's up to you. If you

somehow manage to pull this one, you're in for a surprise, as the last boss isn't a Dragon, but an evil bald wizard.

You do fight in the same room, and the battle is pretty similar, but it's worth your while oh so much more this time around. Why?

Well, now that the map is complete, you get to see Karnov strut right onto it, trying not to look too stupid after realizing that to get the treasure, he could have just walked a few miles south instead of circling the whole damn world. Then, Karnov vomits profusely on the "X" and makes a nifty little hole, which he proceeds to leap through. Where does it lead?

Let's just say that we're looking at one happy fat fire-breathing Russian Circus Freak.

Does Karnov still hold up as the greatest game of all time? Of course. Will it ever be topped? I seriously doubt it. After one whole year, the Karnov magic is still alive and well. If you got through this entire review without developing an undying love for Jinborov Karnovski, I weep for your soul. I actually do that anyway, since you'd have to be as nuts as I am to even be here in the first place. But through it all, one message remains perfectly clear: ALL HAIL KARNOV.

## 14 - Trio the Punch: Never Forget Me...

Funny thing, this Internet. You hear expressions such as "you never stop learning", or "you learn something new every day", and for the most part these sayings used to be a crock of BS. Even in the early 20th century, you could learn pretty much everything by age 27 or so. Then at a point in history that no one can agree on, other than it happening sometime in the 1960's, the world went crazy and everything changed. Radical new thought manifested itself in the minds of Americans over the next few decades, and hopefully someone who lives in Japan can explain just what the hell happened over there. The end result was a twist of pop culture both stupendous and horrific, followed by video games like the one I'm going to talk about today, many of which stayed in Japan, escaping our grasp. Thanks to the Internet, we can now claim "better late than never".

The point I'm trying to make sans the nonsensical rambling social commentary is that I found yet another screwy Data East game thanks to the vast resources of the Internet. Did your ears just perk up? They should have, if you've been coming here for awhile. Despite being relatively obscure and irrelevant by today's standards, they were responsible for unleashing a bevy of gaming insanity upon the world. Some of these games have been covered on the site, and there are a good number of others I could do. However, as we all know, none even come close to holding a candle to the veritable Russian pimp laureate of gamedom himself, the all-powerful KARNOV. And as we've seen in the past, Data East isn't afraid to exploit this fact.

This time, things are a little different. It's like Data East invaded my future nightmares to get just enough material for a good portion of an arcade beat-em-up. Certainly, it's been noted that for the right price, Karnov is willing to cast his lot on the side of evil. But never like this. You see, Karnov is a man of many resources, and as we saw in the above-linked Fighter's History review, he had droves of followers willing to train under the great one in order to do his bidding. So this time, Karnov decided he'd rather just kick back in the old recliner and let his legions of Karnovores do all the work while he collected the check. Just because he can. And wait until you get a load of these guys -"Never Forget Me" is certainly appropriate. They had me at Black Karnov.

Before we get to that, let me tell you just a little bit about the actual game itself. Even without all the Karnov, it still has a place here.

Upon insertion of coinage, you'll be able to select from this ...trio. Hey, it all makes sense now, and by "all" I mean "the first word". We have Skinny Bathrobe Shredder, Token Backward Cap Rebel Street Punk, and what appears to be Fei Long on 'Roids, brandishing a bigass sword. There may be a more logical explanation and backstory to these characters, but quite frankly, I'm certain that my version is much better. In any case, if they're going to make it through the land of Karnov, they'll need all the help they can get.

Unfortunately, the best they're going to get is an old guy in a rubber hat and his number wheel of fortune and fun. The white number rotates clockwise, and you must attempt to stop it with the attack button on the one you want. 1 puts you back at full energy, 2 improves your main weapon, 4 your special, once-per-level attack, 3 and 5 you probably want to stay away from if you value your improved attacks,

and 6 is the only way to switch characters. Not that you have any reason to pick anyone other than Bathrobe Shredder, considering he's the fastest and has jumping projectiles at the cost of frail weakness. In the interest of fairness to you the reader, I tried to give all three guys equal time.

All video game ninjas know the Double Attack & Art of Fire Wheel.

The "drop giant rock on goblin head" thing, that's a new one.

Well, he got the best specials, what can I say. Standard attacks can also be upgraded, and here's ol' backward cap guy to show us how.

From fists, to Vega Claw, to giant battery.

Hey, wait a sec. Fei Long, Vega Claw; there probably would have been another Capcom vs. Data East lawsuit in the cards, if anyone had heard of this game 15 or so years ago. On the other hand, no Capcom beat-em-up was quite like this. The levels literally have no end, unless you count the time limit that eventually appears. You'll just continue to loop through the mini-level until you collect enough "HELP" hearts, which are usually dropped by enemies. You have to collect 1-5 in every stage, and the subscreen will tell you how many are left until the boss appears. If this seems cheap, the levels may be short but they are Kid Chameleon-like in number, and every one has a boss, even if the "boss" is sometimes a group of strong regular enemies.

Know that it won't be easy grabbing hearts from the bad guys in this one. In many of my reviews, I've devoted a mini-section to the wacky enemies present in the game. This is, I believe, the first time I've made one for an entire SUBSET of enemies. With no further ado, ladies and gentlemen, let's MEET THE KARNOVS.

**LOINCLOTH KARNOV:** The most common Karnov flunkie in the game. Karnov's budget doesn't include the traditional baggy pants for the multitude of enemies in this game, so they pretty much had to fend for themselves. Despite the lack of attire, these guys can utilize the basic Karnov attacks: spitting fire and awkward jumping. The best part about these guys is that they're only the tip of the iceberg.

**MIDGET KARNOV:** Karnov's mighty midget contingent has the ability to bend backwards and breathe flame, as well as the unique power of, well, standing upside down. They're also used for other diabolical purposes, as we'll see shortly.

**BLACK KARNOV:** Although that fat racist bastard Karnov put his soul brothers in the game's jungle area, he did rightfully endow them with more speed and power than their white bretheren. Of course, they do tend to gang up on you more than the others ... you know, I think I'll just stop here before Karnov gets me sued again, then laughs about it from his luxury gondola that he takes out over international waters whenever there's a legal threat.

**INJUN KARNOV:** ...See what I mean? At least Injun Karnov has the mystical Indian ability to shoot glowing neon pink fireballs.

**SCUBA KARNOV:** In an homage to Level 5 of the original, these Karnov disciples don the famed scuba helmet the big guy wore to swim slightly faster against those spear-tossing mer-demon things. They also perform a delightful swan dive back into the water if they reach land and your character is nowhere around.

**BOMB KARNOV:** Not to be outdone, these fellows set you up the bomb with a bigger version of one of

Karnov's favorite weapons. And, just like their hero, the bomb very often backfires with comical results.

WINGED KARNOV: Ever wonder what Karnov did with all those useless Scuba Mask and Wings icons he picked up during his game? Wonder no more. Of particular note is the bouldous size Winged Karnov's head must swell to in order to properly spit down fireballs at you.

And last, but certainly not least...

GIANT SEDUCTIVE KARNOV STATUE HELD ALOFT BY FOUR KARNOV MIDGETS THAT SHOOTS FIRE OUT OF HIS TOES

Regrettably, Data East could only afford Karnov and company for about 1/4 of the game, at which point Karnov began demanding a dump truck per day of Milk Duds with the disgusting centers removed delivered to his trailer. Needless to say, the game had to go on without him. On the bright side, this is still Data East we're talking about, so I'll be happy to take you the rest of the way.

Here we see Fei and his flaming sword take on the jungle stages, where the Karnovs are actually still pretty prevalent. I still need to introduce you to this area for a very important reason - the boss is a gigantic pink sheep. That's not even the reason. See, if you are killed by this monster sheep, you inexplicably turn into a giant pink sheep yourself, and remain that way for the next 4-5 levels until it just kind of wears off.

A terrible fate indeed, except for the fact that you gain the boss' power of tossing out miniature pink sheep as offensive weapons, which results in a hilarious sheep-tossin' rematch with Pinky. To illustrate what I was just talking about, here I am in a later level, with a towering demonic totem pole stumbling toward my fluffy pink @\$\$.

Once the sheep curse is lifted, it's out of the frying pan and into the fire, as the old guy in the hat gets fed up with your ungrateful, bonus-grubbing ways. After kicking his hiding place (an oversized turtle shell), he hops into action against you with his plethora of advanced techniques; not only does he possess the greatest attack in gamedom, the classic extendo punch, but he can shoot Japanese characters at you, and make random parts of his anatomy (...) very, very big.

Come to think of it, this guy is probably the trio's sensei. After all, one of your guys does possess a very similar special move. If only he had time to learn crane style...

The fact that I'm using this screen solely to demonstrate your ability to leap on projectiles speaks volumes about this game.

Things get (relatively) normal for a bit, as you get through the last of the Karnov areas and the K-crew gets fewer in number. They pick right back up as you meet the final boss before the entirely non-Karnov levels, the enormous foot that transforms you into a star-throwing midget upon contact. To beat it, you must employ the final boss strategy from Super Mario Bros. 3. Reread the preceding paragraph, and then try and tell me I don't have the greatest site on the Internet.

I know, you were thinking "gee, a giant foot boss is great and all, but what about the spooky riverside graveyard and the multiple bridges of doom?". Before your puny brain could even arrive at the point of wondering when the skinny tin man with the ludicrously oversized mallet was going to show up, I had

you covered. In a lesser game, any of these screens would make an adequate final section to the stage. Somehow, probably revenue left over from the original Karnov, Data East had deep pockets at this point in history, and sprung for one more major guest star to really cap things off. Go on, keep reading. You're not ... chicken, are you?

The vertical scrolling sewer of gator death and the Tonka Truck Zombie are your last chances to turn back....

BA-GAWK! Yes, Colonel Sanders himself shows up to tempt our hero(es) with a delicious box of Kentucky Fried Chicken. But in a disgusting orgy of black magic and white meat, the poor Colonel experiences karmic retribution and explodes from within, revealing the always effective evil birds and a bevy of chicken leg projectiles. Colonel Sanders also has midget power. I hope to the gaming powers that be that this is the first time in the history of life that anyone has typed "Colonel Sanders also has midget power".

This is indeed a Japan-exclusive, so as per most of them, we take our obligatory trip to the land of the rising sun. The levels with the endless bamboo and katana platforms made me as dizzy as the last time I touched Fuzzy. If you're using Shredder Ninja, the game really starts to take on an "I'm playing a second-rate knockoff of Ninja Gaiden" vibe at this point, which is why, I'd wager, that they quickly threw in a massive Kitty Boss.

I shouldn't have to say it anymore, but yes, midget power. That's not even the end of the Japanese area. For instance...

...a rematch against Crazy Sensei, more vertical goodness with extendo spear monkeys this time, and rooftop battles with various stone things that come to life. After something like that, you must be expecting something even crazier and off the wall. I'm very sorry to disappoint you, as all I can give you is an unexplained journey into space to battle aggressive astro blobs of many colors.

All right, when the yellow ones can not only employ the blob tanks of their red brothers, but also transform into a dinosaur, that's just too much. Contrary to, or perhaps due to their soft, gelatinous makeup, these guys can take a lot of damage, a very frustrating development when you're trying to collect hearts and ol' Mr. Time Limit rears his ugly head. Did I mention the green ones can bounce? Yeah, they can bounce. The stretch of space levels is what I'd consider the toughest area of the game, but it's okay since we're almost done. Because now, it's LAST BOSS TIME.

...I think? This area consists of a serene park setting, in which you beat up on several small, defenseless animals. After completing this task, your guy strikes his victory pose, evil eyes form beneath him, then the colossal block of evil they're attached to rise up, and we go into midget mode one last time. I'm thinking that this is possibly a bad ending of sorts, perhaps for beating on said animals, but in a game like this? Eh, who knows. After the "block of evil" scene, this happened:

Considering Karnov's involvement, that's a good enough ending for me.

There's no way you can possibly dislike this game. It lends itself perfectly to the arcade beat-em-up genre, especially as far as getting you to add more quarters, which I accomplish by hitting the "Space" key. Perhaps the looping stages could have been made a bit longer, but there are plenty of them, and



hey, we were still in the 80's. In that respect, you've got the usual 80's Retro Cafe insanity, topped off with a heaping helping of Karnov. KARNOV. It's a blast to play through at least once, and every time you do, Karnov himself receives a royalty check for 49 cents. So what are you waiting for?

## 15 - Waku Waku 7: Neo Geo Stardom!

When I finally acquired a Neo Geo Emulator, Waku Waku 7 was one of the first games on my list to play on it. It's a fighting game by Sunsoft that never got enough attention if you ask me. And just why is this semi-obscure game deserving of a chance to shine in the spotlight? Allow me to explain.

Fire off, Waku Waku 7 isn't the seventh game in a series; the number refers to the amount of primary playable characters in the game. There are a lot of people out there who avoid fighting games like the plague because there's simply a large learning curve to them. And hey, let's be honest... it's never a lot of fun to be the new guy playing a fighting game against somebody who's been playing it for an eternity. You can only laugh but so many times as your character gets stomped into the ground before that laughter turns to frustration and rage. RAAAAGE! Well, Waku Waku 7 pretty much eliminates all of that. Your special moves don't require a crazy combination of button presses and joystick jerks, it's just a matter of building up enough energy. Furthermore, if your opponent is about to unleash a special move on you, there's a warning alarm so you can try to counteract it while he's charging up.

Another thing I love about this game is that the characters are awesome. Sure, it doesn't have the 30+ characters that many modern fighting games do, but it does have seven solid characters plus two amazing bonus characters that you can use in versus mode. You don't even have to unlock anything to play them. So why are the characters so much fun to play? It's because they're all lampooning some preexisting fighting game characters (including Street Fighter, Darkstalkers, Samurai Shodown and others).

For example, the character "Bonus-Kun" is clearly poking fun at Ryu from the Street Fighter series. Bonus-Kun is a punching bag with no arms or legs, but he's got a headband and can pull off a mean "Kou Shuu Tan", his own version of the Ryu's "Hadouken" move.

Then there's Fernandez. Ohhhhhh Fernandez. This is without a doubt my favorite character in the game. Imagine a giant black water balloon three times the size of your average fighting game character, tack on some tiny bat wings and a huge grinning face and you've got Fernandez in a nutshell. He also kinda reminds me of one of those giant Chain Chomps from Mario Kart. Regardless of what you think Fernandez looks like, he's a mocktacular tribute to all of the oversized characters in fighting games, and let me tell ya... you haven't lived until you've played a two-player Fernandez vs. Fernandez game. The camera actually has to back out frequently just to fit the two of them on the screen. His special moves are pretty damned amusing too, but I don't want to spoil 'em for those of you who haven't given it a shot yet.

With a title like "Waku Waku 7" (the "Waku Waku" part apparently being a Japanese onomatopoeia for sounds of excitement), I guess it's not surprising that the game isn't more well known, but know that it is available. In addition to being on some Neo Geo MVS arcade cabinets, the game was also released on the Sega Saturn and on a "Sunsoft Collection" disc for the Playstation 2. Sure the game could use some more characters, no doubt about it, but it's still a blast. Great graphics, hilarious characters and extremely fun gameplay make Waku Waku 7 a title definitely worth hunting down. I mean, how often do you get to fight as a pissed off punching bag or a jolly giant blob with a big smile? It's not easy standing

out from the rest of the fighting games out there, but Waku Waku 7 definitely found a way.

If you're still not sold on Waku Waku 7, then perhaps a victory screen will do the trick with Politank Z?

YES, YES, YES! BALLS, BALLS, BALLS!

## 16 - Hugo's House Of Horror!

Dual 5 1/4" floppy drives, dot matrix printers, EGA monitors... ahh yes, those were the days. It was a simpler time, back when "going online" meant dialing in to a local computer BBS to play ANSI door games like "Tradewars 2002" and "The Pit" for hours on end. I should know; long before I started I-Mockery, I ran a computer BBS for years and had an absolute blast doing so. My parents hated it for a while, because the house would get phone calls in the middle of the night, and when they answered the phone, all they would hear is that piercing, garbled modem noise from somebody trying to dial into my BBS. Eventually, I got a private line of my own for it (and upgraded to a blazing fast 14.4k Zoom modem!) and the BBS was up 24/7 without waking up my family late at night any more.

In addition to meeting some really nice people with similar interests in my town, one of the great things about running that BBS for all those years was a lot of the members on my board would upload shareware games to it for myself and other members to check out. Long before I played any of the classic adventure games by Sierra (King's Quest, Space Quest, Police Quest, etc.) and LucasArts (Monkey Island, Day of the Tentacle, Loom, etc.), I was introduced to a little shareware adventure game called Hugo's House of Horrors:

Needless to say, upon seeing this opening screen, I knew this was going to be a game I would not stop playing any time soon. I already loved anything involving horror (shocking, I know), so getting to play a game where you guide some guy into a haunted house to save his missing girlfriend sounded absolutely awesome. Keep in mind, at the time, this wasn't a game where you used your mouse to move around... you had to literally type in every command. As with all adventure games, there's a lot of trial & error involved, but some of those errors can produce some laughs. For example:

Ok, so typing "FART" wasn't an error or particularly mature, but I remember half the fun of games like this was to play them with friends while typing in something ridiculous to see what it would respond with. In this case, Hugo reacts by exclaiming, "Same to you, loser!" He's got a temper, that one.

Now, two decades later, I've come back to the game after discovering it was re-released to be compatible with Windows, and I thought it would be fun to take a trip down memory lane and play through the whole thing. Fortunately, they let you use a mouse to move around now, which makes playing the game a lot easier than it used to be. Perhaps it's nostalgia, but I still enjoy typing in a lot of the commands, so I'll be doing that a lot as I play through it this time. Before we begin, if you're interested in getting a copy of the game, you can buy it here.

Alright, now with the big introduction out of the way, let's get down to business and play through Hugo's House of Horrors!

Once you're done looking at the bat or trying to climb the fence, you'll want to smash the pumpkin on the front porch there to reveal a key that unlocks the front door. I remember doing this instinctively and thinking I was a goddamn genius for figuring it out so quickly... and you know what? I was.

Before we go inside, I just have to say that this exterior haunted house graphic has appeared in countless Halloween clipart collections over the years. In fact, I just did a Google image search for "haunted house clipart" and a black & white version of it still appears as the second result! I'm always amused to see it still floating around in those collections after all these years, because I was sure that nobody even knew it originated in an old PC adventure game.

Moving on, we're now inside the house in the main hall area and have to collect a few things: the candle from the table, and a pocket knife and whistle from the cubbyhole beneath the stairs. While you're in there, you notice some inconspicuous eyeballs looking at you from behind those paintings. I used to think there was some way to get to a secret passage behind them, but this wasn't the case. Couldn't even poke them in the eyes, the peeping bastards. With the aforementioned items now in our inventory, it's time to move upstairs into the bedroom. But wait!

If you're like me, the first thing you'd do upon acquiring those items would be to blow the whistle. Sorry, but this isn't Legend of Zelda... for if you blow that whistle in this house of horrors, somebody comes to greet you:

Greet you and eat you that is. Of course, your death isn't very graphic or anything, though that psycho dog with the red eyes is covered in blood. So yeah, lesson learned... don't blow the whistle while wandering around in the house unless you want to be mauled by psycho dog. Ok, let's move onward to the bedroom.

The bedroom is pretty small, so there's not much mystery about what to do here. You open up the cabinet and discover a "grotesque monkey's head" mask inside it. Hey, I never claimed the game didn't have completely random elements, that's part of its charm. Speaking of charm, if you try looking under the bed, the computer basically mocks you in something akin to Kuni in Weird Al's UHF. Good times.

We now head to the next room over, the bathroom, in search of more things for the ol' inventory. What we find instead is a surprisingly clean bathroom. This always surprised me, because I never figured a haunted house full of monsters would ever bother cleaning up after themselves. Well, except maybe for Dracula. That guy has class. But the Creature from the Black Lagoon? He'd try swimming in the toilet for chrissakes, and he doesn't strike me as the kind of guy who's gonna clean up after himself. He's more likely to eat a roll of toilet paper than use it for what it was intended for.

Well anyway, Hugo refuses to look inside the toilet for any clues, and when you tell him to piss, he really

overreacts by exclaiming, "Yeugh! How uncouth!" Come on Hugo, you'd probably find clues a lot easier if you weren't distracted by a full bladder, don't ya think? Fortunately for him, there's a big "333" scribbled in red ink on the mirror above the sink. It's either telling us that the monsters in this haunted house are only mildly evil, or it's a clue that will come in handy later. Hmm, I wonder which it could be? Before leaving the bathroom, I told Hugo to wash his hands and he said, "Look, are you taking this game seriously, or what?" No Hugo, I'm not, and besides... cleanliness is next to godliness.

Alright, let's see what's in that last upstairs room...

Upon entering that room, you get a notice telling you, "The high frequency cosmic radiation emanating from this rooms knocks your mask onto the floor! (You can pick it up again when you come out!)" SCIENCE! Who are we to question such bulletproof logic? Once inside, you discover it's a lab belonging to The Mad Professor (hey, it's not just scientists who go mad) and he wants you to walk into his box for an experiment. Seeing as you really want the rubber bung that's on the table behind the door, you cautiously agree to do it.

The Mad Professor tells his adorably green assistant, Igor, to push the blue button, but since he's color blind, he pushes the red one and you get shrunk down to half your original size. Annoyed with Igor, the Mad Professor storms out of the room and leaves you alone in there. Now you're small enough to walk behind the glass door and grab the rubber bung.

Guys, it's taken me over thirteen friggin' years to write an article where I get to say "grab the rubber bung," so I'm gonna revel in it here for a moment. Sure, a rubber bung is just a fancy, scientific way of naming a cork or a stopper, but a rubber bung transcends all conventional uses, and absolutely needs to become a part of our common vernacular. The next time you're at a restaurant, ask your server if they have any fine wines that are sealed with a rubber bung. If they say they don't have any or (even worse) they don't know what a rubber bung is, let out a big chortle and shout, "And you have the gall to call yourself a restaurant!? Good day sir! I SAID, GOOD DAY!" and proceed to storm the hell out of there. If we don't take these kind of drastic actions, rubber bungs will never have their chance to shine in the spotlight. Let the rubber bungs into your hearts, people... let them in.

Now listen up. Before we do anything else in the game, I think we need to take a minute here to appreciate the true star of Hugo's House of Horrors. No, not rubber bungs, though they clearly come in a close 2nd place. I'm talking about IGOR!

I mean, just look at the guy. He's green, has a red eyes, ears and a belly button, and walks around in nothing but purple underwear (and I bet if he want back in time, his mom would see them and call him "Calvin"). If there's any single character in this game who deserves to have a spin-off game of his own, it's gotta be Igor, the colorblind lab assistant. Hell, I could see him, Karnov and Abobo going on an epic bald guy's adventure together. Even Hugo knows Igor has something special, for if you look at him, he remarks, "He has a certain charm, I suppose!" Indeed, Hugo... indeed!

Ok, so after you've grabbed the bung and allowed Igor to fiddle with the buttons some more until he made you normal again, you put on your monkey mask and head on downstairs to the dining room. There you'll find a butler who will give you a tasty steak chop, but you can't sit at the table with all the other cool monsters, because you weren't invited. It's a damned shame too, because sitting at the table are some of the world's most famous monsters, Dracula and Frankenstein's Monster, along with some of the more unsung ones, such as Slime and Pea Head. You can try talking to any of them, but they're either really rude to you, or tell you a bad joke straight off the back of a Bazooka gum wrapper. Either way, not a dinner party you should be attending.

Oh, and if you're wondering why you needed that monkey mask? If you ask the Butler for a chop without your mask on, he'll chop off your head. Very good, sir.

With your head still intact, it's time to head out the back door and enter the old shed. But wait! There's a combination lock on the door! Crikey! Now what do we do!? Well, if you're like me, you wonder why you just typed "crikey" when your name isn't Steve Irwin, and then you remember the "333" that was scribbled on the bathroom mirror. Bingo! The lock opens up and you venture into the shed to collect an oil can.

From there, you head back inside and enter the room to the left of the kitchen where that psycho dog, who mauled us earlier in the game, is currently hanging out. Since the dog moves fast, you have to be quick here, so what I always did was type "give dog chop" just before I went into the room, and then hit the enter key as soon as I saw him charging at me. Now that the dog is distracted by the tasty chop, you lift up the carpet and discover the secret door (which many of you will now get the reference I made to this in my "Trick-Or-Treat Adventure Quest" game) and use some oil to loosen up the lock. Sadly, you no longer need to wear your monkey mask in the game, so it makes you throw it away. Personally, I'd feel safer exploring the depths of a haunted house with the monkey mask on. It got me this far in the game, what suddenly gives Hugo the foresight to realize he'll never need it again, anyway? Oh plot holes... how we love thee.

After heading down the trap door, you find yourself in a basement which appears to be a storage facility for large boulders. There's also an iron door which you can see your girlfriend, Penelope, locked inside of. Of course, if you try opening it, the game makes fun of you for thinking it was gonna be that easy, so you have to keep searching around the room for another way to reach her. Since we don't share Hugo's visual perspective, we eventually wander between the two boulders in the center of the room and suddenly end up in a bat-infested cave. Don't question the logic, just go with it.

There's an opening on the other side of the cave, but those bats will get ya if you don't act quick. Fortunately, science reigns supreme, and their "sonar-like hearing" is messed up when you blow on your whistle. I guess psycho dog was still chowing down on the steak chop to care about coming to find you down in the bat cave. Well, the dog was nothing compared to this next enemy:

If there's one thing in the game that annoyed me, it was The Mummy. Correction: Mummy on Speed. As far as classic horror movie depictions of the mummy go, he's usually seen as an extremely powerful, but slow, supernatural force. Much like zombies, if you can move a little faster than they do, you're generally gonna be ok unless you get cornered. That's not the case with this mummy. He's insanely fast, and I still have nightmares about how he would say "Gotcher!!" whenever he caught Hugo, so your only hope is to use the AI to your advantage by strategically making him get stuck behind boulders in the room. If you get him to follow you in a counter-clockwise path, he'll end up stuck behind the boulder on the far left, where all he can do is sob as he watches you steal all his treasure. Stupid mummy... can't even figure out how to move around a rock.

In the next room, we find a small lake with a boat floating in it and an old man fishing on the opposite side. Hugo either doesn't care about Penelope enough to just swim across the water, or he simply doesn't want to get wet, because the only way it allows you to get across that water is to use the boat. Problem is, there's a hole in the boat. If only we had some way to plug that hole. Hey, wait a minute! I've got just the solution!

Yes! That's how you plug a hole in a boat... with a goddamn RUBBER BUNG! Oh rubber bung, where would we be without you? We'd be absolutely lost, that's where we'd be.

With your boat hole properly bung-plugged, you can cross the dangerous 10 foot wide lake to see what the deal with the old fisherman is. Apparently, he's a jerk who won't let you hop ashore unless you answer some of his trivia questions. Hugo, being a total pacifist, decides to answer the old man's questions instead of just picking him up and throwing him in the lake (something I wanted to do many a time).

Keep in mind, this was before the advent of Google, so if you didn't know how to solve a question about the Chronicles of Narnia, you were gonna have to ask other people for the answers or do some reading. Yep, back then, games made us actually use our brains! Now you know where the "horror" part of "Hugo's House of Horrors" really comes from. Once you've answered all of his questions, including the incredibly difficult "Are you sure you want to rescue Penelope?" (which I'm still not sure about to this day), the old man allows you to pass into the final area. Remember, he warned us that there were dangers through yonder passage? I was expecting some horrible mummy-dog hybrid that would kill me in an instant, but as it turns out, the old man was talking out of his @\$\$.

Yep, no real challenge awaits you, just a badly sunburned moustache man who, like Igor, has a penchant for purple underwear. He also has a penchant for treasure, and it only takes one gold coin to



get him to step aside so you can finally go rescue you beloved Penelope. Believe it or not, that was your big final challenge... bribing a sunburned guard with a nice moustache. House of horrors, indeed!

You walk through the doorway and find Penelope, sitting behind a desk. For some reason, she only appears as a shadow on this screen, but I'm sure that's just to keep the mystery of her identity hidden from us until we get a close-up shot of her. Oh wait, no... it's not that at all. We don't get to see her face at all, all we get to see is hugo spinning around doing a crazy celebratory dance followed by this:

That's it. No explanation as to who kidnapped Penelope, no explanation about what evils plans were taking place, no explanation about where the mad professor stormed off to, and to top it all off, we never even get to see the face of Penelope. Wait, now that I think about it, this is actually a horrible ending. Look at Hugo! Penelope apparently sucked all the life out of him and turned him into a shadow just like herself! Turns out the real horrors weren't inside that house at all... they were in his marriage! Whoah, talk about an unforeseen surprise ending twist!

Well, if you ask me, it's not all bad news. Maybe I'm just a hopeless romantic at heart, but I like to think that there was one truly happy ending to this tale...

It may be a small entry in the history of PC games, but Hugo's House of Horrors had a big influence in getting me interested in creating games of my own. With that in mind, I'd like to extend a hearty thanks to David P. Gray for all the hours of entertainment, the laughs and the inspiration that this little game gave me back in the day.

Again, if you'd like to support this old indie game, it has been re-released for Windows in a pack that includes both Hugo sequels as well for only 10 bux. You can buy it [here](#). Well worth the wave of classic PC monster game nostalgia it brought me, and I'm looking forward to trying out the sequels too. I still think Igor deserves a game of his own though. Come on David, isn't it time to let Igor shine?

## 17 - Batman Arkham Asylum: Welcome to the Madhouse!

Batman: Arkham Asylum is the best superhero video game ever made. Hands down. Nothing against Marvel's recent Ultimate Alliance series, as they're quite fun as well, but this one is just that good. And it's about time Batman got a decent video game, too. The Batman franchise is rife with possibilities for something like this, but it's sad that it's taken nearly 30 years of video gaming for them to finally get it right.

As most of you are probably aware by now, the Joker has cooked up an elaborate plan that involves (you guessed it) frackin' with Batman by releasing the inmates of Arkham Asylum. Oh, there's a little more ambition behind it than that, but I don't want to spoil things too much here. Reprising their roles from Batman: The Animated Series are Mark Hamill (Joker), Kevin Conroy (Batman), and Arleen Sorken (Harley Quinn), which truly brings these characters to life and adds an incredible amount of atmosphere to the game. Plenty of other characters have speaking roles as well (Scarecrow, Poison Ivy, Bane, Killer Croc, Victor Zsasz, The Riddler), and though their voice actors aren't as recognizable as the others, they also do a great job with the roles. Experiencing something as wonderful as this, it's hard to imagine how we ever played games where the dialog was just represented by silent text on the screen.

You have all of Arkham Island and the Asylum's buildings to explore, which is a surprisingly vast amount of space. And given that the Riddler left plenty of hidden clues lying around all over the place for you to find, there's ample reason to use your special Bat-visor's "detective mode", which will have you wanting to check every last nook and cranny in search of trophies that unlock bonus content. It's tempting to just leave detective mode running all the time, as it's very useful, but in doing so you would miss out on much of the game's graphical content, and the graphics in this game are stunning.

The game's combat is ridiculously fun, and extremely easy to get the hang of. One button does almost all of your attacks, one button does counter moves, another dodges and another does a distracting "cape swipe" maneuver. It's easy to kick plenty of @\$\$ once you get the hang of the system, and you'll find yourself wading into a sea of twelve guys without pause. However, when the henchmen have guns, they're extremely deadly, and that's when the game's stealth system comes in very useful. You can use air ducts to move around and position yourself behind enemies for a silent takedown, you can grapple up to gargoyles and silently swoop down on them from above, you can lay down explosive gel and wait for an enemy to get too close--there are many different ways to dispatch enemies, and the game really leaves it up to your discretion to choose how best to handle it. Though some situations require you to use stealth to survive, other times you'll find yourself using the stealthy approach simply because you're the goddamned Batman, and it's fun.

Some of the boss fights are a little easy, and some of them are false alarms altogether (the first time you take down Mr. Zsasz is a joke), but they're always entertaining. And sometimes just when you think you've seen the last of a character, they'll pop up again and surprise you. The most visually interesting parts of the game are when you're under the influence of the Scarecrow's fear gas, which cause bizarre hallucinations where Scarecrow is a giant god-like being, and if his Sauron-gaze spots you sneaking around on his level, he will crush you like a bug and it's game over for Batman.

Some of the characters have gotten interesting redesigns--they tried to make Harley a little sexier (which was unnecessary), and they gave Scarecrow a Freddy Krueger syringe glove. I've seen some people online complaining about how that's "ruined" the game, but honestly it makes very little difference. As an avid comic reader, I'm used to seeing different artist's interpretations of these characters, so seeing them sporting slightly different looks here doesn't bother me, as thematically they're all the same, and easily recognizable. After all, you and I don't wear the same clothes every day (at least I hope you don't), so why should we expect comic characters to do the same? Some days the Riddler wears a green suit, and other days he just feels like embarrassingly tight spandex.

As many different villains as they managed to work into this game (many of them with boss fights), no doubt some of you will be disappointed that your favorite villain didn't make it into the game (no Two-Face!). The developers had to draw a line somewhere, but the good news is that nearly every single Batman villain worth half a shoot (and even some who aren't) is at least represented in the game in some way. You'll find Harvey Dent and Mr. Freeze's cells. You'll find Ra's al-Ghul's body in the morgue. You'll spot one of Penguin's umbrellas in a glass display case. This really adds to the feel that even though you don't encounter them yourself, these characters were there, which just seems to make the asylum pop with life.

This game is insanely fun and compelling, and there are so many secrets to find, and so many different ways to take out the bad guys that I'd say it has pretty high replay value. And the good news is that the developers have already said they'd love to tell more stories in the Batman universe, so many we'll eventually get a sequel where we'll get to see some of those characters who didn't make a showing here. We can hope. In the meantime, we have this one to enjoy over and over again. This game is the model by which all future superhero games should be designed. It's about as perfect as a video game can be.

## 18 - Ghouls and Ghost: Keep your Boxers On, Arthur!

When it comes to the Ghouls 'n Ghosts series (including Ghosts 'n Goblins, of course), people are completely divided with their opinions on the games. They either love the games for their fantastic graphics and challenges, or they absolutely loathe them for being ridiculously difficult in certain areas. Personally, I belong to the former group... I simply can't get enough of these games or the challenges they present.

My first experience with Ghouls 'n Ghosts was when it was ported to the Sega Genesis, and while there were some slight graphical differences, it was generally a very faithful reproduction of the arcade experience. Still, if you're going to take the time to play this beast of an action game all the way through, you might as well play the arcade version with the best sound and graphics.

It all starts off with Arthur, the infamous hero knight who wears nothing beneath his armor than some polka-dot underwear, on a quest to rescue Princess Prin Prin who has once again been kidnapped by some evil demons. The gameplay itself is very much like the original Ghosts 'n Goblins game, but there are some significant changes in this version. For one thing, Arthur is able to shoot upwards and he can also shoot downwards while jumping (which comes heavily into play with one particularly nasty boss fight with a giant grub). He also can gain a special golden armor which enables him to unleash magical spells to fight off the hordes of demons with. While there are a few new weapons in the game, I still prefer the knife above all others. It's fast and when combined with the magical golden armor, it creates a shadow of yourself for twice the firing power.

As for the enemies themselves, there are more than enough just waiting to frustrate the hell out of you on your long journey to battle the evil Loki (Lucifer). Countless zombies, evil wizards who turn you into helpless ducks (no really), puking pigs, bouncing turtles, the twisty tongues of gargoyles, grabby hands, and of course, a handful of those red devils that never leave you alone until one of you is dead. The bosses are pretty spectacular as well. A giant cyclops zombie in armor who rips his head off before attacking you, an angry floating eyeball surrounded by electric storm clouds, the aforementioned giant grub with multiple hearts, and a giant bee that can break down into a swarm of invincible little bees.

And let's not forget Loki himself. Your battle with Loki as he sits upon his throne while shooting lasers at you as the floor crumbles into lava is nothing short of epic. He's a huge boss that takes up almost the entire screen and it's definitely a nice note to end the game on. There is one catch, however. As with the other games in this series, you have to play through the entire game TWICE before you're even allowed to fight Loki. You see, you can only kill him with a special weapon... and the only way to get that weapon is to travel all the way back to the beginning of the game and then fight your way back to Loki once again. This is the kind of challenge that truly tests your gaming fortitude (and if you're playing it in the arcade, be prepared to spend a lot of quarters because it'll test your wallet as well).

Ghouls 'n Ghosts may be one hell of a tough game, but that makes it all the more rewarding when you finally do manage kill Loki and rescue Princess Prin Prin. It has some of the best pixelated graphics you'll come across, some amazing enemies and bosses, highly creative and difficult challenges, and memorable music. If you ask me, there's really no reason why anybody shouldn't love it, even with

having to play through it twice in order to win. Take the time to play through the whole game and hopefully you'll see exactly what I mean.

## 19 - Gyromite: Robot Madness With R.O.B!

Good ol' Gyromite. Talk about a classic! This game was my introduction to a new era of gaming, for it came bundled with the original Nintendo Entertainment System Deluxe Set along with R.O.B. the robot. Sure, it might seem like a novelty item in retrospect, but imagine being a kid who grew up on the Intellivision and Atari 2600 systems and all of a sudden being told, "Here, take this new video game system. It has superior graphics and sound and it comes with a robot who will help you play one of the included games. It also comes with a gun that you can use to shoot some ducks with, but there's a laughing dog in that game who will make you so furious you'll be talking about him in therapy about 20 years from now, so stick with the robot game instead, ok?"

Ok, I wasn't actually told that, but that's how it felt. It really was the beginning of a new gaming age and I couldn't be more excited about tearing into that Deluxe set and assembling R.O.B. (Robotic Operating Buddy) so we could play Gyromite for the very first time.

There are two modes to the game. Mode A allows you to hook up the second controller to R.O.B. so he can spin his gyroscopes in order to depress the pads which control columns on the screen which are in the way of your character, Professor Hector (and Profession Vector in 2-player games). While R.O.B. is busy trying to clear a path so you can move forward, it's up to you to use the first controller to make the professor collect all the dynamite on the screen. However, being accidentally crushed by a rising steel column because your so-called robotic operating "buddy" betrayed you isn't the only thing you need to worry about. Each level has a fair share of Smicks for you to avoid.

Smicks are strange lizard-like creatures with bird beaks and they hunger for the flesh of aging professors such as yourself. They do have a few weaknesses though, my favorite of which is that they can be tricked into getting squished by one of those moving columns. They also love eating turnips and those veggies sure do come in handy at times. Yeah, I don't get it either, but it was very satisfying seeing a Smick eating one of your strategically placed turnips one second, and then getting squashed the next.

Mode B is slightly different in that you are no longer in control of the professor. In this mode, you simply control R.O.B. while the professor sleepwalks his way through the screen. There's no dynamite to collect, but surviving the columns and Smicks while the old man sleepwalks is more than tricky enough on some levels.

I also feel I should mention that the theme song to Gyromite remains one of my all-time favorites to this day. There were times where I would just leave the game on, not even playing it, so I could listen to that fantastic in-game tune play on an endless loop. It also made the game that much more enjoyable when you were playing with a friend. You see, you could have a friend take the place of R.O.B., but that friend could easily turn on you instead of aid you in your quest to get past those deadly steel columns. Believe me, I wasn't above such treacherous and juvenile behavior. I can't begin to tell you how many uncontrollable fits of laughter I enjoyed after watching my friends get squashed because of my immaturity. Hearing that glorious \*splat\* sound was music to my ears. If you played Gyromite with a friend, there's no denying that you did this exact same thing. Don't even try it, bub.

To be perfectly honest, it's hard to imagine how the hell anybody even came up with a game like this to begin with. Can you imagine how the pitch meeting for something like that went?

"Ok boss, so here's my idea! We're gonna build a robot that picks up spinning gyroscopes and drops them onto a platform which causes a button on a video game controller to depress and interact with some steel columns on the screen. While this is happening, we're gonna have a professor dodge a bunch of turnip-eating lizard creatures with bird beaks while he collects bundles of dynamite. Soooooooo... whaddaya think? When can I expect to see these on the assembly line?"

To say the least, Gyromite is one of those games that you absolutely must play in its original format. No form of emulation can really do it justice, because you simply can't experience both the hilarity and the frustration of playing it with the aid (and I use that term loosely) of R.O.B. the robot. If you have the means, I highly suggest trying it out so you can experience the very beginning of what would become one of the most successful video game systems in history.

## 20 - Golden Axe: Ride On, Gilius!

Who in their right mind wouldn't love a game involving the forces of evil going up against a tough dwarf with a big axe, a scantily clad warrior woman and a guy who clearly wishes he was Conan the Barbarian? Golden Axe was definitely one of my favorite hack 'n slash arcade games, and the Sega Genesis port of it was a fantastic translation of the original game.

For one thing, the Genesis version added some more depth to the game by including additional levels and gameplay modes. First, there was "Duel Mode" which was basically a "see how long you can last against impossible odds" kind of game. Nothing too special there, but you could set it to play against a friend in a battle to the death which usually resulted in some glorious shoot-talking.

The real game, or "Story Mode", is what Golden Axe was all about though. In this mode, you could choose one of three warriors to fight your way through the seemingly endless hordes of bad guys working for Death Adder. Ax Battler the barbarian (who carries a sword, not an axe), Tyris Flare the amazonian warrior woman, and my personal favorite... Gilius Thunderhead (god I love that name) the dwarf with one hell of an axe. So why do these three warriors have such a grudge against Death Adder? To put it simply, he was responsible for the deaths of their family members, and now it's payback time.

What made Golden Axe such a fun game, aside from the 2-player cooperative action, was the incorporation of magical spells. Each of the characters has their unique spells which they can use to decimate their enemies. Obviously, they had to balance out the use of magic versus the standard weapons of each player. As a result, Gilius has the weakest magic, Tyris has the best, and Ax Battler is right in the middle.

While seeing Tyris unleash a giant fire breathing dragon upon her enemies was damned impressive at the time, the fact is, it takes a while to gather up enough potions for her to use a maxed out spell like that. So it's for that reason that I suggest using Gilius, because he definitely has the best weapon in the game. Ironically, because of the technical color palette limitations of the Sega Genesis, one of the major differences between the console and arcade versions is that Gilius' titular axe is no longer golden, it's silver. I guess they figured they couldn't name the console version "Silver Axe" and expect the same amount of sales... it just doesn't sound as cool.

The game setting is quite interesting as you go from level to level. At first, you'll be fighting your way through villages that have been devastated by Death Adder's minions. Later on, however, you'll find yourself fighting enemies while on the back of a giant turtle and a giant eagle. I never did understand how or why there were buildings erected on the backs of those massive creatures, but I suppose some mysteries are better left unsolved.

Golden Axe is one of the greatest hack 'n slash arcade classics you'll ever encounter on a home console, complete with fun characters, magic a nice variety of enemies and some truly fun boss fights. There's even a bizarre, long-tailed animal with a beak that you can ride on called a "Chicken-Leg". Did I mention you also get to enjoy the warm glow of a campfire while you kick some minuscule thieves until they give you meat or magic potions? If that doesn't make you want to give the game a whirl, then



nothing will.

## 21 - Mega Man 2: Turn Wily's Robots Into Scrap Metal!

There is no question that this is my favorite NES game, and quite possibly my favorite video game overall. The first Mega Man was a great game, but parts of it were so frustratingly difficult (I'm looking at you, Cyclopean Rock Monster) that I wouldn't exactly consider it a joy to play. Fortunately the sequel found just the right balance between challenge and impossibility, and it has a certain charm in its robot masters, music and level design that the series never quite managed to capture again. Video games are rarely as fun as this.

This is an extremely replayable game, and I find myself going back to this one more than any other I've ever played, probably just to hear the music again if nothing else. The Mega Man series has always been praised for its fantastic music, and this is definitely the high point of the franchise (it has never topped Dr. Wily's first stage music before or since). Sure, the other games have great music too, but none of them maintain this level of awesomeness across every stage. The eight robot masters are also classics, not suffering from the lameness that some of the later bosses succumbed to (you know they were just one game away from Milk Man, Garbage Man, Mail Man, etc, by the end).

This game also introduced some elements to the franchise that stuck around from here on out: energy tanks, eight robot masters instead of six, password continues, and Dr. Light's useful tools were a predecessor to the Rush vehicles (and way better than that crappy magnet gun).

If you've never played a single Mega Man game, you're missing out on one of the most enjoyable game franchises of all time, and Mega Man 2, the apex of the series, is the best place to start.

## 22 - Pacman for the Atari 2600: BLEEP! (Wait, No Waka?)

If you've never played this port of Pac-Man on the Atari 2600, you're missing out on some serious video gaming history. Notice I didn't say "fun" there. It's not fun. In fact, it's a horrible game which, along with E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial, contributed to the big video game crash in the early eighties.

The reason why the game is known for being one of the all-time worst ports of an arcade classic is because its release was rushed in order for it to be on store shelves in time for Christmas back in '81. If they had more time to work on it, maybe it wouldn't have been so godawful.

Among the many differences between the Atari 2600 port and the original arcade version of Pac-Man were is that not only are all four ghosts colored in pastels, but they flicker constantly on the screen. Believe me, this game was a real treat for epileptics.

If there's one good thing about this game's legacy, it's the sound effects that came from it. Sure, they're not nearly as good as the original arcade sounds, what with the extremely loud "WAKA WAKA!" sound that Pac-Man makes whenever eating a pellet, but there is a plus side to it all. I can't tell you how many times I've seen a TV show or a movie make a reference to video games and then you hear some of the sound effects from Pac-Man on the Atari 2600. The sounds from this version of Pac-Man must've been used in the world of entertainment more than any other video game.

So yeah, check it out if you've never played it or you just want to relive some classic console history. It's far from the greatest game ever made, quite the opposite in fact, and it may make you go blind if you stare at the ghosts for too long, but it is an experience. This is one Pac-Man game that I will NOT beat.

## 23 - Scott Pilgrim the Game: Doom's Gamer Gold!

O Canada. It's such a charming country. Although not a major world stage, a lot nevertheless does happen here, especially in Toronto, the location Scott Pilgrim takes place in.

As shaming as it is, I have yet to read the Canadian exploits of Scott Pilgrim and his friends. I'm just not enough of a nerd I suppose. I'll have to fix that. Luckily for me, the series has recently expanded beyond black and white pages into other, much more exciting media.

2010 has been a pretty important milestone for the series. The sixth graphic novel has been released, a film adaptation has debuted to the world (see it. It's good), and best of all, there's a new videogame based on the property that owes its very existence to parodies and references to nerd culture.

The game was obviously planned to be released alongside the film so that each can help promote the other. The problem with that is obvious to anyone who has been gaming for a long time. With very few exceptions, videogames based on movies are always terrible. So the question is, how good is the game counterpart of the Scott Pilgrim Vs the World movie?

### STORY

Scott Pilgrim, a 23 year old slacker and bass player for the band Sex Bob-omb from Toronto, falls in love with the mysterious Ramona Flowers, a delivery girl with weird mystical powers to travel in into the subconscious. Scott soon learns that in order to be with her, he must first defeat her seven evil ex-boyfriends, who have formed a syndicate and are out to kill him for some reason. It makes no sense, but it's a videogame plot. Or rather it's the novel plot based on videogame plots then put into this videogame. Whatever.

GRAPHICS (For those who think that Graphics Make EVERYTHING, Stupid Younguns...)

Scott Pilgrim vs The World: The Game is a beautiful, sprite based game that looks like it could have been made for the SNK Neo-Geo hardware. Lush, beautiful 32-bit sprites animate with cartoon-like motion. I can honestly say that Scott Pilgrim vs The World has some of the best looking sprites I've ever seen, Arcana Heart, Odin Sphere and Muramasa included. The reason the sprites look so good is in large part thanks to the wonderful art direction.

The art direction, under the unbelievably talented pixel artist Paul Robertson, makes this game the playable embodiment of his sprite films, just without the extreme violence. If that doesn't make you want to play this game, then nothing will.

I can completely imagine Scott Pilgrim vs the world the game as an arcade cabinet co-op game I could have played endlessly growing up. From the way even the shop characters animate to the clever use of

parallax scrolling, Scott Pilgrim will satisfy anyone looking for a retro-fix on their new console. It handles similar to classic Konami games such as The Simpsons Arcade or Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Arcade.

## Audio

The entire soundtrack for Scott Pilgrim vs The World The Game is composed by American chiptune band Anamanaguchi. Distinctive as their prior works, the soundtrack is composed by the wonderful sounds of both the real NES and Gameboy hardware, as well as real drums and guitars.

Scott Pilgrim has some of the best music I've heard in any game in a long time. I personally have a soft spot for chiptune music, but this stuff I think has universal appeal.

Just check out this track to the first stage to get a taste of what you're in for.

## Gameplay

Scott Pilgrim vs the world the game is a homage to all the great beat 'em ups of yore, but is especially a homage to the Technos NES classic, River City Ransom. It isn't completely identical as there is now a RPG-like level up system, encouraging replayability.

As you fight enemies, they will burst into coins, which you collect to spend in shops for food and items that restore health, boost your stats and sometimes even allow you to level up. being a Canadian property, enemies burst into Canadian coins. This was completely unnecessary, but the attention to detail with minor aspects like this really do add up.

You can pick up just about anything lying around and use it as a weapon, from baseball bats to garbage cans, even fallen enemies and snowballs. Most of the make-shift weapons do a fair bit of damage and are great for crowd control. Best of all, nearly all objects you can pick up can be used infinitely and don't disappear if dropped, a true rarity in beat 'em ups.

## Control

Scott Pilgrim is a fairly simple beat 'em up, but employs the use of six buttons! Two are for attacks (weak and strong), a jump, block and two special moves used for crowd control. The controls themselves are responsive and the game is fun to play, no matter if you prefer the d-pad or the analog stick. Most of the time you'll only be using the two attack buttons and the jump, so don't feel overwhelmed by the number of buttons the game uses.

On the PS3, most likely due to tight scheduling, Scott Pilgrim cannot be played with most USB controllers. Only the PS3 controller and a select few arcade sticks can be used. My Sanwa modded Datel PS3/360 stick works perfectly, but none of my other sticks seem to work at all. This is a real shame, as Scott Pilgrim is built as an arcade brawler, and is best experienced using a quality arcade

stick.

This unfortunately also means the Saturn USB controller can't be used either. It's a real shame. Hopefully this will be fixed in a future update. This is my one and only major complaint with the game.

## Frustration

Scott Pilgrim is at heart, an arcade game. Much of the difficulty from classic coin-op games is present, and therefore so is much of the frustration those games entail. The game can be played solo, but it's a lot easier and more enjoyable when playing with a group of friends.

Evidently due to time restraints, Ubisoft did not implement any online co-op, so you'll either need to go through this one alone or with a group of friends on your couch.

The game gives you three lives for a stage, but depending on your level, sometimes this just won't be enough to complete everything. Mercifully, the game allows you to retain any experience.

You can also revisit previously beaten stages, so it's also possible to level grind if you feel the need. Doing this allows you to gain more cash as well, so it's not a wasted effort. The level cap is at a mere level 16, so even if you do choose to grind, you won't have to do so for long.

## System availability and price

Scott Pilgrim is a downloadable game for the Playstation 3 or the Xbox 360. The game is \$9.99 on PS3, and 800 Microsoft Points on Xbox 360.

## Audience

Scott Pilgrim features none of the gore and extreme violence Paul Robertson is known for, and there's no blood either unless you enter a password. The game's cartoony graphics make it friendly for anyone to enjoy.

## History

Scott Pilgrim was originally a series of black and white graphic novels released between 2004 and 2010. The series is known for many references to nerd culture that would appeal to gamers currently in their 20's. Some references are obvious such as the band Scott is in being called "Sex Bob-omb", where bob-ombs are the wind up bomb enemies first featured in Super Mario Bros. 2 for the NES.

If you know a good deal of NES gaming, you'll get a lot of these references. It should be pretty obvious to everyone what the cover for volume 3 shown above is a reference to.

Other references, such as rival band names "Clash at the Demonhead" and "Crash and the boys", are actually titles of obscure NES games. The Scott Pilgrim vs the World game is jam-packed with these sorts of references, and it's fun to go through every stage and see how many you can notice. Maybe you ought to stop by the video store and pick up a copy of "Never ending Fantasy". I hear that's a long running RPG series!

## Overall

### Good

Brilliant graphics, addictive music, fun fast paced gameplay and the references to the past twenty or so years of nerd culture make this game a clear winner. The game is lengthy for a beat 'em up I'd say around 4 -6 hours worth of gameplay here. Not bad for \$10.

### Bad

The fact that you can't play this online stings. Worse, the fact that you can't use the wonderful USB Sega Saturn controller and many arcade sticks means you will probably have to use the stock controller, which is a total bummer.

### Conclusion

Scott Pilgrim vs The World The Game is just as good of a game as those it is paying homage to. If you're a fan of Scott Pilgrim, this game is a no-brainer, but even if you don't care about the series, there's enough solid game here to itch that retro fix.

It might not cutting edge, but Scott Pilgrim proves that there still is a place in this modern HD gaming scene for brand new, 2D sprite based action games.

If you've read this far, you owe it to yourself to at least download the demo. Scott Pilgrim will not disappoint.

## 24 - Hugo's House of Horror: I found scarier... XP

Dual 5 1/4" floppy drives, dot matrix printers, EGA monitors... ahh yes, those were the days. It was a simpler time, back when "going online" meant dialing in to a local computer BBS to play ANSI door games like "Tradewars 2002" and "The Pit" for hours on end. I should know; long before I started, I ran a computer BBS for years and had an absolute blast doing so. My parents hated it for a while, because the house would get phone calls in the middle of the night, and when they answered the phone, all they would hear is that piercing, garbled modem noise from somebody trying to dial into my BBS. Eventually, I got a private line of my own for it (and upgraded to a blazing fast 14.4k Zoom modem!) and the BBS was up 24/7 without waking up my family late at night any more.

In addition to meeting some really nice people with similar interests in my town, one of the great things about running that BBS for all those years was a lot of the members on my board would upload shareware games to it for myself and other members to check out. Long before I played any of the classic adventure games by Sierra (King's Quest, Space Quest, Police Quest, etc.) and LucasArts (Monkey Island, Day of the Tentacle, Loom, etc.), I was introduced to a little shareware adventure game called Hugo's House of Horrors:

Needless to say, upon seeing this opening screen, I knew this was going to be a game I would not stop playing any time soon. I already loved anything involving horror (shocking, I know), so getting to play a game where you guide some guy into a haunted house to save his missing girlfriend sounded absolutely awesome. Keep in mind, at the time, this wasn't a game where you used your mouse to move around... you had to literally type in every command. As with all adventure games, there's a lot of trial & error involved, but some of those errors can produce some laughs. For example:

Ok, so typing "FART" wasn't an error or particularly mature, but I remember half the fun of games like this was to play them with friends while typing in something ridiculous to see what it would respond with. In this case, Hugo reacts by exclaiming, "Same to you, loser!" He's got a temper, that one.

Now, two decades later, I've come back to the game after discovering it was re-released to be compatible with Windows, and I thought it would be fun to take a trip down memory lane and play through the whole thing. Fortunately, they let you use a mouse to move around now, which makes playing the game a lot easier than it used to be. Perhaps it's nostalgia, but I still enjoy typing in a lot of the commands, so I'll be doing that a lot as I play through it this time. Before we begin, if you're interested in getting a copy of the game, you can buy it here.

Alright, now with the big introduction out of the way, let's get down to business and play through Hugo's House of Horrors!



Once you're done looking at the bat or trying to climb the fence, you'll want to smash the pumpkin on the front porch there to reveal a key that unlocks the front door. I remember doing this instinctively and thinking I was a goddamn genius for figuring it out so quickly... and you know what? I was.

Before we go inside, I just have to say that this exterior haunted house graphic has appeared in countless Halloween clipart collections over the years. In fact, I just did a Google image search for "haunted house clipart" and a black & white version of it still appears as the second result! I'm always amused to see it still floating around in those collections after all these years, because I was sure that nobody even knew it originated in an old PC adventure game.

Moving on, we're now inside the house in the main hall area and have to collect a few things: the candle from the table, and a pocket knife and whistle from the cubbyhole beneath the stairs. While you're in there, you notice some inconspicuous eyeballs looking at you from behind those paintings. I used to think there was some way to get to a secret passage behind them, but this wasn't the case. Couldn't even poke them in the eyes, the peeping bastards. With the aforementioned items now in our inventory, it's time to move upstairs into the bedroom. But wait!

If you're like me, the first thing you'd do upon acquiring those items would be to blow the whistle. Sorry, but this isn't Legend of Zelda... for if you blow that whistle in this house of horrors, somebody comes to greet you:

Greet you and eat you that is. Of course, your death isn't very graphic or anything, though that psycho dog with the red eyes is covered in blood. So yeah, lesson learned... don't blow the whistle while wandering around in the house unless you want to be mauled by psycho dog. Ok, let's move onward to the bedroom.

The bedroom is pretty small, so there's not much mystery about what to do here. You open up the cabinet and discover a "grotesque monkey's head" mask inside it. Hey, I never claimed the game didn't have completely random elements, that's part of its charm. Speaking of charm, if you try looking under the bed, the computer basically mocks you in something akin to Kuni in Weird Al's UHF. Good times.

We now head to the next room over, the bathroom, in search of more things for the ol' inventory. What we find instead is a surprisingly clean bathroom. This always surprised me, because I never figured a haunted house full of monsters would ever bother cleaning up after themselves. Well, except maybe for Dracula. That guy has class. But the Creature from the Black Lagoon? He'd try swimming in the toilet for chrissakes, and he doesn't strike me as the kind of guy who's gonna clean up after himself. He's more likely to eat a roll of toilet paper than use it for what it was intended for.

Well anyway, Hugo refuses to look inside the toilet for any clues, and when you tell him to piss, he really

overreacts by exclaiming, "Yeugh! How uncouth!" Come on Hugo, you'd probably find clues a lot easier if you weren't distracted by a full bladder, don't ya think? Fortunately for him, there's a big "333" scribbled in red ink on the mirror above the sink. It's either telling us that the monsters in this haunted house are only mildly evil, or it's a clue that will come in handy later. Hmm, I wonder which it could be? Before leaving the bathroom, I told Hugo to wash his hands and he said, "Look, are you taking this game seriously, or what?" No Hugo, I'm not, and besides... cleanliness is next to godliness.

Alright, let's see what's in that last upstairs room...

Upon entering that room, you get a notice telling you, "The high frequency cosmic radiation emanating from this rooms knocks your mask onto the floor! (You can pick it up again when you come out!)" SCIENCE! Who are we to question such bulletproof logic? Once inside, you discover it's a lab belonging to The Mad Professor (hey, it's not just scientists who go mad) and he wants you to walk into his box for an experiment. Seeing as you really want the rubber bung that's on the table behind the door, you cautiously agree to do it.

The Mad Professor tells his adorably green assistant, Igor, to push the blue button, but since he's color blind, he pushes the red one and you get shrunk down to half your original size. Annoyed with Igor, the Mad Professor storms out of the room and leaves you alone in there. Now you're small enough to walk behind the glass door and grab the rubber bung.

Guys, it's taken me over thirteen friggin' years to write an article where I get to say "grab the rubber bung," so I'm gonna revel in it here for a moment. Sure, a rubber bung is just a fancy, scientific way of naming a cork or a stopper, but a rubber bung transcends all conventional uses, and absolutely needs to become a part of our common vernacular. The next time you're at a restaurant, ask your server if they have any fine wines that are sealed with a rubber bung. If they say they don't have any or (even worse) they don't know what a rubber bung is, let out a big chortle and shout, "And you have the gall to call yourself a restaurant!? Good day sir! I SAID, GOOD DAY!" and proceed to storm the hell out of there. If we don't take these kind of drastic actions, rubber bungs will never have their chance to shine in the spotlight. Let the rubber bungs into your hearts, people... let them in.

Now listen up. Before we do anything else in the game, I think we need to take a minute here to appreciate the true star of Hugo's House of Horrors. No, not rubber bungs, though they clearly come in a close 2nd place. I'm talking about IGOR!

I mean, just look at the guy. He's green, has a red eyes, ears and a belly button, and walks around in nothing but purple underwear (and I bet if he want back in time, his mom would see them and call him "Calvin"). If there's any single character in this game who deserves to have a spin-off game of his own, it's gotta be Igor, the colorblind lab assistant. Hell, I could see him, Karnov and Abobo going on an epic bald guy's adventure together. Even Hugo knows Igor has something special, for if you look at him, he remarks, "He has a certain charm, I suppose!" Indeed, Hugo... indeed!

Ok, so after you've grabbed the bung and allowed Igor to fiddle with the buttons some more until he made you normal again, you put on your monkey mask and head on downstairs to the dining room. There you'll find a butler who will give you a tasty steak chop, but you can't sit at the table with all the other cool monsters, because you weren't invited. It's a damned shame too, because sitting at the table are some of the world's most famous monsters, Dracula and Frankenstein's Monster, along with some of the more unsung ones, such as Slime and Pea Head. You can try talking to any of them, but they're either really rude to you, or tell you a bad joke straight off the back of a Bazooka gum wrapper. Either way, not a dinner party you should be attending.

Oh, and if you're wondering why you needed that monkey mask? If you ask the Butler for a chop without your mask on, he'll chop off your head. Very good, sir.

With your head still intact, it's time to head out the back door and enter the old shed. But wait! There's a combination lock on the door! Crikey! Now what do we do!? Well, if you're like me, you wonder why you just typed "crikey" when your name isn't Steve Irwin, and then you remember the "333" that was scribbled on the bathroom mirror. Bingo! The lock opens up and you venture into the shed to collect an oil can.

From there, you head back inside and enter the room to the left of the kitchen where that psycho dog, who mauled us earlier in the game, is currently hanging out. Since the dog moves fast, you have to be quick here, so what I always did was type "give dog chop" just before I went into the room, and then hit the enter key as soon as I saw him charging at me. Now that the dog is distracted by the tasty chop, you lift up the carpet and discover the secret door (which many of you will now get the reference I made to this in my "Trick-Or-Treat Adventure Quest" game) and use some oil to loosen up the lock. Sadly, you no longer need to wear your monkey mask in the game, so it makes you throw it away. Personally, I'd feel safer exploring the depths of a haunted house with the monkey mask on. It got me this far in the game, what suddenly gives Hugo the foresight to realize he'll never need it again, anyway? Oh plot holes... how we love thee.

After heading down the trap door, you find yourself in a basement which appears to be a storage facility for large boulders. There's also an iron door which you can see your girlfriend, Penelope, locked inside of. Of course, if you try opening it, the game makes fun of you for thinking it was gonna be that easy, so you have to keep searching around the room for another way to reach her. Since we don't share Hugo's visual perspective, we eventually wander between the two boulders in the center of the room and suddenly end up in a bat-infested cave. Don't question the logic, just go with it.

There's an opening on the other side of the cave, but those bats will get ya if you don't act quick. Fortunately, science reigns supreme, and their "sonar-like hearing" is messed up when you blow on your whistle. I guess psycho dog was still chowing down on the steak chop to care about coming to find you down in the bat cave. Well, the dog was nothing compared to this next enemy:

If there's one thing in the game that annoyed me, it was The Mummy. Correction: Mummy on Speed. As far as classic horror movie depictions of the mummy go, he's usually seen as an extremely powerful, but slow, supernatural force. Much like zombies, if you can move a little faster than they do, you're generally gonna be ok unless you get cornered. That's not the case with this mummy. He's insanely fast, and I still have nightmares about how he would say "Gotcher!!!" whenever he caught Hugo, so your only hope is to use the AI to your advantage by strategically making him get stuck behind boulders in the room. If you get him to follow you in a counter-clockwise path, he'll end up stuck behind the boulder on the far left, where all he can do is sob as he watches you steal all his treasure. Stupid mummy... can't even figure out how to move around a rock.

In the next room, we find a small lake with a boat floating in it and an old man fishing on the opposite side. Hugo either doesn't care about Penelope enough to just swim across the water, or he simply doesn't want to get wet, because the only way it allows you to get across that water is to use the boat. Problem is, there's a hole in the boat. If only we had some way to plug that hole. Hey, wait a minute! I've got just the solution!

Yes! That's how you plug a hole in a boat... with a goddamn RUBBER BUNG! Oh rubber bung, where would we be without you? We'd be absolutely lost, that's where we'd be.

With your boat hole properly bung-plugged, you can cross the dangerous 10 foot wide lake to see what the deal with the old fisherman is. Apparently, he's a jerk who won't let you hop ashore unless you answer some of his trivia questions. Hugo, being a total pacifist, decides to answer the old man's questions instead of just picking him up and throwing him in the lake (something I wanted to do many a time).

Keep in mind, this was before the advent of Google, so if you didn't know how to solve a question about the Chronicles of Narnia, you were gonna have to ask other people for the answers or do some reading. Yep, back then, games made us actually use our brains! Now you know where the "horror" part of "Hugo's House of Horrors" really comes from. Once you've answered all of his questions, including the incredibly difficult "Are you sure you want to rescue Penelope?" (which I'm still not sure about to this day), the old man allows you to pass into the final area. Remember, he warned us that there were dangers through yonder passage? I was expecting some horrible mummy-dog hybrid that would kill me in an instant, but as it turns out, the old man was talking out of his @\$\$.

Yep, no real challenge awaits you, just a badly sunburned moustache man who, like Igor, has a penchant for purple underwear. He also has a penchant for treasure, and it only takes one gold coin to get him to step aside so you can finally go rescue you beloved Penelope. Believe it or not, that was your big final challenge... bribing a sunburned guard with a nice moustache. House of horrors, indeed!

You walk through the doorway and find Penelope, sitting behind a desk. For some reason, she only appears as a shadow on this screen, but I'm sure that's just to keep the mystery of her identity hidden from us until we get a close-up shot of her. Oh wait, no... it's not that at all. We don't get to see her face at all, all we get to see is hugo spinning around doing a crazy celebratory dance followed by this:

That's it. No explanation as to who kidnapped Penelope, no explanation about what evils plans were taking place, no explanation about where the mad professor stormed off to, and to top it all off, we never even get to see the face of Penelope. Wait, now that I think about it, this is actually a horrible ending. Look at Hugo! Penelope apparently sucked all the life out of him and turned him into a shadow just like herself! Turns out the real horrors weren't inside that house at all... they were in his marriage! Whoah, talk about an unforeseen surprise ending twist!

Well, if you ask me, it's not all bad news. Maybe I'm just a hopeless romantic at heart, but I like to think that there was one truly happy ending to this tale...

It may be a small entry in the history of PC games, but Hugo's House of Horrors had a big influence in getting me interested in creating games of my own. With that in mind, I'd like to extend a hearty thanks to David P. Gray for all the hours of entertainment, the laughs and the inspiration that this little game gave me back in the day.

Again, if you'd like to support this old indie game, it has been re-released for Windows in a pack that includes both Hugo sequels as well for only 10 bux. You can buy it [here](#). Well worth the wave of classic PC monster game nostalgia it brought me, and I'm looking forward to trying out the sequels too. I still think Igor deserves a game of his own though. Come on David, isn't it time to let Igor shine?

## 25 - Kid Chameleon: Get Your Game On! ....Screw it.

One day in an Arcade long ago, a game called "Wild Side" was created. It was a giant room containing all kinds of holograms that really stupid looking kids lined up to play. Unfortunately, the boss of the game was apparently not a hologram, because he somehow escaped and began capturing all the kids that played the game. You'd think that after a few disappeared, the kids would smarten up. But then again, look at them. Oh yeah, the boss' name is "Heady Metal", no relation to Dynamite Headdy. The reason for this is that every boss in the game is a collection of giant bald heads for some reason, but more on that later.

Anyway, the game then lets us know that our only hope is this really dorky kid in a leather jacket and shades that reminds me a lot of Fonzie's short-lived nephew Spike on Happy Days. However, for the purposes of this game and saving the retarded, captured kids, he will henceforth be known as KID CHAMELEON.

The focal point of this game is collecting helmets that transform your undershirt-wearing useless self into some sort of strangely costumed semi-useless self. Keep in mind that even with their amazing powers, you have almost no chance of finishing this game, which I'll also get into later. But if nothing else, they at least give you at least 3 extra hits. So without further ado....

"NOTHING" - DOOM CALLS IT: BACK TO THE DAMN UGLY KID. This is your default form, in which you're a total wuss with no crazy powers and only two hits. Also, when you lose any special helmet, this is what you revert back to until you find another. The only way to beat enemies is by jumping on them. His "special power" is double-tapping Jump near a block or ledge to grab on to it. Yep, amazing.  
Weak Diamond Power: A Mega Man-like diamond shield tries to protect you, and fails miserably.  
Strong Diamond Power: A snake-like stream of diamonds homes in on and attacks enemies. Meh.

"IRON KNIGHT" - DOOM CALLS IT: ROBO-HEAD. Not bad considering that you get 5 hit points instead of the usual 3. However, whether he looks more like a robot or a knight to you, what the hell does either have to do with the ability to climb walls? That's right, repeatedly tapping the Attack button to climb walls is this mask's only power. Well that, and being so heavy you can break floors, usually against your will. Not to mention you look like a dipshoot, though I suppose it's no worse than most of the other helmets.  
Weak Diamond Power: The same damn shield you get without a helmet.  
Strong Diamond Power: Gain one extra hit point. Not bad in a pinch.

"RED STEALTH" - DOOM CALLS IT: LIL' SHREDDER. I'm sorry, but I love the little three note accompaniment that comes with this helmet. It also lets you move faster and jump a little higher, and lets you attack with an extremely ineffective short sword. However, you can downward thrust a la Zelda 2 to destroy blocks below you. Better than the Iron Knight helmet, but not as cool as some of the later ones.  
Weak Diamond Power: Makes enemies move verrrrrry slowly.  
Strong Diamond Power: That damned diamond snake you can do as the stupid looking kid.

"BERZERKER" - DOOM CALLS IT: THE GAY RHINO. This one is pretty dull unless there's a long stretch of land with multiple enemies. Hold the Dash button while moving to charge right through almost

enemy in your path. This helmet also allows you to use the charge to break through vertical rows of blocks ... one at a time, no matter how much speed you build up, which gets incredibly annoying.

Weak Diamond Power: Your basic invincibility; no more, no less.

Strong Diamond Power: A zig-zagging wall of diamonds wraps across the screen, killing enemies and causing distraction.

"MANIAXE" - DOOM CALLS IT: JASON MASK. Well? It's a damn Jason Mask. But it's one of the better ones, because the axe projectiles are as powerful as most weapons, and you can fire them off pretty quick. The only problem is that you seem to move a tad slower, but it's a small price to pay to be able to run around merrily saying "kill her, mommy" while searching for all the camp counselors ... oops, wrong messed up game.

Weak Diamond Power: Stupid circle of diamonds again.

Strong Diamond Power: This one's good; a circle of ankh's appear, and you get an extra life.

"JUGGERNAUT" - DOOM CALLS IT: SKULL TANK. Now we're talking. You morph into a little German skeleton soldier in a long tank that can shoot rapid skulls. It don't get any better than that. The only problem is that you're a midget skeleton in a long tank, so your jumping is severely limited, and you also can't fall through narrow spaces in the floor, which can be good or bad. But you're in a Skull Tank! Vrrrooommm!

Diamond Power: Shoots 5 diamonds across the screen. Guess how many it costs?

"MICROMAX" - DOOM CALLS IT: THE FLY. He done sure can stick to walls. Not entirely useful unless you're in one of those wacky mountain levels with all kinds of annoying vertical narrow passageways.

Most ironically, that's usually where the Micromax helmet is. How about that. It's also fairly essential against Heady Metal. It's only been like twice, and I'm already sick of typing that name.

Weak Diamond Power: Another damned diamond snake, but smaller.

Strong Diamond Power: The same fracking thing, but a little faster. Whopee.

"EYECLOPS" - DOOM CALLS IT: AHH, shoot. This is your token "shooty item of the game". At first glance, it shoots an all-excompassing green beam that looks pretty impressive ... until you find out that all the enemies you fire at are laughing at you hysterically. All that damn beam does is reveal hidden blocks. You usually find this helmet, you guessed it, in the levels with lots of .... hidden blocks. Lousy Eyeclops helmet.

Diamond Power: Shoot a (smaller) white beam of energy that still sucks but hurts enemies a bit, costs 2 diamonds per shot.

"SKYCUTTER" - DOOM CALLS IT: HOVERBOARD. This can either be totally kickass or insanely piss-you-off-able. Once you hop on the board, you start moving automatically, and can only stop by changing directions. Also, by jumping and pressing Attack, you can reverse your personal gravity and stick to the ceiling. Depending on your skill, you can use it quite effectively to zip through levels, unless of course its a Skycutter-themed level, in which case you'll have to.

Weak Diamond Power: Invincamability.

Strong Diamond Power: The stupid fracking diamond snake again.

"CYCLONE" - DOOM CALLS IT: HAWKEYE. Hey, remember Hawkeye?! Actually, all the puss did was

shoot arrows. I don't know for the life of me why the Avengers kept him around. Anyhoo, by rapidly pressing Attack after jumping, you can spin into a tornado and fly. This one REALLY lets you get through levels quickly, and should be held onto as long as possible. It's also effective against ... Heady Metal, if you can control your spinning. The only drawback is zero offense.

Weak Diamond Power: Diamonds fall down on enemies from the top of the screen.

Strong Diamond Power: Same damn thing, with better accuracy.

DIAMOND: AKA Helmet fuel. Aside from being all purdy and sparkly, you need them to use your helmets special "powers", most of which suck, but eh. 20 of these lets you use your weak power, and 50 gives you strong. If you have more than 50 diamonds, you'll automatically unleash your strong power whether you like it or not. 100 gives you an extra life, but unless you have a really crappy diamond power(s) for a sustained amount of time, stick to the ankhs.

CLOCK: It's .... the Clock. Finding it gives you 3 extra minutes to finish the level, up to a maximum of 9:59. Sometimes useless, sometimes your sorry @\$ better find one if it's one of those 2:00 levels where the flag is in plain view. but you have to navigate a damn block maze or something.

ANKH: I'm not exactly sure why this thing represents an extra life in a game such as this, but that it does, so get it. And yes smartass, I know it's a symbol of life. But where's the THEME? Oh, and it also makes a funny tinkling noise when you get it. No comment.

COIN: Grab this bad boy to get you some hot Continue action. And believeth you me, you'll need every Continue you can get your grubby hands on in this one. When you get it, you hear some girlish yelling and weird noises, but the bottom line is that you have an extra Continue. Did I mention you'll need it.

OK, now to finally come out with the statement I've been alluding to the whole time: this game is frackin' hard. Not only that, but it's extremely big. Big and hard .. er, wait a minute. Anyway, there's no way to see everything on your first trip through because of all the teleporters and multiple paths, which greatly enhances replay value. But you'll have enough of a time getting through it in the first place. The damn thing never seems to end.

Your three main functions are run, jump, and attack. You can set all of these functions to the A, B, or C button of your choice. Also, you can use a not-so-devastating diamond power by holding Run and pressing Start. Do not hold Start and press Run (which ... some people I know have been known to do...), or you'll just pause the game and look like an idiot. You keep doing this for a loooong stretch of level after level, each more evil than the last. Oh, and don't die, 'cause the game will actually yell "DIE!" at you when you do. If any game is responsible for kids going nuts with guns these days, it's Kid Chameleon.

OK, there are two ways to get out of a level. You can either find a flag at the end of a level, which gets you bonus points of all kinds (time, no hit, no items, etc.), or you can find a Transporter. A Transporter will usually take you to an "Elsewhere" level, which in turn takes you to another regular level. The Elsewhere levels are mini-levels that either have lots of bonuses and few enemies, or the other way around. However, sometimes Transporters just take you to other points in the level, and even back to the beginning. Sucker.

Now, the bosses. These guys are a special bunch. Actually, no; they're just a bunch of freaky looking



bald heads. I'm serious, they include: Shishkaboss, three giant bald heads on a spear that spit green energy at you. Boomerang spitting bald heads. Heads that just float around aimlessly while you hop into manhole covers for, well, cover. But they all pale in comparison to the mighty....

In the final level, "Plethora" (?), you meet up with Heady Metal. What you don't see here is that the floor is comprised solely of rubber blocks, which means you'll be bouncing around the room like it's nobody's business, all while Heady is spitting out tiny heads at you, that spit TINIER heads at you, that spit fireballs. Eesh. There are some rising platforms in the room if you're stuck as the stupid kid (including one that rises all the way into the ceiling, crushing you in the process), but it's almost impossible to beat him this way. A smarter move would be to find the hidden "P" blocks in the room (one was above my head in the left screenshot, the other is in the exact same spot on the right side of the room) that contain a Micromax and Cyclone helmet, respectively. You'll also want to jump in the extreme bottom-right of the room to find a clock. And be quick about it.

If you have the Cyclone, spin up to the top of the head(s) and get in as many hits as possible. Keep in mind that he'll be rising/lowering along with you, and also note that you can maintain your spin even on rubber, as long as you don't land on a platform. It's somewhat hard to keep Cyclone in one place while you're spinning, so be careful. Once you lose it due to your inferior skills, quickly bounce up and get Micromax to (hopefully) finish him off. You should actually uncover the "P" Block that contains Micromax as soon as you get Cyclone, makes it a lot easier. As Micromax, use the walls on the left and right sides to shield yourself and to climb up. Once you land on his head, you can score multiple hits by practically standing still, as long as you avoid the mini-headies. When his eyes start popping out, you know you're almost there. Keep bouncing and avoiding and you'll eventually get to see the crappy ending.

If you're a "newer" type gamer that's miserable at anything pre-32 bit, or if you just flat out suck, this is not the game for you. However, if you have a lot of time on your hands and you want one of the longest and most challenging platform games I've ever played, Kid Chameleon will keep you occupied for quite awhile. You know why? No password or save feature! Curse ye mangy hides!! .... sorry. But really, play it anyway.

## 26 - Super KKK Brothers: A Rom Hack gone Stupid.

WARNING: THIS REVIEW HAS A BAD WORD. DOOMLORD IS NOT A RACIST, BUT IS SHOWING YOU THIS, FOR YOU TO AVOID. IF YOU PLAY SUCH GAME, PLAY AT OWN RISK. DOOMLORD FOUND THIS WHEN TRYING TO FIND A KUNG FU GAME TO MAKE FUN OF. HOW DO YOU DO THAT? AND SO, THIS WAS SPAWNED.

The Mario brothers have for so long been a symbol of hope for all the peoples in the world, especially Italians. Say for a minute, though, that they were just the opposite. Say that instead of international superstars, they were just bored skinheads waiting to spread white power throughout the Mushroom Kingdom. What's that, you say you can't imagine such a scenario? Neither could I, until I had a look at "Super KKK Brothers".

Looking for a game that supports up to two members of the "master race"? Well, you're in luck, because Super KKK Brothers is a one or two "n@\*#\$\$% H8R" game. Ah, nothing says class like throwing in numbers for letters like many of the more popular bumper stickers. You know, I had always thought that the Klan was an organization that would never try to cut corners, especially when spelling was involved. I suppose it is hard to spell correctly when you have your hood on backwards.

As you may have guessed, the majority of the enemies from the original game have been replaced with crude drawings of black people. The turtles, instead of being transformed into a black guy with a shell on his back, have been turned into a black guy with a bucket of KFC on his back. This brings up two important questions: What KFC sells such relatively huge buckets of chicken, and what kind of bucket bounces around killing people when you kick it? The most confusing enemy conversion, however, has to be the cloud guy:

Now come on, this makes no sense at all. Since when has one of the main complaints that the Klan has against black people been "they rain pointy monsters down on us from their cloud perches in the sky"? Maybe it's just a Southern thing...

Some enemies, like the flowers and the giant bullets, have remained the same because like every other ethnicity, they are on the Klan's list. We need to band together as one people if we want to stop these madmen from destroying the members of our giant bullet community. Some of my best friends are giant bullets! Enough about these Supposed "inferior humans", let's take a look at our "hero".

What the hell? I thought Caucasians were supposed to be tall. How can I look to this short bastard to be my hero? Man, I am so disillusioned right now. Why, he's no taller than the enemies! Oh yeah, to get tall in Super Mario Bros., you had to get those mushrooms. Our tiny neo-nazi, on the other hand, picks up one of these:

Aw, isn't he just the cutest little hatermonger you've ever seen? If only he came in plush form... Oh well. Grabbing one of these guys transforms you into a hood-wearing Klansman, with bonus moustache. The next step in Skinhead Mario's evolution requires one of these:

I assume it's meant to be one of those Iron Crosses that Hitler used to give out before he had his brains smeared all over the wall of some secret bunker. Anyway, one of these crosses will transform you into a red Klansman that shoots smaller versions of the cross instead of traditional fireballs. Now really, should the clan just be giving out these awards to everyone that comes their way? I don't see a lot of Vietnam vets going out and tossing handfuls of Purple Hearts at people. Anyway, on occasion you will find one of the rare invincibility power-ups, which were stars in the original game, by the way:

Yes friends, a noose makes you invincible. It makes sense that a noose would be such a sought-after item when you think about it, because if you were part of an organization that is despised by all people of the world and wracked by sheer stupidity, wouldn't you want to kill yourself? When you grab said instrument, the bad guys will simply get out of your way when you touch them because frankly, they pity you, even that weirdo in the cloud.

So there he is, the David Dukes of the Mushroom Kingdom. As if all the stuff before hasn't been enough to thoroughly creep you out, wait until you see the new take on Bowser:

Yes, that menacing, fire-breathing dinosaur has been replaced by a menacing, fire-breathing platypus. Now this is yet another surprise for me: I didn't know the Klan had problems with Australian animals. I guess it's a good thing there's plenty of lava to dunk that nasty creature in. As your reward for killing this dangerous mammal (Amphibian? Reptile? What the hell is it?), you'll find that you have rescued one of the princess's helpers, in this case, a little bald child.

Oh, thank you, little androgynous child. Your instructions shall be taken to heart. Now where has that real princess gone? Ah, there she is:

Oh, you're quite a feisty redhead, your majesty. I think we should let these ebony-skinned people live

with us so that we might enjoy their fried chicken and the fact that they are not related to us, as there's a better chance our children won't grow up with flippers like when we marry in the family. Now, if you'll excuse me, I need to wash my sheets because I soiled myself when I saw that giant platypus.

Above all, This game Should've Never been created. I cant believe someone did this. What were they thinking? Never try this, horrible thing. I'mm Doomlord, and I'm existant to entertain you.

## 27 - The 50 Greatest Arcade Machines of all time!

Seeing classic arcade game machines lined up next to each other is an easy way to have a wave of nostalgia smack you in the face harder than a hurled barrel compliments of Donkey Kong himself. It brings you back to a time when games were simple, fun, and fairly cheap to play for the most part. Whether it was laughing at how all the enemies bullets traveled 75% slower than your own or enjoying the cheesy digitized voices, there's no denying the classic games had something special.

But there is something about arcade games that we don't think gets enough credit. While everybody has their picks for the best games, most people don't give too much thought about the artistry that was put into the cabinets which held these games. It is with that in mind that I-Mockery is paying tribute to what we consider to be the The 50 Greatest Arcade Cabinets In Video Game History! Keep in mind, this list isn't ranking the games themselves, but the unique designs for the cabinets and cockpits which encased them. Chances are, you'll see some games on here that you've never even heard of, and that's likely because some of them sucked more than E.T. on the Atari 2600. But hey, at least their outer shell designs were damned nice to look at! Furthermore, if there are some games you feel should be on the list, let us know and we might eventually add them!

### #50: Space Invaders

Nobody can deny the desire to pop a quarter into this ol' machine should they be lucky enough to spot it. The inviting drawings on this cabinet helped catch people's attention and made Space Invaders hugely successful. What's nice is how some of the artwork on the faceplate actually bleeds into the screen area. At first glance you might think that it would be distracting but it's not. It just helps draw you into the game that much more. And let's be honest, it's a very simple game and it's not like the artwork would be covering up some vital detail anyway. Another noteworthy thing is that there is no joystick on this cabinet, the left & right movement controls are all buttons, just like the fire button.

### #49: Crystal Castles

Crystal Castles tried a couple different things with this colorfully decorated cabinet. Most arcade games used joysticks for moving the player around, especially when movement is limited to the four cardinal directions, along with their four half-and-half cousins. Not Crystal Castles, though; the designers decided that the player should have to use a trackball to navigate the grid-like mazes in the game. It's an ingenious way to make your game seem unique, while simultaneously drawing extra cash out of the customer by causing a lot of cheap game overs. The game also came in a cocktail-style cabinet, in case you could convince someone else to join you in getting screwed out of your quarters. Hey, at least the trackball was backlit. That's cool, right?

#### #48: Crossbow

They used to have this game at an old roller rink in town. The premise for the game is that you have to protect your friends from harm by picking off bad guys and flying debris with your trusty crossbow. To fully immerse you in the game, you had to actually use a small mockup of a crossbow. In a way, it was sort of like a primitive version of Silent Scope, except that there was no scope, just a couple notches in the thing that you lined up. The point is, the game allowed children to finally experience the elegant killing power of a crossbow (the H-bomb of the Middle Ages). Incidentally, there was a sharp increase in the number of crossbow-related injuries around the time this game came out, and the politicians of the day sought to pin the blame on video games. Frankly, I don't see the connection.

#### #47: A.P.B.

Being a cop requires certain specialized equipment. To that end, the designers of A.P.B. created a machine with a few special features to more accurately simulate the hectic life of a police officer. The game is almost all driving, so it's only natural that there be pedals and a steering wheel on the cabinet. However, the game also included one of the most memorable features of a cop car: the lights. Whenever you hit the "siren" button in the game, a set of red and blue lights at the top of the cabinet would begin flashing, giving you the chance to annoy and distract people from all the way on the other side of the arcade. Thankfully, though, the actual siren itself was in-game only. Also worth noting is that a platform seat could be attached to the cabinet, in case you felt your customers might not want to stand on one foot, with the other on the gas and/or brake, for an extended period of time

#### #46: Tapper

When making a simulator-type game, it is important that you nail down as many details of the experience as possible to completely immerse the player. One of the most basic steps you can take is to include a controller that looks and feels just like the real thing. That said, it's just common sense that Tapper, a bartender simulator, would have an actual pour spout to let you get the full feel of life as a bartender. Of course, you're not much of a bartender, as you only serve beer at your bar, and you only serve one kind of beer: Budweiser. Still, you got to experience bartender-dom in all of its glory. The cabinet even came with drink holders and a brass railing so that you could play as a bartender while still enjoying the amenities afforded to those on the opposite side of the bar.

The bad news: no tips.

It should also be noted that there actually was an alternate version of this game created for more family-oriented places (ie: Chuck-E-Cheese) and was renamed "Root Beer Tapper". Unfortunately the

nice add-ons such as the brass railing and drink holders were not included with this version of the game.

#### #45: Fonz

There are many motorcycle racing arcade games out there, but none of them were based on the most memorable character from "Happy Days", Fonz! In addition to having handlebar controls that functioned exactly like a real motorcycle, you had the Fonz giving you a big thumbs up on the side of the machine. His visage alone makes this 1976 Sega classic worthy of our list. Eeeeyyyyy!

#### #44: Two Tigers

Here's another fun one from days past. The idea was that you'd sink your opponent's battleship not by randomly guessing a letter and a number, but by blasting through it with bombs and flaming plane wreckage. It even had steering controls just like an old-fashioned fighter plane, or so I assume. Of course, it was a little hard to control the plane with these controls since the action took place from a side view, and not a cockpit view like you'd expect from games with controls like this, but still, it added a certain degree of realism to the experience. Not quite enough realism to offset the fact that you had an unlimited number of planes and that each one only flew about 10 miles an hour, but it was still fun.

#### #43: Bazooka

The game name? Bazooka. Your controller? A bazooka. Need I say more?

#### #42: Super Off-Road

I've said it before on this list, and I'm bound to say it again: I generally don't care for racing games. The sitting down is nice, but rarely do arcade racing games come with comfy chairs. Ivan "Ironman" Stewart saw this, and decided to save a little money on his racing game by simply doing away with uncomfortable plastic chairs and creating an entirely upright racing game. To some, this must seem like a bad move. Quite the contrary: indeed you are bound to get tired after standing for a while with one foot on the ground and the other tapping a squeaky metal pedal. That's where the "Ironman" part of the game comes into play. It was a race within the game, and a test of endurance without. One player toughs it out while his buddies crack from the strain and start mashing their "nitro" buttons, which merely leads to them slamming into the wall and griping about off-roading being a redneck sport. No no, thank you, Mr. Stewart.

#### #41: Battlezone

Here's an old school classic for you. The wire frame tanks were cool, as were the nifty stickers for fake buttons carefully placed next to the real buttons that controlled your own tank (which was actually designed in 128-bit color with amazing texture detail and bump mapping, all of which went to waste when it was revealed that the game was entirely in the first person perspective). However, some of the cabinets were designed to further sell the whole "tank of the future" motif. Instead of having an ordinary, blasé screen, they had a sort of periscope view. Normally, completely shutting out all outside light and subjecting your eyes to nothing but bright wire frames for long periods of time could be detrimental to your eyesight, but thankfully, the developers had the foresight to include open areas to the sides of the scope frame to let in some sunlight, and to let a few people look in on you to see if you were doing well or sucking out loud. If Nintendo had remembered this little feature when they were designing their damned Virtual Boy, I might still be able to see the color red.

#### #40: Exterminator

Having a game where you use a digitized hand to smash digitized bugs in a digitized house wasn't good enough for the designers of Exterminator. They wanted the entire cabinet to be shaped like one of the houses in the game, right down to the roof and chimney. It gave the game a very unique feeling, which was good because the cabinet couldn't be made to play any other games besides Exterminator (something that's commonly done in arcades). It was a very bold move. It wasn't a very popular move, especially since the cabinets themselves were pretty unreliable, but it was a bold move nonetheless.

#### #39: Title Fight

You kids today. In my day, we didn't have a "Nintendo Wii" with motion-sensitive control sticks for our boxing games. Oh no, we had our own kind of control "sticks" for our boxing games. Take Title Fight, for example. You had two joysticks, and each one was like a set of plastic brass knuckles that you would slam forward and backward in order to lay your opponent out on the canvas. There probably were sound effects in this game, but I could never make them out over the loud banging of the joysticks as I mimicked the motions (and enthusiasm) of real professional boxers. In a totally unrelated note, the local arcade was always sending their Title Fight machine away for repairs because somehow, the joysticks kept getting broken. Probably some punk kids spilling their sodas all over the damn console. I hate kids.

#### #38: Smash TV



Who doesn't remember Smash TV? Altered Beast had "Wise from your gwabe", and Smash TV had "Big money, big prizes, I love it!" Ok, I'll admit it doesn't have quite the same punch, but it was fitting, considering how many toasters and VCRs you could walk away with. The thing that really took me by surprise back when I first saw this thing was that instead of having a joystick and a couple buttons for shooting, it had an unbelievable two joysticks: one for moving, and one for shooting in one of eight directions. It was positively revolutionary. So much so that I didn't even mind the fact that I was getting totally reamed in that game, and shelling out more than my fair share of quarters trying to find the "Pleasure Domes", if you know what I mean.

### #37: Laser Ghost

Lasers and ghosts were at long last brought together in this late 80's shooter. The cabinet featured plastic guns affixed to the console just like all the other shooters from that era. However, whereas other shooters could only fit two guns for two players onto the machine, Laser Ghost managed to squeeze a third gun in between the other two. This meant your other friend didn't have to wait for either you or your friend to die before jumping in. Unfortunately, the middle gun was much higher than the other two. Some versions of the cabinet included seats for players 1 and 3, and others included a seat for just player 2, but either way, someone was going to be left standing when you played the game. It was just a matter of figuring out which friend you liked least.

### #36: Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (TMNT)

If you were at an arcade with both this game and The Simpsons, you had a tough choice ahead of you, but either way you were in for a lot of fun. Now, the obvious thing to do would be to go with the TMNT game that four people could play, but they still made a number of cabinets designed for only two players. That's how you knew if you were in a cheap-@\$\$ arcade or not. Anyway, the cabinet itself was decked out with images of the turtles, along with a couple actors portraying April and Shredder. Were the artists unable to draw convincing human characters or did they think these photo actors would make the appearance of the game all the more impressive? Perhaps it was simply too hard to find the real ninja turtles for a photo shoot? Only Master Splinter knows such ancient secrets. I'm sure that this machine was the start of a highly lucrative modeling career for the girl who posed as April too. Either way, it was a big, bright arcade machine that drew in gamers like pizza draws in turtles. Ninja turtles.

### #35: S.T.U.N. Runner

I was never one for racing games, unless you were talking about those racing games where they added some gimmicks to make it interesting, like driving an armed hovercraft of some sort. That's where

S.T.U.N. Runner came in. Oh sure, you'd start out as just a wimpy hover Ferrari, but once you got past the first level, they'd strap some wings, a nosecone, and a gun turret to your ship, and you were ready to start tearing @\$\$ around the long, tubular highways, gunning down any hapless motorists that were going too slow for your liking. Time just seemed to fly by on this machine, and let me tell you, that boxy plastic bench you had to sit on while playing the game was cooomfy! Plus the machine itself looked like it could pass for a futuristic vehicle of some sort. When you're a little kid trying to play this game, though, you were often better off just standing on the damn thing so you could get a good angle on the screen, but of course, some concerned parent would always be waiting somewhere nearby to scold you for standing on that narrow plastic seat, but hey, if they'd have put an accelerator pedal down there instead of just making the acceleration automatic, we wouldn't have had that problem in the first place.

### #34: Top Skater

Joysticks can be useful for the majority of arcade games. Still, however useful they may be, you can't expect players to walk away with your game in mind if there isn't something special about it. Sure, you could try to make a memorable gaming experience with entertaining gameplay, but that will only draw in so much money. The real cash comes from drawing in casual players who are just trying your machine on a whim. Top Skater went for this angle with their tilting skateboard controller, the first of its kind. The player would stand on the board and tilt it left or right, forward or back, depending on what trick was to be performed. A nifty innovation by itself, but thankfully, the developers also had the foresight to install railings on the side so that you wouldn't simply fall off and twist your ankle the moment you attempt your first trick. You could still slip right off and smack your head on the railing on your way down, but it was still an improvement. Just make sure you aren't wearing flip-flops when you hop on the thing unless you enjoy having arcade crows laugh at your mishaps.

### #33: Starship 1

A few decades ago, there wasn't much to most arcade games. Graphics and CPUs had only advanced so far, so developers would often try to spruce up the cabinet to make up for this. In the Starship 1 cabinet, in order to simulate the feel of space, the makers of the cabinet put in an angled mirror that reflected the image from the monitor onto a drawing of space. It's a pretty nifty way to make up for hardware limitations, and it must have been quite impressive back in the 70s. And let's not overlook the unusual futuristic plastic molding that was inserted into the front of the cabinet merely for aesthetics. Also, there were no in-game crosshairs (which are quite handy to have when running a combat flight simulator), but this was fixed by applying a couple strips of tape in a cross. Ah, the wonders of technology.

### #32: Hang-On

With racing games, the basic rule of thumb is to put a steering wheel on the cabinet so the player will be drawn into the game. With motorcycle games, you use some fake handlebars, plus you can save extra costs by putting the accelerator on the handle. Of course, if you're standing up while all this is going on, the illusion is ruined, so Sega decided to turn out a version of the game with a plastic motorcycle that you had to lean left and right on to turn. It was quite unique, and it helped distract from the unremarkable graphics such as the solid blue sky and the generally barren areas on the ground.

### #31: Thunder Blade

Arcade versions of flight simulators are fairly easy to come by. Most of the time, the manufacturer will just slap a special joystick with a trigger on the underside and a little button on the top, usually for machine guns and missiles respectively, on a regular upright cabinet and be done with it. If they were feeling generous, they might also throw in a lever for adjusting your throttle, or altitude, or whatever other bit of avionics they feel is necessary to get your precious quarters. Normally, that would probably be the case for 4 out of 5 Thunder Blade players. However, if you were fortunate enough to visit a ritzier arcade than those other chumps, you might happen upon a version of the game that used a cockpit-like setup that would tilt left and right according to how you moved the joystick. Fortunately, the developers had the foresight to include some metal cups for your feet so the machine wouldn't chuck you over the side after a sharp turn. However, that's not to say it didn't happen, especially if you made a right turn (no throttle joystick to catch your hip before your fall).

### #30: Skydiver

For those who were too fearful of trying their luck at real skydiving, Atari had things covered with their 1978 release of Skydiver. This game created challenges for your sky diving character based on timing jumps and variable wind factors in order to eventually land on the target. What was truly unique about this cabinet is that the controllers were actual ripcord rings instead of typical joysticks! And if you didn't pull the ripcord in time? Well, your diver got splattered on the pavement and then an ambulance would come onto the screen to take the diver away. I'm sorry though, if you actually have a skydiving accident, you don't need an ambulance... you need a hearse.

### #29: Paperboy

Paperboy instantly caught my attention in the arcade, not because of the insane things happening in the neighborhood where the main character has his paper route (fights, breakdancing, the grim reaper showing up, etc.); it was the handlebar controller that piqued my curiosity. In a weird way, it really did feel like you were riding a bike for the first time when you played the game. Problem is, all too often

people would steal the rubber grips that were on the handlebars, so you'd be stuck playing the game by gripping two metal bars. You're clearly going places in life if you think stealing two plastic grips off an arcade machine is worth the effort. You know, roughly 30 years from now, there will be an elderly man living in a trailer somewhere, telling his grandkids about the wild days of his youth and when they ask him what it was like, he'll just wink and point to a couple of plastic grips he stole from the Paperboy arcade machine which he now keeps on the mantle like trophies. Paperboy is another game that I think could be remade for arcades today; the new version would have the player both steer and peddle the bike instead of just steering it like in the old version. It might not be easy to play, but at least it'd be good exercise.

#### #28: Tron

In any discussion of cool arcade cabinets, it is pretty much required that you mention the cabinet for Tron. Disney wanted this game to be as successful as the movie, if not moreso, and they spared no expense to make the cabinet eye-catching: The sides of the cabinet featured scenes from the movie, the control panel and a bunch of the surfaces around the screen were painted with white lines like those you'd find on a circuit board. Here's the real kicker: The cabinet also had a pair of blacklights, and when they were on, the circuit lines, and even the joystick, would appear to glow. It was a very cool effect, especially in a perpetually dark arcade. And as if all that weren't enough, even the profile of the cabinet was a unique shape compared to the rest of the games you'd find in an arcade. In fact, the only downside to the cabinet was that the screen was placed at an angle so that you looked down on it as you played. This meant that if you were short, you were basically screwed. On the other hand, isn't that just a fact of life?

#### #27: Sea Wolf II

Yet another old school game makes it onto our lists. As is the case with a number of other games we've mentioned, this one's an arcade-style simulator. You look through the periscope to spot ships in the distance, and fire your torpedoes with a thumb button on the joystick. For added effect, when you hit a ship, and when you've fired all your torpedoes, lights alerting you to these things will light up inside the scope itself. Better yet, the cabinet has two submarine periscopes side-by-side so that two players can go head to head to see which one of them can sink the most ships in the least amount of time. Word to the wise: during the second round, make sure you torpedo the RMS Lusitania in order to enter the WWI Lightning Round!

#### #26: TX-1

Let's face it: it's hard to improve upon the racing game. Apart from improved physics and graphics, there

really isn't much room for innovation. TX-1 threw that notion out the window. In addition to cutting-edge graphics (green grass, blue sky, gray road) and state-of-the-art physics (car is held to the earth by gravity), Atari went a step further and put three screens into the cabinet. On straightaways, it's not a particularly useful feature, unless you want to make sure that the ground is the right color. However, when you come to a turn in the road, you'll notice that you're actually able to see more than ten feet of the road ahead of you. It was the most amazing thing to come to racing games since the steering wheel. Eventually, developers would learn that if the perspective shifted with the car, you didn't need to have extra monitors, but until that time, it was all about TX-1 and its fancy new setup.

#### #25: Dance Dance Revolution (DDR)

Personally, I don't care to do a lot of jumping and stomping while I'm playing my games. When I do some of that, though, it's usually because I just realized I haven't saved my game in almost two hours. Regardless, DDR took a very unique approach to the game of Simon. Each DDR unit consists of an upright cabinet with two huge speakers, and two dance stages, each with four pressure pads set up in a cross formation. You'd think these things would be in constant need of repairs, what with all manner of players stomping on them in the course of a normal day, but the dance stages were remarkably sturdy. Heck, the machines are even being incorporated into the physical fitness programs at a few schools around the world. Now you too can impress your classmates with your ability to match the rhythm of a whole assortment of J-pop songs!

#### #24: Guitar Freaks

These days, you'll be hard-pressed to find someone who's never heard of Guitar Hero. For that very reason, it's worth acknowledging its arcade predecessor on this list. The cabinet had two guitar controllers with it, each with a fret bar and three colored buttons on the neck, which presumably makes it easier than Guitar Hero, with its five colored buttons. The cabinet could also be linked with the arcade game, Drummania, which is the same sort of game but with drums. Even better, those two systems could then be linked with the game Keyboardmania. What this means is that not only do you have the progenitor to the Guitar Hero games; you've also got the earliest version of the game Rock Band!

#### #23: Panic Park

Pushing and shoving... it's what friendship is all about. Well, some brilliant people at Namco figured out a way to make it into a video game. Panic Park consists of a series of mini-games in which you must take your controller and try to physically push your opponent out of the way at just the right time. Keep in mind, your opponent is trying to do the exact same thing to you, so the end result is a big shoving match and a lot of laughs. And no, there's nothing wrong with kicking your opponent in the shins to give

yourself that extra "edge" needed to win the round! Come on, you know you've always wanted to shove your friend into a raging fire... Panic Park actually gives you that chance! If you've got big hands though, watch out, because you can really smash your knuckles when ramming those two controllers together if you're not careful. Then again, what do a few bloody knuckles matter in the grand scheme of things if you win the war?

## #22: Arm Champs & Arm Champs II

Here's another game for those of you who like to show off your machismo at the arcade. Arm Champs had no joysticks or buttons to mash, you simply grabbed onto the arm which protruded from the machine and tried to pin it down. For added amusement, they included a monitor which features the head of your opponent so you could see 'em struggle when you were winning or see 'em laugh at your weak @\$@ when you lost. While Arm Champs II had a wider distribution and a few more characters to arm wrestle, I prefer the cabinet of the original simply because it had a molded, muscular upper torso and the monitor blended in with it much better. The original one also had lights on top of it which flashed at the end of each match, which could be extra embarrassing for you if you lost. Oh and if you're wondering why Arm Champs II had a robotic arm, it's because the final opponent in the game was an android named "Specks" who looked kinda like Robocop.

## #21: Caveman

You're probably asking yourself, "Why the hell is there a pinball machine on this list? That's not the same as an arcade game!" Well before your head explodes with bewilderment, take a closer look at the machine. Notice anything different? That's right, Caveman was the first Pinball machine to have an arcade game built directly into it. After you hit some of the proper targets with your pinball, it would place the ball in a holding location while it switched to the video game mode. You would then grab a hold of the joystick and try to guide your caveman to hunt down some food, but if the T-Rex ate you during your game time you'd lose a ball. While the idea of creating a pinball/arcade hybrid game was unique, it unfortunately never really caught on and only a few more games of this nature were ever created.

## #20: Death Race

I had always believed Carmageddon to be the father of vehicular homicide-themed racing, but that was before I found Death Race. Though the art on the cabinet itself gives the impression that this is just a friendly race between two grim reapers, but in truth, the goal is to run down as many pedestrians as possible. And if you had a friend, you could compete to see who could run over the most people in a limited amount of time! It all sounds quite grand, until you consider that the 70's era screen could only render black and white stick figures. Plus, the bezel itself was at least as big as the screen that actually

showed the game you were playing. Still, it was quite upsetting to people back then, though that may be due to the fact that the game became linked to the hilariously bad Sylvester Stallone/David Carradine vehicle (no pun intended), *Death Race 2000*. Perhaps they could've sold a few more of these cabinets if those two had appeared on the side of the cabinet. Then again, *Death Race* was banned due to its violent (stick figure) content, so it's unlikely they would've sold many either way.

#### #19: Star Trek

This game came in the standard, garden variety, mom-and-pop upright cabinet, but for my money, you'll be much better off if you experience it through the "captain's chair" model. Granted, the captain shouldn't have to push his own "photon", "warp" and "thrust" buttons to get things done, but this is at least a step in the right direction. A "Strategic Operations Simulator" must be designed to prepare you as a captain to take over in case your button-pushers are burned by hortas. You even got Scotty and Mr. Spock to introduce you to the game and call you "the captain". I guess they were willing to take anyone over Shatner.

#### #18: T-Mek

Competition. It'll spice up even the most mundane trip to the arcade. I brought my younger brother along with me whenever I went in part because he brought his own quarters, but also because I could persuade him to try just about any game with me as long as it had some sort of gimmick. In the case of T-Mek, it was the chairs with the speakers built into the headrests, and the two joysticks you'd push and pull in various combinations to get your T-Mek in gear, use your special weapons, etc. Sure, other games would come along where you used two joysticks to pilot a tank, or a giant robot, or something (but usually one of those two), but they didn't have the tank/robot that you piloted painted on the sides of the cabinet like a dog-in-a-van mural! Plus, there was a light above each player's chair that let everyone standing nearby know that someone was handing out an @\$-kicking.

#### #17: F-114

This cabinet was easily one of the largest ever made. The player would sit in a swiveling chair and steer with the aid of a joystick mounted on the right side of the chair (sorry all you southpaws). All the action was displayed on a large curved projection screen, and all the sound effects came from, believe it or not, an 8-track player within the cabinet. I'm not overly familiar with 8-track players, as they were created and phased out before I was even born, but apparently someone knew of a way to wire one into the cabinet of an arcade game. There was also an area just below the screen made to look like the console of an aircraft, albeit with light-up hit counters that I doubt are included in real military aircraft. Or maybe I just need to watch *Iron Eagle* again. While I'm at it, you think the soundtrack is available on 8-track?

## #16: Sonic Blast Man

We've all played those games where you test your punching strength by hitting a target and it tells you how many pounds of pressure you contacted with. Well, the Sonic Blast Man game took it a step further by actually making a real video game out of it instead of just a way for you to show people you could hit hard as Ivan Drago. In Sonic Blast Man, you play the role of a superhero who has to fight crime and basically save the planet. So you strap on the pair of boxing gloves, punch the target as hard as you can and then see if you did enough damage to the enemy on the screen. Enemies included a purse snatcher, a runaway semi-truck, a skyscraper, a giant mutated crab, and a meteor headed for earth. While the moon was the hardest, I always thought the giant mutated crab was a really random thing to throw in there. The game always drew lots of crowds and laughs as some people would get a running start before throwing their punches. I actually saw a guy practically miss the entire target once and man oh man did he ever feel like an @\$\$. The one drawback of this game was that, even with all of the padding on the cabinet, it was out of order all too often. I guess you just can't make an electronic machine that people are supposed to wail on and not expect it to malfunction at some point. Even better, because some people are complete idiots when it comes to throwing punches, "Taito lost a class action suit for \$50,000 to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) because of injuries sustained by players of Sonic Blast Man. The CPSC alleges that between 1991 and 1994, Taito failed to report about 70 cases in which young players fractured or injured wrists and arms as a result of hitting Sonic Blast Man's punching pad." And these people had the nerve to put on those boxing gloves and call themselves superheroes. Pfft.

## #15: 720o

Long before Tony Hawk realized how much cash there was in the virtual skating market, the king of the skating games was 720 (that's two 360's for our less mathematically-inclined readers). You controlled a skater with a joystick and two buttons for performing tricks (and dodging killer bees). Here's the catch: normal joysticks work when you tilt them away from the center in the direction you want your player to move. The joystick for 720, however, could only be rotated clockwise or counterclockwise. To the casual observer, it looked like the joystick was broken since it was fixed tilted as far from the center as it could be. Not so, gentle readers. The funky-shaped cabinet also included a couple speakers at the top to give you real stereo sound and the look of a boombox! That meant you could enjoy all the best video game skateboard music the 1980s had to offer, so long as the arcade was willing to supply all the proper cable hookups. At the very least, you could enjoy the sounds of a digitized "Skate or DIE!" voice in full stereo sound.

## #14: X-Men



I remember walking into a small arcade and seeing this X-Men machine for the first time. I was absolutely floored by it. At the time (around 1992), it was easily the biggest multiplayer arcade machine I had ever seen in person. This beast was covered in bright X-Men character graphics and had two monitors connected together which gave you a 50" wide viewing screen. It had 3 coin slots on the left side and 3 coin slots on the right side. And if you were fortunate enough to get in on a 6-player co-op game and play it all the way 'til the end, it would probably end up being one of the greatest arcade gaming experiences of your life. Partially because it could get pretty crowded with 6-people standing around the machine at once and you'd often end up getting in some major shoving matches. But hey, that only added to the excitement of playing the game. A big colorful machine that took up more space than any other arcade game at the time... is it really any surprise that this massive arcade cabinet made it on the top 50 list?

### #13: Star Wars

There are a lot of movie tie-in video games that people avoid the plague, and rightfully so, but the original Star Wars arcade game was not one of them. While there was a stand-up version of this game, the truly nice one was the sit-down cockpit environmental one. Combined with the nice artwork, a cockpit reminiscent of the inside of an X-Wing, the lighting, the music and sound effects directly from the movie, this game really made you feel like you were Luke Skywalker flying towards the Death Star in your trusty X-Wing. The only thing the game was missing was an R2-D2 unit on top and an X-Wing pilot helmet for you to wear while playing. Well, that and giving you the opportunity to play as Porkins too.

### #12: Shark Jaws

While this cabinet looks fine 'n all as far as classic games go, what's truly great about it is how they avoided being sued by the filmmakers of "Jaws". If you look closely, to the top left of the word "Jaws" is the word "Shark" written in tiny letters. What this accomplished is the average kid back in 1975 would walk by the arcade game and only really see the word "Jaws" and think it was some official game based on the hit movie. Smart move! The added screaming sound effects whenever the shark ate a diver didn't hurt either.

### #11: Ms. Pac-Man

If there was ever another standard arcade cabinet that stood out more than Ms. Pac-Man, I honestly don't remember it. In a sea of standard cabinets that were almost always black with some artwork on the side, Ms. Pac-Man defied our comfortable corneas with a bright blue, pink and yellow cabinet that just screamed "Hey you! Yeah YOU! Get over here and play me!" to anybody that crossed its path. This thing was so bright that it almost appeared to be neon. And hey, there's no denying that Ms. Pac-Man is

far sexier than Pac-Man could ever dream of being... even the ghosts are in love with her for chrissakes! This game didn't just look good, it also made guys comfortable enough in their manliness to be able to play a game that had pink all over the cabinet. Viva la Pac!

#### #10: Time Traveler

In the early nineties, the lead designers at a lot of game companies got the idea into their heads that the future of video game graphics was Full Motion Video (FMV). Essentially, rather than hire artists and programmers to create characters and settings for your games, you could just hire actors, shoot them doing scenes as you would for TV/movies, compress those video files into ugly little bits of footage, and then string them together with a little interaction from the player to make what is generously called a "game". Sega, however, decided to take all this a step further. Anyone could make a plain, old, two-dimensional FMV game. Instead, they decided to take a step into the field of holograms. Kind of. In reality, the game just used mirrors to make two-dimensional projections appear to be on different plains, thus creating a "3-D" effect. Pretty weenie, Sega. And you didn't even bother to make a decent game to go along with this "innovation." For shame.

#### #9: After Burner

With the popularity of movies like "Top Gun" and "Iron Eagle" at the time, it's no surprise that people wanted a chance to get in on some of their own realistic dogfighting action. After Burner allowed you to do just that with this cockpit-style arcade machine which rotated in 4 different ways depending on how you were flying your jet. John Connor even played this arcade game in the movie "Terminator 2"; perhaps as a testament to his skills as a future leader of the resistance.

#### #8: Sinistar

Sinistar was well-known mostly for its steep difficulty creepy voiceovers. However, almost completely overlooked is the stuff on the outside. The most basic Sinistar machine was just a plain old upright machine, but if your local arcade was willing to spring for the high-end model, you were in for a real treat. The entire cabinet was made up to look like a spaceship. If you ask me, though, the thing looked more like a solid black semi truck cabin with a muffler on the driver and passenger side windows. You'd think that if they were going to make the cabinet look like a spaceship, they would make it look at least a little like the spaceship in the game, a wimpy triangular ship. Hey, but what do I know? Maybe you felt better about being pursued by a shrieking monster if you thought you were in a hulking, boxy starship. Could this be the true origin of the SUV?

## #7: Pong

Many people believe Pong to be the first arcade game ever created, but that honor belongs to Computer Space which was released a year earlier in 1971. Still, Pong was the first successful arcade game that had a really wide distribution and was eventually released in a home console version as well. In addition to being a simple game that anybody could pick up in an instant, Pong came in a much more basic (and lighter) cabinet than Computer Space, so that might help partially explain why it was successful. You didn't need a forklift to move the thing. Granted, it didn't look nearly as futuristic or flashy as Computer Space, what with the wood paneling 'n all, but this game is what really brought arcade games into the mainstream and we owe a lot to it for that reason. When you think about it, a game as simple as Pong probably should have a cabinet that matches it in terms of simplicity. Well, you can't get much simpler than a cabinet covered in wood paneling.

## #6: Baby Pac-Man

Not to be confused with Pac-Man Jr., Baby Pac-Man was a whole new spin on the Pac-Man series combining both video game and pinball gameplay into one machine. While the Caveman pinball/video game hybrid came out earlier, Baby Pac-Man was the first to combine the two into a standard upright arcade machine rather than a bulky pinball machine. The way the game worked is you started out in a standard Pac-Man maze, but the ghosts in this game were far more intelligent than in any other Pac-Man game, so you often wanted to make a run for the escape tunnels. Once you made it into an escape tunnel, the pinball game down below would launch and that's where you could score yourself some much needed power pellets. While the game itself only enjoyed moderate success (primarily because it was extremely hard), it sure looked damned nice with 100% completely unique layout.

## #5: Fire Truck

Now here's an old game from 1978 that took two-player cooperative gaming to a whole new level. Player one got to control the cab of the fire truck, while player two stood behind and drove the trailer. It was just like driving a real fire truck! Ok not really, but the idea was still good. The object of the game was to drive to your destination as quickly as possible while avoiding hazards in the streets. What's funny about the cabinet is that the steering wheels and the gas pedal were the only things that had any effect on the actual gameplay. The additional buttons you see would simply make bell and horn sound effects. Player two also had the option of smacking player one on the head from behind and annoying the living hell out of him, thus Fire Truck never became a big hit. If you ask me though, this game is begging to be remade for modern arcades complete with fully-functional fire hoses.

## #4: Tank 8

Tank 8 was the follow-up to Atari's hit "Tank" game and it was about as unique as arcade gaming experiences got at the time it was released in 1976. An unheard of 8-person multiplayer game in which you have 8 different colored tanks to control. It also featured two modes of play; you could play on a team, or you could play as a lone tank hell bent on destroying every other tank in your path. As you can see, the layout of this machine was really different - a cube with 2 sets of controllers on each side and a 25" color screen in the center. Each controller set consisted of two joysticks for you to maneuver your tank with in the same way that you'd drive a real tank (ie: pushing one joystick forward while pulling the other one back to make a sharp right turn). I call dibs on the green tank!

### #3: Computer Space

This one should come as no surprise to any video game history buff. "Computer Space" was the first commercially available arcade game ever, released back in 1971. With its molded retro sci-fi look, this fiberglass cabinet is an absolute gem in the minds of collectors whether it's the original 1-player or the 2-player version. While the game itself was never a big hit, people are always excited by the chance to see one of these rare machines in person. And a true testament to just how awesome the build of the cabinet is, even though there weren't a ton of these machines produced, they still made their way into popular culture. The "Computer Space" game appeared in the movies "Jaws" and "Soylent Green".

### #2: Maneater

Another game created to cash in on the "Jaws" craze, Maneater didn't need to try and trick people with its name like "Shark Jaws" did. Maneater had more than enough visual charm to attract just about anybody at the time. The screen and controls are brilliantly nestled inside the jaws of a big fiberglass shark! You just know this design made some young children too scared to even play the game. Gotta also love how they didn't even consider the fact that some people like resting their arms on arcade cabinet surfaces. They may not be sharp, but I doubt those shark teeth are a comfortable place to rest your arms while playing the game. Unfortunately, these machines are really hard to come by these days so don't count on finding one at your average arcade. They have been on display at some retro gaming exhibits before though, and if there's any arcade game cabinet worth taking a picture of with your head in it, this just might be the one.

### #1: Discs Of Tron

This is it. The creme de la creme of all arcade video cabinets. Weighing in at over 730 lbs of pure video

gaming joy, the environmental cabinet version of Discs Of Tron was in a class all its own. Unlike other environmental cabinets at the time, Discs Of Tron didn't have you sit inside of it. Instead, you stood up and leaned back in it, just like your disc-chucking character on the screen as you listened to everything in full stereo sound and enjoyed the badass glow of the backlight enhanced artwork. It's truly one hell of a fun time standing inside one of these bad boys and if you ever have the chance to do so, do not pass it up. What really horrifies both myself and arcade collectors worldwide is how many of these amazing machines were eventually sawed in half. You see, not every arcade could afford to have a machine that weighed so much shipped to them, nor did they all have the space for this behemoth. So, what Bally Midway did with many of the unsold larger environmental versions of the game, was saw it in half and ship only the front part (it wasn't built to split apart even though looking at it would make you think otherwise). As a result, finding a complete version of this game that wasn't sawed in half has become increasingly difficult over the years. Even worse, I've heard tales that many of these machines ended up in landfills, much like the legend of Atari's infamous dumping of countless E.T. cartridges. Another interesting note is that Discs Of Tron was originally supposed to be a fifth game in the original Tron arcade machine (which also had the same stylings as this cabinet, but sadly didn't come in an environmental version). While there's no doubt that the original was great, I think we're all glad that Bally took the time to keep Discs as a separate game of its own. After you've had a chance to look at this cabinet inside and out, you'll quickly realize it wasn't just another cool game... it was a true work of art through and through and I've yet to see another arcade machine that comes anywhere close to it.

And there you have it for our list of the top 50 greatest arcade cabinet designs! It took a lot of time for the two of us to compile this list, but there's still a good chance we've left out some of your favorite arcade picks. If that's that case, by all means post your suggestions in the Reader Comments area down below to let us know what we left out. Who knows, maybe we'll update the list to cover 100 arcade cabinets sometime! Thanks for reading and may the warm glow of the arcades guide you all in your darkest hour.

## 28 - Sexual Moment in Gaming History!

Video Games and Sex. In recent years, it seems like the two have been going together like peanut butter and jelly. Grape jelly. With recent titles such as "Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball" and "BMX XXX", it's obvious that sex sells ... especially to horny little gamer geeks. Back in the day, however, this was not quite the case. Well, at least not intentionally... most of the time.

In the golden age of video games, there wasn't a whole lot of blatant sexual stuff in games. Unless of course you had a copy of "Leisure Suit Larry" - then you probably got a rare glimpse of that oh-so-naughty pixel that was supposed to represent a nipple. Still, for the average gamer, there wasn't a whole hell of a lot of sexual innuendo in the majority of games out there unless you looked really, really hard. Fortunately, we've decided to save you the trouble of searching for the the more obscure dirty little bytes in the wee hours of the night. Unlike other sites which try to force sexual situations in video games, we're scouring tons of classic games for those moments which require no alterations. Moments that simply exist in the games to disturb you. Enjoy our list of some of the top sexual moments in video game history! It's a work in progress, so if you have a game that you think we should include on the list, by all means let me know! Click on any name below to view the shocking super spicy story behind that particular game!

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### RING KING!

Gotta get this one out of the way first - it's probably the most well-known unintentional sexual moment in classic videogames. "Ring King" for the NES started out as just an average boxing game. You begin by training for fighter in power, speed, and stamina. After that it's into the ring you go for your first round of good ol' button-mashing fisticuffs. And that's when it all starts to go downhill.

"May I have this dance?"

Whenever you get too close to your opponent, you start to hug up on each other real close and do a little dance. I like to think of this as their way of turning each other on before the real action begins. A little foreplay if you will. Well boys, it was a really well-fought (and well-danced) round, now what say you two head on over to your corners for...

### ORAL SEX?

I thought boxing was all about "the eye of the tiger" not the "one-eyed monster", but apparently I was wrong. In between rounds, both boxers are treated to a lil' wobble-gobble. I mean, there's really no other reason for those assistants to be down there, moving like that. Normally, the assistants will hold a bucket for the boxers to spit in or replace their mouthpieces or what have you. But no, these fellows have become the mouthpieces. I have a hard time believing that this was unintentionally sexual... it's downright blatant if you ask me. The censors must have been drinking pretty fracking heavily the day

they let this one slip by. But I'm no ringside announcer by any means, so let's see what they make of the situation.

Well there you have it. If the ringside announcers think the boxers are getting blowjobs, then it's gotta be true. And just look at how excited some fans are:

"WEEEEEE HEEEE!"

Dancing in the ring, blowjobs in the corners, people in the crowd jerking off... man, boxing sure was different back in the 80's. Nowadays it's all just a bunch of rough sex involving biting, but back then it was something pure. Let's never forget that.

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## PRO WRESTLING!

This was easily one of my favorite wrestling games ever (along with Tag Team Wrestling for the NES). The nice thing about this one was that you had a variety of characters to choose from, each with a few special moves of their own. Hell, you could even be a freakish Amazon monster guy who chomped on his opponents faces. **CHOMPED ON THEIR FACES!** Still, amongst all of the cool aspects of the game, there was a perverted moment that most people caught. Granted, wrestling can often look perverted, but this particular moment definitely stands out.

The most devastating move in the game was a "pile driver", but like a few other powerful moves, you had to get your opponent weak enough before you could execute it. Now if your opponent wasn't weak enough and you still tried to execute the pile driver, this is what happened:

"I think I might have a rash. Here, have a closer look."

Basically, you'd shove the poor bastard's face directly into your crotch - a move that is far more brutal than a pile driver if you ask me. To make matters worse, your character's face makes an expression as if he's in ecstasy while his opponent is buried in his groin.

Now if the guy wants some head, that's fine, but he should at least be polite enough to ask first instead of just shoving the other guy's face down there.

Ok maybe not. I guess it would've been best if they just left those frames of the animation out. Hell, if you were to shove that Amazon guy down there, he'd be likely to bite your lil' winky off. :o

Oh cry all you want, but you're not getting pity from me you sick, twisted pervert.

---

A true arcade classic that was later released on the SNES (but it slowed down badly on the SNES when you had 2 players playing at once, plus you could have 3 players at once in the arcade version). For any of you who enjoyed the multi-player button-mashing fun of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and Simpsons arcade games, Knights of the Round would surely be up your alley as well. In the game, you play as one of three characters: Arthur, Lancelot, and Perceval. Each have their strengths, but in the end, as long as you have enough quarters, you're gonna make your way through the game just fine.

Your objective is to obtain the holy grail, but before you can do so, you must fight all sorts of medieval warriors, magicians, and a few huge bosses. In addition to that, you'll sometimes encounter MAD TIGERS.

As you can see, these mad tigers seem to be your run-of-the-mill beasts that are hungry for flesh. Oh but how looks can be deceiving. When you decide to battle these angry creatures, you're in for quite a surprise.

**MAD TIGER BALLS!**

Yep, whenever you attack one of the mad tigers and send it flying backwards, you get a nice shot of their mad tiger balls. They're just so in your face there's no ignoring it. I mean really, did they have to draw in those balls with such detail? Furthermore, does anybody really want to shell out a bunch of quarters only to be rewarded with glimpses of said balls? I hope the quest for the grail was worth it...

---

Few games were ever as daunting as Ghosts 'n Goblins, and its sequel, Ghouls 'n Ghosts. I myself have spent countless hours on the games, slaying unmentionable horrors and avoiding that damned torch weapon that falls out of your hand and explodes. And don't get me started on that frigging red demon that flew around dive-bombing you right when you least expected it. He can kiss my @\$\$.

Anyway, the real problem was that you could only be hit twice before you died. Now, fighting your way through the legions of hell is hard enough, but worse than that is having to fend off scores of the damned in your underwear, and that's exactly what you had to do if you took that first hit.

Here, we see the evolution of King Arthur and his fabulous undies, from his flamboyant Valentine's Day red briefs to his flashy polka dot boxers.



Yes sir, Arthur was not one to take crap from any zombies, or giant worms, or puking pigs, or giant flaming bears. He face 'em all, even when he was down to his skivvies. Not only that, but he was defiant about it the whole time:

That's right, evil. When others would balk in terror, Arthur invites all of you to take a long hard look at the moon. In your face!

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## BAD STREET BRAWLER!

In 1989, Mattel apparently wanted a video game hero to promote a new line of action figures, but somehow their request for 'a tough street-fighting vigilante' was interpreted as 'Peter Pan fag with shaved armpits' by Beam Software. I'm not 100% sure about the storyline in this game, but judging by the enemies I'd guess a circus has come to town and gone awry and some guy in a yellow one-piece swimming suit is the only man who can save the day. For some reason, he can only attack in to set ways in each level. In the first level, the techniques at your disposal are the regular punch and a slide kick. In other levels you lose the ability to do this, but suddenly you can use such attacks as 'drop kick', 'body slam' and 'gut knee'. Another is the 'crouch down and ram your head into the nearest crotch' move.

More interesting, however, is the 'trip' move, which is used to trip people and to pet dogs. No, seriously. If a dog comes up to you and tries to bite you in the jugular, you can just pet it and it dies.

Be dead! Good boy!

The 'trip' maneuver even has a third function: it lets you fondle people.

This is one of those moments when the graphics designer, project manager or even the damned coffee boy should have stood up and said "Hey guys, it kinda looks like the guy is masturbating that passed-out midget. We better get that fixed." But of course nobody did, and now suddenly the already unconventional hero is also a sexual assaulter and possibly a somnaphiliac or narcophiliac or whatever you're called when you fondle sleeping people.

The tables have turned!

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## BASEBALL STARS 2!

I've never been a big fan of sports games (with the exception of Pigskin Footbrawl). However, something caught my eye when I was checking out Baseball Stars 2. Something aside from the fact that your teams consisted of grown men with names like Vixen, Mummy, and Anthrax.

It was just another day at the ballpark. I was getting my @\$@ handed to me by the Seoul Ivorys (spelled just like that), and the fans in the stands were eating it up. It was the bottom of the ninth, and I had just put in another quarter because the game assured me that we could still win, even though we were down ten to zero. The pitcher pitched, I swung the bat, and the ball went right into the hands of the shortstop. Game over. I lamented the loss, and the fans cheered...

Whoa, what the hell? I know you're excited for your team, lady, but put that hand away! There are children present!

The umpire called for a time out, but it was too late. The damage had been done.

Well, at least it cheered everybody up. My boys needed some cheering up after their resounding defeat. God bless you, crazy lady.

-----  
Before its US release, Monster Party was toned down a bit. Since the original version for unknown reasons never was released in Japan, all we can know about it is what we can learn from a couple of images swimming around on the net. Which means all we can know is that the piranha plant boss was slightly more realistically drawn, that he had a Marshall amp, and that the title screen looked like it had been manufactured by the nightmare factory. A couple of the elements that collided with Nintendo's guidelines were for some reason left in, like the bloody screens preceding each level and the spooky change in the first level's graphics once you pass the halfway mark.

The plot in this game is as follows: a kid called Mark is walking home in the middle of the night after baseball practice when a monster called Bert comes to tell him there is trouble in Monster World and that he needs his help to defeat various leviathans and demons.

Apparently getting a job at McDonalds requires a higher level of competence than being the messiah of Monster World. Next, Mark and Bert fly off to his dimension. The intro runs along thus:

Bert: Mark, my planet is dangerous. So we must act together.

Mark: How?

Bert: Like this!

Then they fused together.

At this point, Bert puts himself on top of Mark and fuses with him. This is an important gameplay element: if you eat pills you'll find along your way that a monster will come and 'fuse' with you. OMG! HAWT MONSTER-ON-CHILD AKSHUN!

Enough beating around the bush, let's cut to what qualified Monster Party for this project: the beating around the @\$\$.

One of the first enemies you encounter in Monster World is a naked @\$\$ sticking out of the ground. It doesn't really attack you in anyway, it's just an @\$\$ growing straight out of the ground. I don't really know what to make of it, but then again this game is from Japan. For all I know, there's a part of Asian mythology I haven't read about that concerns magical asses ready for the picking. To me, all it is is the first case ever of sado-masochism in a Nintendo game.

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## STREETS OF RAGE 3!

Streets of Rage 3 is simply one of the best side-scrolling fighter games you'll ever play. The levels are great, the enemies are fun, and even the soundtrack is worth downloading. Even with all of these plusses going for it, they must have been worried about selling enough copies, because they through in a scantily clad gal as one of the main characters.

Meet Blaze. She's a 5'6" @\$\$-kicking heroine who apparently didn't want to give out her weight. Typical. Still, it's safe to assume that if one was to weigh Blaze, her clothes wouldn't be a factor since there's not much of 'em to begin with.

Call me crazy, but for some reason I have my doubts about a woman actually choosing to fight in a short skirt and high-heeled boots. For some reason I think some nice sweat pants and sneakers would do the job a lot better. But hey, what do I know? Through the magic of video game animation, she successfully fights her way through all the levels and bosses without a problem. Well, ok... there were a few problems.

Blaze's enemies get more views of her crotch in this game than if she had her own spread in an issue of

Hustler. In that mini-skirt Blaze kicks, flips, jumps... she's absolutely shameless about it. Come to think of it, maybe that's been her strategy all along. Show the enemy a lil' muffin to distract 'em and then beat their asses. Eh, who are we kidding... they just wanted to have a scantily clad babe in the game so more desperate dweebs would buy a copy. Isn't that right you dweeb? What's that? You want to see her in action more? No, screw that. Why don't you go buy the game if you need to see 1 pixel of underwear that badly? Piss off.

Oh alright, one more time...

Now, I would like to say that the Blaze slut-factor is the only thing in this game that I had to write about. That's just not the case. Sure, there's other women with whips and what not, but that's nothing compared to this little secret...

In the Japanese version of "Streets of Rage 3" (known as "Bare Knuckle 3"), you confront a character by the name of Ash on level 1. He's quite the flamboyant character, as you will see in a minute. There's a little secret about him though... you can actually play as him. When I first heard that you could play as Ash, I figured they were talking about "Evil Dead" Ash, not "YMCA Reject" Ash.

After you beat Ash, if you press all three buttons on your Genesis controller and the start button at the same time and then die shortly after, the next time you continue you'll see the option to choose Ash as your character. And why wouldn't you choose Ash? What are you a homophobe? Ash may be a bad Japanese stereotype of gay men, but he can beat (er slap) the enemies into a pulp with very little effort. I mean, just look at the power you'll have at your fingertips.

OOO LA LA!

OH YOU SSSSILLY BOY YOU!

YOU BETTER WORK IT!

IT'S RAININ' MEN!

I think the choice is now quite clear - Ash is THE character to play as in Bare Knuckle 3. It's a damned shame you can't play as him in the American version of the game. Ah well, perhaps it's for the best. I don't want the bad guys to win or anything, but I still want them to stand a fighting chance. If Ash and Blaze were to combine forces, shoot... they'd be absolutely unstoppable. Actually, they sorta did meld

the two together... anytime Ash screams, it's the scream of a woman.

A match made in S&M Heaven.

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## RIVER CITY RANSOM!

One of the greatest NES games, River City Ransom challenged our perceptions of high school life. Forget everything you thought you knew, high school was really all about pummeling gang members, taking their money, and blowing it all at Hack's Chicken Shack. It was about beating the hell out of someone for \$1.25. It was about spewing epic amounts of vomitus.

But it was not without its shameful moments...

Fighting the mafia AND the Squids was bound to get you good 'n tired pretty fast. Fortunately, if you couldn't afford to buy and eat an entire pizza, there was a cheap alternative:

The local health club. Sure, they didn't have a lot to offer (hell, they couldn't even afford to get a name), but what they can give you is the cheapest sauna in town.

Three fiddy? I'd be a fool not to take advantage of this great offer! Sign me up, nerdy bald man!

"Alex was very uptight, and the sauna was so relaxing..."

Well folks, all I can say is BARF! Speaking of asses, though, there was another curious specimen roaming the many malls of the river city.

Typical street walker clothes, but definitely not something I want to see on a young boy. No wonder he looks so pissed off. I'd be mad too if I were made to strut around in a tube top and hot pants. Especially white ones. Everyone knows you're not supposed to wear white after Labor Day, not even if you're a wee lad whoring himself out to support his family. Ah, life in the big city.

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## THE "CHO ANIKI" SERIES!

Ok, this is going to be a somewhat long page compared to the others. Why? Because it's about more than one game for one thing - it's about an entire series of completely insane "kuso-ge" (shoot games) by the name of "Cho Aniki". Rather than let you off easy with exposure to one of the games, I figured I'd torture your eyes with some footage from almost all of them. These games don't have just 1 little sexual moment in them... these games are pretty much nonstop romps through the deepest and strangest perversions straight outta Japan. Still, they're fairly obscure and thus need to be exposed. We begin with "Ai Cho Aniki" for the PC Engine (ie: the Japanese version of NEC's Turbo Grafx-16 system). I've heard that it loosely translates to "Super Big Brother" and/or "Great Big Brother", but as far as I'm concerned, it really translates to "A Bunch of Speedo-Wearing Homosexual Lunatics with Holes in their goddamned Heads."

I like how the back cover instructs us to DO THE MUSCLE, yet it's quite vague as to which muscle we're supposed to "do" exactly. Then again, one glance at some of the imagery, and it doesn't take a genius to figure out what muscle they're probably speaking about. Onward to the game itself...

In this first installation of Cho Aniki, you play the part of Samson... he's the crazy guy in the speedo. Basically, it's a side-scrolling shooter game - with a lot of strange shoot going on. At one point you're trying to fend off a fairy and her boat of angry semi-nude men, and the next minute you're going mono-a-mono with a giant naked guy who flies around in half of a meteor. Or is it a planet? Damned if I know. Just as long as it covers up his jigglies I'll be content.

I don't really know why Samson can fly, nor do I know why he has a hole in the top of his skull which he can shoot from. I don't really know why he encounters a train filled with more semi-nude men who enjoy diving off of a board even though there's no actual water to dive into. And furthermore...

I have absolutely no clue as to what's up with this guy. He obviously has a thing for signs 'n stuff... a traffic cone for a hat. But trust me, you don't need to see that traffic cone to know that you need to swerve out of the way of this guy. His crotch is just like one giant tumor that's begging for you to stare directly at it. The flowery background is a nice touch too, yes?

I'm sorry, I just had to show you that guy close-up. Besides, I've taken the time to go through these video ga(y)mes, so the least you can do is look. Look oh so closely. Well, at least after looking at that guy you've got an idea for a Halloween costume next year, eh?

"He's got the cutest little dinghy in the Navy, heave ho... heave ho!"

Yeah, there's an underwater level and sure enough, you encounter even more guys in speedos. This time they're attached to anchors and sinking to the bottom of the ocean. Still, even though these guys are sinking to their demise, they put their best "Right-Said-Fred" pose. If you've gotta go, look good while you're doing it. I guess that's their philosophy.

Ok, now that pretty much throws any sexual ambiguousness that the game had right out the window. I did mention that one of Samson's attacks has him sprinkling his enemies with faerie dust didn't I? Sadly, I don't think that's even the worst of it. In fact, I KNOW it's not the worst of it.

Oh you still think you can handle more do ya? Hah, ok tough guy, let's see just how manly you feel after taking a gander at this image from the game:

YES. YES. YES.

So there you have it for the first Cho Aniki appearance. If they had a plan with this game, I can only assume it was this: If you want to make an impact on the gaming world, show them something they've never seen before. And by god, they sure as hell accomplished that.

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Now we move onward to the Super Famicom (ie: the Japanese version of the Super Nintendo system) and the release of "Cho Aniki Bakaretsu Rantou Hen." I have no idea what the rest of that text means, but I'm guessing that's a good thing. A damned good thing. Unlike "Ai Cho Aniki" which was a side-scrolling shooter from homoerotic hell, "Cho Aniki Bakaretsu Rantou Hen" is more along the lines of a typical Street Fighter games. Well, typical probably isn't the right word to use, because this game is anything but that. And now let's meet a few of the splendid characters you can choose from:

BOTEI: He reminds me of something straight out of the movie "Beastmaster". Still, I don't recall anybody in that flick pulling off crotch-exposing yoga stretches in mid air, nor do I recall any of them wearing pink armor... but hey, maybe my memory is just fuzzy.

MAMI: Mami is all woman. Well, ok, part woman, part battleship filled with nude men. How come Carnival cruise lines doesn't have something like this for one of their vacation packages? I'm particularly fond of the heart anchor that's hanging off the side of the ship. What a wonderful touch.

SAMSON: Yep, Samson is back and..... gayer than ever. I'm sure that's all that needs to be said about Samson.

ADAM: No longer is Adam an enemy for you to encounter, now you can control his naked @\$\$\$. And with moves such as "The Crotch Cannon™" and "Check Out My @\$\$ While I Hide In My Half-Meteor™", why wouldn't you want to?

There's other characters too, but they just don't compare to the aforementioned frolicking foursome. But what about the gameplay itself? Well let's take a look.

The combination moves are pulled off in the same way you'd pull off a combo in Street Fighter or Mortal Kombat, but it seems like there's a lot less combos for each character in this game. I guess that's not too surprising considering that you don't even have... hey wait a second. What in the frack is going on in the background there!?

Holy sweet drunken ninja Jesus, it appears that our battleground is none other than a field of daises. A field of daises with floating, muscle faerie men in pink speedos. That's too gay. That's just too too too gay. Even gay people would be offended by how excessively gay that is. Keep in mind, you're having to stare at that background while people like Samson and Adam are also pulling off some very suggestive moves in the foreground. You know what? I think I need some time away from this level. I'm going to go to a place that would truly shun such imagery. I'm going to church.

Ah, good old church. A place where I can relax in peace and clear my mind of... what in the!?! NO! IT CAN'T BE! GODDAMNIT IT IS!!!!

Yes, we've apparently entered "The Church of Flamers". While you're duking it out with your opponent in church, you're treated to giant purple men doing squat thrusts before your very eyes. All that was once holy and sacred has been tainted by the Cho Aniki series. Hmm, you know... that's actually kinda cool.

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Moving right along, we now take a look at "Cho Aniki" which was released on both the Sony Playstation and the Sega Saturn. I've been unable to get my hands on this game so far, so I can't get too in-depth as to what it's like, but the artwork and digitized characters pretty much tell you all you need to know about it.



I'm not really sure what's going on with the cover here, but apparently they've now added baby angels to the mix of characters. Perhaps they're representatives of the church of flamers from the last game, or maybe they're just angels of death trying to rid the world of games like this. I suppose time will tell.

Just like with the game "Pit Fighter", they really use digitized characters all over the place in this game. The fact that they could actually find people willing to play these parts is amazing. Then again, it is Japan. I once saw a show there where a guy from there towed a truck with a rope tied to his penis, so I guess this isn't too surprising. Gotta love that guy with the golden visor on his head. I'll bet that's where he gets his power from. Genius.

So in this game, they return to their roots with another side-scrolling shooter. What's great is, in addition to your own hilarious characters, you can tell there's all sorts of lovely things going on in the background.

Take this for example. Had I not pointed it out to you, you might have missed the naked guy sprawled out in a flower patch. Aren't you glad you've got me as a tour guide who will leave no stone unturned? Please, save your thanks for later.

Ok, now right here is the reason that I must play this game. Not only do they have a green muscle guy turned upside-down while another guy rides him like a pogo-stick, but they have a huge Japanese guy who... appears to have raped a sentinel from the Matrix. I mean seriously, what in the hell is going on with his crotch? You wouldn't believe what his big attack is. Ok, well, maybe at this point you would.

And lookee here, it appears as though you have to fight a cheerleader pyramid later on in the game. Well, it's not really cheerleaders, it's just a bunch of Japanese guys in speedos... but that's close enough I suppose. It's also nice to see that the character you play as is completely naked. Always a great selling point for a game.

I'm with you kid, I'm with you.

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Our final destination is "Cho Aniki Seinaru Protein Densetsu" (roughly translated to "Super Brother: Legend of the Holy Protein") for the Sony Playstation 2 system. It's kind of amazing that they'd make one of these games for a powerful system like the PS2... then again, it's surprising they'd make these games for any system. Playing these games on any system is an insult to the system itself (even if there was an Atari Jaguar version of Cho Aniki). Still, I can't help but feel like if you own a system that one of these games exists for, your game collection will never be complete without owning at least one Cho Aniki game. Just imagine having some friends over and telling them you got this awesome new game from Japan. They wouldn't even have time to prepare for the onslaught of blatant flashy-speedo imagery that all of these games provide. Good times I tell you, good times indeed.

Anyway, from the look of the box it at least looks like it's a semi-professionally made PS2 game. The weird thing about this one though, is you don't play as Samson (or his "friend" Adon), you play as the Holy Protein. I'm sure that's just a fancy name for "sperm" in Japan. But yeah, you're just this little glob of protein that can shoot at its enemies. Still, Samson and Adon are always at your side, helping you fight the good fight.

Now what in the hell is going on here? I'm not sure, but it looks like they might be bowling in space with the sperm, er protein, on a long track of naked men. At this point, is anything even shocking anymore?

Hmm, no, I guess not.

For a PS2 game, these graphics look pretty friggin' horrible. Not that I'm really complaining, I could easily do without seeing the detailed glistening of Samson's @\$@ cheeks during battle. And check out some of the enemies there. It appears someone mated with a shark and created a man-shark hybrid a la "Sharkie" from "Cabin Boy". Yes bestiality, one of the few remaining vices that the Cho Aniki creators hadn't tapped into yet. But let's not forget the nice addition of the axe-pick wielding, tightly-whitey wearin' construction workers.

So tell me, does it burn when you urinate? Pfft, that's nothing compared to this giant statue that PISSES LAVA. And, for no apparent reason whatsoever (unless it's something they're going to use for a sex toy later on), you have to battle a giant CORN ON THE COB BOSS. I have to say, they totally redeemed themselves with that last one. I can't think of a better evil boss than corn on the cob.

So what does the future hold for Samson, Adon, and all the other misfortunates in the Cho Aniki series? I really don't know, but one thing's for sure: the next game is totally going to change Cho Aniki's

reputation. No longer will there be greased up muscle men in search of protein. Instead, we'll see a brilliant adventure game with a deep plot, rich characters, incredible bosses, and a stunning conclusion. It will truly be a game for the whole family to enjoy and reminisce about for years.

Yeah... like hell.

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## KUNG FU!

Kung Fu is a game a lot of us hold close to our hearts. It was one of the very first games released for the NES and therefore one of the main hour thieves back in the day when our mothers needed a break from the Super Mario Bros music. It was also one of the first NES games to advocate homosexual group sex.

If you've ever played Kung Fu, and I'm assuming you have, you probably know what I'm talking about. The 'generic guy' enemies in this game attack you not by using kung fu or at all hit or kick you: they walk up to you with their arms above their heads and then grab hold and embrace you. If one of them already is latching onto your @\$\$, that doesn't mean the next guy is left with nothing to do. He just grabs the nearest @\$\$ and has his way with it. And so on and so forth, it's a lot like those toy train sets with magnets on the carts. Magnetic mantrain set.

While I know what this looks like, I have no idea what actually is going on. So I fired up Kung Fu 2, the sequel I don't think even was released in Japan. Perhaps seven years of progress and enhanced graphics could provide an answer?

Nope. Nice pants, though.

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## RAMPAGE!

Ah yes, Rampage was always a childhood favorite of mine. What other games had the 3-player arcade mindless smash-em-up action that could be found in this little gem? Not many I say, not many at all. It was just one of those games that you and your pals had to play if you saw it, even though you had already played it a million times.

So you start off with three different characters to choose from. George is basically supposed to be like King Kong, Lizzie is your Godzilla, and Ralph... well, he's just a fracking werewolf I guess. I don't

remember any goddamned stories about giant werewolves destroying entire buildings, but then again, I haven't seen all of the "giant monster" flicks out there so who knows. Ralph has a cool expression on his face and that's good enough for me. Besides, Ralph got the shaft on the NES port of this game, so he deserves his props.

So there you are, three mighty monsters, looking to tear down the cities of every state in the country. If you were an asshole like I always was, you spent your time trying to kill your buddies instead of helping them destroy the buildings. As easy as this game is, you still die here 'n there... it's inevitable. Once your energy runs out it's bye bye giant mutant monsters...

... and hello ugly little sissies. Yep, you shrink back down into your human form (ie: the way you were before you were exposed to the radioactive stuff). But that's not the best part. The best part is that you have to stand before the partially destroyed city completely naked. Sorry, this isn't one of those stupid "Hulk" moments, where his clothes magically stretch out enough to still cover up his genitalia whenever Bruce turns into the Hulk. This is reality. If you grew into a giant beast that's as large as some buildings, your clothes are going to be torn to shreds (and possibly consumed by your nasty beast self).

If you squint your eyes you can see their... nope... nothing. Damn.

Sure, they're naked and quivering with fear now, but all of the parts that make the baby Jesus cry are covered up. Not too risqué, right? Well then, let's skip ahead roughly a decade and see how the times have changed Rampage.

I was so excited to hear that Rampage was making a comeback, and World Tour did not let me down. They kept all of the fun of the original, only they souped up the graphics to look more like claymation. As if that wasn't enough, they gave ol' Ralphy boy a blue dye job... OOOO YOUR SO PUNK RAWWWWK RALPH!

Something that amuses me is how in the beginning of the game they mention that it contains animated violence. Sure there's violence in it, that's obvious, but what about the adult themes that are present in this game? You'd think that would be something parents might want to know about, right? Let's take a gander...

From the very get-go, there's already signs that they're trying to appeal to horny young teenagers by presenting us with a live Scum-Link feed of a busty babe in a tiny skirt with high heels. Even more blatant, when the mutants first strike, the camera accidentally pans down to her breasts and then cuts

off. Oh you naughty programmers you.

Goddamn, have they no shame? Well I guess that's why they call themselves Scum after all. There are animated "Live Girls XXX" signs in some of the cities, and while you can't actually go into these strips joints nor scare any strippers out by destroying the building, you can still see a little peep show:

Lizzie apparently became a bleached blonde with a boob job during the past decade, but the Hollywood dream didn't pan out so she's still making nude appearances in video games. It's a sad story and we've all heard it a million times, but I'm still amazed they got away without an adult warning. I mean, there's obviously pubic hairs and breasts there for the kids to see anytime Lizzie dies. But nothing could prepare me for this...

Oh my god, did I just see what I think I saw? No it couldn't be. Yes it is! It's...

Whenever George or Ralph kick the bucket, you're treated to an eyeful o' cock! So how's that for progress over the last decade, eh!? EH!? Oh shut up, you know you love it. Each and every last one of you do.

Well there you have it folks, look what a mere decade can do to a fun game for the family. At this rate, if they keep making these games, Rampage in the year 2030 will no longer be about 3 movie monsters wreaking havoc upon the world. Instead, Rampage will be about 3 mutant ex-junkie strippers who destroy buildings not with their fists, but with their naughty parts all in the name of Hitler. :o shoot, I just gave somebody out there an idea didn't I. Forget I ever said it. Move along, nothing to see here.

In the end, the Rampage series may not be the most thought-provoking games you can play, but it's a great way to let out some aggression with the added potential to see a rare glimpse of digital wang. And hey, the game still managed to give me some of the best advice I've ever received:

YOU MUST EAT FOOD TO SURVIVE. CLIMB BUILDING AND PUNCH OPEN WINDOWS TO FIND FOOD.

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LANDSTALKER!

Milking the oft used RPG formula of going to find the great treasure, but settling with saving the world, Landstalker put you in the shoes of a scrawny elf lad named Nigel. He and his fairy chumpette, Friday, fought through corrupt noblemen, grinning mushrooms, and at least a dozen different kinds of colored bubble monsters, all in pursuit of fabulous treasure. But of course, Nigel the Landstalker didn't earn a

place here in this piece just by slicing Jell-O monsters.

You can expect to find quaint, bucolic villages in almost any RPG out on the market. They're where you'll get your first dungeon-exploring quest, and they're where you'll first learn that you can sleep off even the most grievous injuries at the local inn. Unfortunately, the countryside villages in this game are sullied by the presence of foul-mouthed fowl.

Geez, that is a chicken that doesn't beat around the bush. The rooster must be slacking off big time. Still, if you think that's bad, wait 'til you hear what the dog has to say...

If that isn't the language of the devil, then I don't know what is...

Fine, maybe it is just regular dog-speak, but I still think it's a bit odd. Especially coming from the mouth of a dog named "\*". Not Nigel, though, he doesn't see anything strange about it at all. Then again, he isn't the most observant guy in the world.

Yes, Nigel, I think the toupee-wearing skeleton is probably dead. Idiot.

Boy, those Japanese and their phallic symbols. It's hard to believe that nobody was raped in the making of this game. Still, say what you will about the giant vibrating phallic mushroom, he still carries a good amount of gold on himself. Where does he keep it? You don't want to know.

-----  
**DIRTY CHALLENGER - MUSCLE MAN!**

Pick just about any wrestling game out there and you'll find a handful of suggestive positions. Which isn't that extraordinary, since real-life wrestling basically is gay sex with a couple of flimsy bathing suits thrown in to keep actual penetration out of the equation. So 95% of the time a gayish move in a game isn't reason to bunch ones panties. When an entire game is about dry-humping your opponent unconscious, we're talking about a horse of a different color. In fact, we're talking about a rainbow-colored wild stallion in a mare-less stable.

Now, a lot of the characters in this game look a lot like the M.U.S.C.L.E. characters, but I don't know if this is another Japanese knock-off or a spin-off product gone horribly horribly wrong. I've been told that there's an animated Dirty Challenger series in Japan, but all I know about it is that basically everyone is calling it 'The Cho Aniki show'. And finally, I have no idea what the game is about since it's in Japanese.

So, what do I know? Well, this is basically it:

There are men in costumes.

Floating heads appear.

The babies are about to burn to death.

Homosex ensues.

You may be wondering just how gay this game is. Well, don't take my word for it, let me illustrate with these animated sprites:

You buying it? No, ok...

Clearer now? No? I got more...

Now we're talking. But wait, there's also...

Oral rape!

And reverse cowboy!

And anal fisting! Enough? Oh come on, one more...

Gay furies! Which is a Nintendo first, unless I'm mistaken.

I've never figured out how to perform these attacks, so that's me being given it in all the screenshots above. For all I know, this game could be about being everybody else's dog. Well, I'm sure there are ways to win a fight, but I'm not staying to find out.

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KID NIKI 3!

"Kid Niki Radical Ninja" was always one of my favorite games to play on the good ol' Nintendo

Entertainment System. I'm not sure what the attraction was. Maybe it was because you had to fight countless hordes of men who looked like the fathers of "Shy Guys" from Super Mario Brothers. Or, maybe it was simply because the artwork on the box and cartridge was hot pink?

Yeah, ok, I'm pretty sure it was because of the latter.

One of the best things about Kid Niki was his awesome... excuse me... radical hair style. So my question is, why did they change it for this particular sequel? In Kid Niki 3, also known as "Kaiketsu Yanchamaru 3 - Taiketsu! Zouringen" since it was only released in Japan, he no longer had the porcupine spike hairdo. Instead, he has a simple ponytail. That's -300 "Radical Points" right there, buster.

I mean really, just look at how his old hair used to look. You can't tell me that those spikes aren't more radical. Hell, they even managed to work in the spikes on the old Commodore 64 version!

\*\*\*RADICAL!\*\*\*

I'm not sure why they changed his hair, nor do I understand why his face became shaped like an eggplant. And speaking of which:

Yep, one of Kid Niki's enemies is an eggplant with feet. There's also a throwing star with feet (awww, cute lil' bugger) and a flower that has a hand pop out which tries to shoot you. Amidst all of these oddly delectable foes, there is one that stands out. You see, one of the other major changes with the 3rd Kid Niki game is the inclusion of something a bit more juicy. Something a bit more racy. Something a bit more spicy. Something a bit more... penile.

Now I'm all for the appreciation of art, and there are many impressive statues of nude people all over the world, but I'll be damned if I can remember one that can actually move, let alone shake its salami at ya. Kid Niki, you may no longer be a radical ninja after this game, but by god, if you're going up against a bunch of enemies that are trying to piss on you... you're still braver than most of us.

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TOILET KIDS!

I admit that I had not heard of this game up 'til a couple weeks ago. Of course, given the title, how could



we not include it in our little list? That's right, we couldn't. We were absolutely helpless against the will of Toilet Kids. Anyway, as far as I can tell, Toilet Kids is the story of a young lad who wakes up in the middle of the night, in need of a bathroom break, and is sucked into his toilet to battle the mysterious, dangerous forces within. Aren't foreign cultures wonderful?

Ah yes, a truly frightening enemy indeed. Woe unto those who wrong the giant urinal and his toilet bodyguards. And not a urinal cake in sight.

But I could go on and on about what other kinds of weird crap is going on in this game. Giant, neatly-coiled piles of shoot, crap-throwing frogs, golden poo, etc. But there's something else that I think you all should see.

There's the unnamed hero of our bathroom bonanza. Aw, look at him. He's sleepy! What a cute little kid.

Hey, wait a minute. What the hell are you doing? Hold on just one...

Aaaaauuuuggghh! Oh for the love of God and all that is holy!

Now I know what you're thinking: this is the worst cutscene I've ever seen. Well you're right. There's really nothing more to say beyond that. Just rest assured that someone is going to hell, and for once, it isn't me.

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## RINGS OF POWER!

Rings of Power for the Sega Genesis has a small, but rabid following. OK, so it moves at slightly below 2 FPS. And the graphics look like they were done in MS Paint. And it's a shameless Lord of the Rings rip-off if I ever saw one. Still, does Lord of the Rings have an inn by the name of 'Lobotomy Club'? Nope, and I think few will protest when I say that 'Lobotomy Club' is a way better name than 'Prancing Pony'. Furthermore, Lord of the Rings does not have a beggar that demonstrates his right to swear, complains about his code and starts reciting Black Sabbath lyrics with no reason at all. And this is only what you encounter within five minutes of gameplay in Rings of Power.

There is another reason why this game was played, though. If you press and hold a bunch of buttons on the second controller (down, right, A, B, C and start) and then reset your system, you get a special little

treat. Pulling this off on an emulator was a lot of work, as my computer started whining like a little dog whenever I tried to hold forty different keys down at one time. The trick is to assign all these buttons to one key. The reward is a slightly different company logo. You get an Eye full of a Blonde Girl and the sweet stuff! :D

Oh, Naughty Dog Software, you sure are naughty dogs.

I played the game a bit, and found the aforementioned inn. And lo and behold, there she was, the woman from the intro. I thought I'd try my luck with the 'show' command.

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PULIRULA!

Pulirula is a game that tells a familiar tale about controlling time that we've all heard before. In the kingdom of Radishland, time is kept flowing not by the wicked machinations of Shub Niggurath, but rather by keepers turning "Time Keys." Some bad guy decides to steal the Time keys, thus messing up each of the cities whose keys were stolen. An old man "impressed by a sense of danger" calls in two children and gives them his "invented magic stick" to defend the towns and get time movin' again. Basic stuff, really.

Anyway, what follows is a lot of clubbing with said magic stick. For some reason, whenever you club an enemy, they turn into an animal and run off the screen. What that has to do with time being halted is beyond me. What's even more confusing, however, is when your bludgeoning takes you to stage 3, and the madness therein:

There's your greeting. The screaming blue-haired man. And just next to his gigantic head, the yellow-dressed flag woman.

Still no clue as to how time being halted is responsible for... this. Luckily, a robot I clubbed turned into a dog and explained the whole thing to me:

"This town is controlled by the dream of a megalomania and all places are such circumstances."

Oh, those canines and their terrible grammar. What the dog doesn't tell you is that the dream the town is stuck in has a couple bits of titillating weirdness hanging around.

Aside from what the red eggplant man is doing, the sumo on the wall is making me really uncomfortable. He's assumed the position (and not the sumo wrestling position) and he's grinning at me. Forget it, Mr. Sumo. This magic stick is not for you. The eager sumo is nothing compared to the other bit of ribaldry:

## CRUSHING LEGS OF DOOM!!!

Players of the Japanese version of the game are treated to this unique hazard. And probably better grammar, too. Anyway, while dodging the deadly thighs, I noticed that there was a door between the two legs. What's inside it, you ask?

An angry pink elephant. IF YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN!

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## TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES II THE ARCADE GAME!

Ok ladies, what is it that you find so appealing about slimy green mutated turtles? Oh right, I forgot... NOTHING. Well, apparently there's always someone with a fetish for just about anything out there, and April O'Neal happens to dig the turtle schlong when it pokes out from within its shell.

Unfortunately for the turtles, she's once again found herself into the hands of the foot clan (hmm, I guess their fetish is for feet?) and now she needs to be rescued. Even worse, the Shredder seems to have turned April over to one of his mutated minions: Baxter Stockman.

Baxter always creeped me out. Something about him just never sat right with me.

Well anyway, Baxter is a relatively easy boss to defeat. You just keep jumping in the air while attacking him and he eventually kicks the bucket. Should you be low on energy, there's a piece of pizza on the ground so you can restore all of your health. Doesn't get much easier than that folks. On a side note, try playing through this game and see how many advertisements there are for "Pizza Hut" in it... you'll be astounded. So anyway, you rescue April and... holy shoot!

It appears that she has mutated too! Look at the size of her boobs. Those things are way out of proportion with the rest of her body... not to mention if you scroll up and look at the previous pics of her, it's clear that her boobs weren't that big. What did that mad scientist Baxter do to her!? Ah well, at least she's safe in turtle hands now. Guess it's time to collect your reward, Donatello.

You can only guess what happens next.

Yep, the van starts a rockin' and it's pretty obvious what's going on in there.

Christ April... you already fracked him, isn't that payment enough?

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**GOLGO 13: TOP SECRET EPISODE!**

The world of the professional assassin is a dangerous one. As shown in Golgo 13: Top Secret Episode, an assassin has to deal with snipers, the KGP, and an inexplicable inability to shoot while crouching. Still, it was all in a day's work for Golgo 13, aka Duke Togo, aka Mr. "..."

His mission is to find a man named Condor who has information regarding a stolen vaccine. Unfortunately, being an assassin, protection isn't his specialty, and poor old Condor winds up eating it moments after you meet with him. Luckily, you're able to get the info you need from him as he lies there dying. The next step is to meet with your contact at the Alex Hotel.

Ooh, I like the sound of this already. Not that I'm suggesting "Cherry Grace" is a bad spy name, but still...

He's smiling, and it's not because that last part rhymed. No, he knows what invariably comes next when there's suspense and intrigue with spies and such.

Before you can say "wakka chikka," he's laying down his best moves for Cherry Grace. Eat your heart out, James Bond. Before you were out driving fancy cars and battling midget hat-tossers, Duke Togo was shooting the bad guys and nailing the hot chicks, all in one night. Better still, once the lights go out, your health refills completely. Forget about the healing power of laughter, Duke has the cure-all everybody needs.

-----  
**VENDETTA!**

If you've seen one game about rival gang members vying for control of a city, you've seen 'em all. Back in the 90s, gangs used to fight all the time, but rather than direct confrontation, one gang would kidnap a beloved member of their rival gang, and thus challenge their rivals to a city-wide brawl, sans guns (except for one guy, and that guy would be a really lousy shot). Unfortunately for players in the US,

members of the international community were privy to a unique view of Dead End City's extremely friendly locals:

These gentlemen presented a new reason why you should be extra careful not to let yourself be surrounded during a fight. Their attack, while not particularly deadly, is nevertheless one of the most frightening attacks in the game. The effect is diminished, however, when in a fit of frottage, the leather-clad gang members will run over to a light pole and hump it until the bulbs fall out and smash their heads in. Fearsome.

And what's this? Why, it's one of the vicious Dobermans found throughout the game. This one looks a bit tired, though. I'm not one to be fooled, though. I know that it's just faking it, waiting for me to make a mistake so that it can rip my throat out. Well not today, mutt.

Hey, what the hell? Augh! Get him off me! GET HIM OFF ME!!!

-----

MIKE TYSON'S PUNCH-OUT!!

Ah, what can be said about Punch-Out that hasn't been said on this site already? That it cures ulcers maybe, but that would be a lie. Little Mac's epic struggle against a series of boxing champions from all over the world, each of which was about three times his size, his only aid a balding fat coach that dropped him sarcastic hints in between rounds. The game was mostly just a little offensive towards various nationalities and races, though at one point you came across an opponent who was so much more than that...

I'm talking of course about Super Macho Man. An animated gif really can't do justice to the speed at which his pecs flex. This is definitely something that made me uncomfortable as a kid. It was like he was trying to hypnotize me into doing unspeakable things. Trying to...

...to make me... make me do... naked... make... manboobs...

...Macho Man... I... am yours... do with me... as you please... your wish... my command.

Even King Hippo agrees: "There's no way to combat those madcap man-breasts. It's no wonder I got pummeled in most of my fights with Super Macho Man. And consequently was woken up by my bewildered parents who demanded to know why I was lying blacked out and pantsless in front of the television."

I guess that's it. Oh, one more thing:

YOU LOVE DOOMLORD1234.  
NOTHING GIVES YOU MORE PLEASURE THAN DONATING MONEY TO  
DOOMLORD1234. YOU CAN'T GET ENOUGH OF SENDING –Doomlord1234- YOUR MONEY.  
YOU WILL GIVE ALL YOUR MONEY TO DOOMLORD1234.

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MORTAL KOMBAT 3!

Mortal Kombat has a special place in the hearts of many gamers worldwide. Its various ways to decapitate or disembowel a person disturbed parents and delighted kids. With each sequel, the creators attempted to outdo the previous game, though after Mortal Kombat 2, that became pretty much impossible. Even though Mortal Kombat 3 is probably my favorite of the series, it clearly leaned more on goofiness and re-used animations, and not much effort was made to visualize the gore, as illustrated by fatalities in which severed hands ended up floating next to severed torsos.

Still, the designers must've known they had to find a new source of shock material to keep the fans happy. Regular finishing moves just weren't cutting it anymore. So they introduced Animalities.

Ergo Nightwolf, having just transformed himself into a wolf to put the finishing touch on Jax. Hey, watch where you put that nose, mister. At this point you'd probably expect a brutal disemboweling. Well, you'd almost be right.

AGK! In some kind of jealous fit of pelvic rage, Nightwolf murders Jax's defenseless groin! Man, look at the blood fly.

Nightwolf wins, yes, but at what cost? This was one of those moments that really made parents, teachers and politicians alike look away nauseously and briefly cup their testicles. And it wasn't like Nightwolf was the only one doing it. Remember what I said about re-used animations? Well...

Jax, Sub-Zero and Kung Lao all join in on the crotch-rending mania, with Kung Lao occasionally going for all-out savage bestiality. Yeah, that was probably the original name for "Animalities" to begin with. After MK3 came a series of rehashes which, while it worked really well for the Street Fighter 2 series, kind of made the Mortal Kombat franchise bleed to death. It's good to know that the games won back their popularity with the release of the latest 3D versions. And as far as I can tell, there's no more mauling of groins. Thank heavens. Who knows what that could lead to in the long run?

Yoo-hoo!

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### SECRET OF MANA!

I now present to you a sad tale. A tale about a brave young lad. A brave young lad who went by the name... "GAY".

Gay always wanted to play. Play I say? I say play. Gay always wanted to play I say, play in the hay and in the month of May I say. Sadly, the other boys did not want to play with Gay I say, so they left Gay alone to play by himself all day I say. Poor, poor gay.

One day, the people of the village decided that Gay couldn't stay, and that they would like him to go far away. Would they let him stay? Nay I say, nay. Tossed out much to his dismay, it was up to Gay to find his own way I say.

As much as this hurt Gay, he found his own way and befriended the bunnies in the field that day. With the bunnies that day, all he wanted to do was play and play and play I say. But Gay didn't want to play in the right way with the bunnies I say. No, he wanted to play in the bad way.

THE VERY, VERY BAD WAY! SO RISQUE! SHAME ON YOU GAY!  
SHAME ON YOU I SAY!

But sadly, this was just the beginning of this bad day I say, for you see Gay still wanted to play. But since the bunnies all ran away, he had to find someone else with whom he could play I say. And find someone else he did that day, in another town that wasn't too far away.

He found another boy named Elliot that day, and Gay forced him into his raunchy world of moral decay I say. It was as if Gay took all of his spirit away, and then left him wondering how could this have happened when every night to the lord above he would pray. From this day forth, "There is no god!" is what Elliot would say.

The townsfolk didn't know what actually happened to Elliot that day, but they suspected Gay was responsible in some way I say. Though it may sound cliché, they punished Gay until he confessed what he did to Elliot that day. While he wanted to run away, Gay knew there was only one way out of this squeeze play, and that was to say what made him act in such a bizarre way.

"I was traveling in an ice castle one day, when I strayed into the library I say. But this was no ordinary library in which one could play I say! There were mystical books flying around much to my dismay, but it was obvious that all they wanted to do was display." said Gay I say. "But what did they want to display to you on that day?" said the townspeople I say.

Gay dropped to his knees and cried out, "They showed me pornography I say! It led me astray and now I have nothing left to say except that I'm sorry for acting in such a way! Pornography is to blame for my shame I say!" And on that note, he ran far, far away.

And now this sad story is finally over I say... HOORAY!

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## BATTLETOADS!

In the world of console games, Battletoads has the distinction of being one of the most difficult games of all time. The oft-overlooked arcade version, however, is far less difficult, but far more violent. It had guns, blood sprays, decapitations, vomiting, and one of the greatest brawling attacks of all time.

In every button-mashing, beat-em-up game, you're pretty much obligated to fight one really huge guy who does a lot of damage with a single blow. In this case, the huge guy was a really ripped rat with a deep, menacing laugh. Theoretically, you could jump up and kick him in the head, or just work his knees until he bent down to an appropriate level, but the designers had something a little more brutal in mind...



Simply put, you grab ahold of the muscular ratman's groin, and he lets out a startled yelp, as any man would in a similar situation. Balls in hand, you then start hammering his punching bag until he falls over. Just look at this vicious assault on the poor rodent's crotch.

Oh lordy. Rest assured that just like the black guy from Kung Fu, the ratman eventually dies after you finish pounding his scrote into Figgie Pudding. And what better way to celebrate such a sociopathic victory than with a couple pelvic thrusts?

Booya, evil. Booya! Seriously, though, what other game can boast that it actually has a crotch-grabbing maneuver, aside from Michael Jackson's Moonwalker? None, that's how many.

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GO GO ACKMAN 3!

A lot of the entries in this update are suggested by readers. A lot of the suggestions are good, others are a bit of a stretch, and others have something going for them, but haven't got enough meat on the bone to be worth writing about. After the first five minutes I played Go Go Ackman, I got a feeling the latter was the case.

OK, the chief of the Angel Police looks like he was yanked out from the Blue Oyster Bar in Police Academy. Still, my panties were far from bunched. But I thought maybe I should give the game a shot and see how it progressed. This is how it progressed:

I got kissed and stolen! And thrown in jail! This is hardly procedure! When Ackman wakes up in his cell, he tries to recall what happened last night. He thinks really hard...

All right, that's the best use of Mode7 graphics yet. Ackman breaks out of jail, and many levels follow without further run-ins with the chief. We do get to see his progress in the case, though, as cutscenes show him in his office furiously chewing his pink handkerchief, making phone calls and giggling like a girl.

After a while, he apparently reports to God himself. You see, the thing is that Ackman is a demon out to

gather souls for his master Satan. No kidding, it's the aim of the game. So naturally, your main enemies are angels (there are also a lot of wind-up toys and stuff, so I'm not sure which version of the Bible is exported to Japan). Which is why God has sent the Angel Police out to get you.

I'm not sure why, but for some reason your nemesis from the first two games is now your ally, and for some reason God is helping the angel who is helping Ackman. Who is the guy the Angel Police is after. I don't know what God is thinking, and I really don't know why he's helping the traitor angel by making himself invisible and hovering around like a set of teeth with a pair of glasses on. But then again, he does work in mysterious ways.

I should also probably mention that the screenshot above is from the Angel Police HQ, and that that backdrop loops. You know that show where they get gay people to decorate somebody's house while they're away, and then when they get back, they all jump out and shout "Yaaay, we decorated your house while you were gone! We're also gay!"? All right, I probably made that show up, but if it doesn't exist by the time this page is uploaded, it won't be long before it does. Anyway, you know that show? If the chief of Angel Police is hired as one of those people, your living room is fracked.

After walking by another three hundred statues of the chief, you finally meet him for the final showdown. And don't think he just gives you the stick like most policemen, he... well, I guess he kinda gives you the stick in his own way. Hang in there, though, and you'll beat him off. Beat him! I meant beat him!

Scarred for life! It all turns out well, though, for reasons I don't understand. But everybody seems to become friends. And guess what?

God is a rockin dude!

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**VOLLEYBALL!**

Ah volleyball... what would sandy beaches be without this game? Ok, they'd still be sandy beaches. But still, volleyball is one of those sports that has gained popularity over the years mainly because it has athletic women jumping around in very little clothing. In all honesty, I think the game was just a big joke on women. Guys would get them to play the game in bikinis and jump up 'n down all day in the hot summer weather. It's basically a way of getting girls to jump on trampolines, without the trampolines.

So with the popularity of women's volleyball on the rise, some video game companies have been picking

up on this. I'm sure you've all seen the "Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball" game for the Xbox. Actually, I'm not sure there is a game in there. I think it's just a disc filled with 3D women who have extremely... er... sorry, I mean Xtremely jiggly body parts. You can bet your bottom dollar that the only people buying this game were horny teenagers that were able to convince their parents that this was nothing but a sports game. Then while mom was out buying them Lunchables meals for the upcoming school week, the kids would spend their time at home, ferociously masturbating to CGI women in skimpy bikinis that couldn't POSSIBLY stay on them in a real game of volleyball.

Still, as controversial as this new game was, it's not the first game to associate volleyball with masturbation. You see, back in the golden days of the Nintendo Entertainment System, there was another volleyball game. Only difference is, this game didn't have the women with enormous breasts. This volleyball was simply a suggestive game on what one should do with his time when he's not busy spiking the ball. But before we begin, we must do the honorable thing and bow to our opponents...

Now that we have done the honorable thing, it's time to sink this game to a whole new kind of low with...

## PUBLIC MASTURBATION!

That's right, whenever our volleyball playin' pals aren't busy trying to hit the ball onto the other side of the net, they stand around and practice jerking off. With blatantly suggestive games like this one, it's pretty easy to see how games like "Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball" came to be years later.

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## GOURMET SENTAI BARA YAROU!

Gourmet Sentai Bara Yarou is a bit of an odd duck. But then again, it was only meant to be released in Japan, the country of tentacle-rape ducks, so one shouldn't be too surprised.

What the game is about, nobody knows. There's an intro featuring mad scientists, human-gro pods and Playboy bunnies, but it muddles more than it clarifies. It's a good thing, then, that the gameplay is pretty much identical to your average Double Dragon knock-em-out.

But while the Lee brothers only had to deal with punks and raging body-builders, the three heroes of Gorumet have to fight off every reject of nature and science you could possibly think of. For example:

Mr. Cock Rocket. This guy will come crashing down with his explosive manhood and rock your face apart.

Robot Tanuki is inspired by a Japanese mythological creature famous for its virility and monstrous penis.

This guy was the inspiration for Tanooki Mario from SMB 3, only we were spared the two-foot schlong trailing between the plumber's legs. Or were we?

This guy has a... well, I don't really have to tell you what he has, do I? Instead, let me show you what he does with it:

Too hot for television!

And finally there are the tiny little guys riding floating robot heads. How do floating robot heads attack, you ask?

By GIVING floating robot head, of course.

Boy, it's a good thing you've got a robot chef who can fix you some salad after all that abuse. Did I mention this game seems to be about beating people up to get ingredients for dinner? Shouldn't be too surprising at this point.

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POWER INSTINCT 2!

Japan has given us a bevy of fighting games over the years. Unfortunately, they've been largely off-limits to me because any move more complicated than "quarter-circle forward + punch" is pretty much beyond my means. In fact, any fighting game more advanced than Yie Ar Kung-Fu is likely to end in much cursing. Still, all that ineptitude has not prevented me from bringing you another bit of electronic ribaldry. This time, the game in question is Power Instinct 2.

I have no idea why the assembled fighters are battling each other. The whole game seems to take place in an amusement park, which is dotted with pictures of a strange-looking old woman, perhaps the theme park's mascot. Among the fighters are a handful of old people, a guy who looks a lot like Axel from Streets of Rage, and a chubby Japanese kindergartener/exhibitionist named Kinta Kojuin.

In the game, he wears some kind of smock with a bear head painted on the front to offset his Moe-from-The-Three-Stooges haircut. Not a particularly dignified outfit to be wearing to a fight, but hey, he's just a kid. He can't be counted on to dress himself properly. Then again, what kind of parents would send their kid out in an apron with nothing else?!?!?

Anyway, he's got his dukes up, and he's ready to fight. When the fighting actually begins, things really go downhill for him. His fighting repertoire includes using his @\$\$ as a weapon and giving the player a peek at his hindquarters. Behold:

Yech. Unfortunately, as is often the case, the pre-teen nudity did not end with a few instances of @\$\$-baring. Whenever Kinta gets knock backwards, you get to see a critical design flaw in his fashionable outfit:

I'm afraid your eyes do not deceive you. Whilst he is flying backwards through the air, you get an eyeful of Peter and his two friends. This marks the second game I've covered in which a wee lad does full frontal, and frankly, it's a streak that I'm eager to break.

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And so this concludes our journey into some of the most disturbing pits of video game hell. On behalf of myself (-RoG-), Dr. Boogie, and Pjalne, we hope you've enjoyed the tour. As stated earlier, this will be an ongoing piece, so if there's a video game with a sexual moment that you'd like to see us do a write-up on, let me know about it!

## 29 - Metal Slug 3: Mummies, Mutants, and Martians, OH MY!

An arcade game by SNK also available on the Neo-Geo, the third installment of the Metal Slug series is quite possibly the world's most perfect video game. Stunning hand-drawn graphics, constant, hectic and addicting action, a wide variety of enemies and environments, tons of destructive weapons, and a great deal of violence balanced out with just the right amount of quirky humor and a lighthearted artistic style to keep it from being another dismal and depressing gorefest. In each game you play one of several soldiers battling enemy troops, their vehicles, and an assortment of just barely cuter-than-normal soldiers and monsters. Metal Slug 3 is thought by most to be the best of the series, as it takes the action to extremes with far more content than the previous two combined. The stages are massive, each with at least one alternate path.

### The Characters

Players can choose between four different soldiers to control, two male and two female. They're all basically the same, so it doesn't matter who you pick. I played Fio for most of the game. There are tons of weapons to pick up, like homing missiles, a flamethrower and the heavy machine gun, but they last only a hundred shots or so. Your default gun, luckily, has infinite ammunition, and each character is armed with ten hand grenades.

This is an explosion, the co-star of the game..

The minions are obviously supposed to be nazis, but their insignia has been cleverly altered to keep the game P.C. The "super soldier", wielding a huge gun, has been in every Metal Slug to date.

### Mission 1

Giant Crabs are the first enemies you meet, and come in two sizes. All crabs spit toxic yellow bubbles and can also attack with their claws.

Massive moray eels emerge from artificial tunnels in the underwater area. They crash through the opposite rock walls to pull out delicious giant jellyfish, inadvertently releasing dozens of normal-sized but very deadly electrical jellies. The eels seem to have been domesticated by the enemy army, and have names posted above their tunnels. The four eels are Helen, Linda, Jenny, and Barbie.

These giant locusts are a little more interested in brains than ...than GRAINS! You know, because grains are kinda more along the lines of what would ordinarily comprise part of an Orthopteran's diet along with leafy vegetables. LOL.

Even more timid woodland fishes harnessed as implements of death, these winged piranhas pop out of tanks custom-built for dangerous airborne fish to pop out of.

The first boss you face is a gargantuan hermitcrab dragging an entire tank instead of some giant sea-snail's hollowed out @\$\$\$. It chases you along a wooden bridge, smashing the path behind you as it launches assorted bombs from its cannons.

## Mission 2

Oh no, zombies!!! Mission 2 is crawling with them, accompanied by B-movie rock music and lots of splattering glop. All of the zombies attack with their pus, which will transform your character into a zombie until hit with pus a second time (which fully kills you). The different zombies are roughly the same except for the soldier zombies (far left) who explode on you.

These slightly bigger zombies are far more powerful than the rest.

Every zombie distributes pus in a different way. Most just puke it out and throw it at you, but the fat zombies and zombified scientists are the most appetizing. The former blast pus from their rib cages, whereas the latter whip out their own intestines and squeeze the pus out with their hands. And in public!

Marco, Eri, Tarma, and Fio in zombie form. As a zombie you are quite slow and cannot use special weapons, but only other zombies can kill you, and your ability to throw grenades will be replaced with the ability to vomit up a torrent of blood that kills nearly everything on-screen!!!

Zombie Fio is really cute with the glasses and that little hat. I wish I had a Zombie. I would name it ZOMBOR.

Oh no, yetis! You'll find these in an optional ice cave area. They can teleport in and their breath will transform you into a helpless snowman. Once you've been transformed, they'll try to smash you!

At the end of mission 2, you'll discover a strange, glowing meteor that appears to be the source of the zombies. Six giant aliens known as the Monoeyes will materialize and attack with energy bullets, flying faster and faster in a ring above the meteor. When all six are destroyed, the meteor becomes a dome-shaped machine that drops monoliths on you.

## Mission 3

This mission has you fighting only the same old human enemies until you reach a pit of molten metal where you'll face the third boss, Jupiter King! Its left arm opens to reveal a missile launcher, it can pull huge missiles out of the door in its stomach, and its deadly eye lasers are very difficult to avoid.

## Mission 4

After a desert battle against the usual soldiers, your path will begin to split. One possible route takes you through the underground barracks of these arabian soldiers. They, too, are your typical humans who run around and do stuff and die. They have amusing man-powered tanks and suicide bombers, though.

Taking another pathway, you'll arrive at an old temple overgrown with bizarre vegetation. Clouds of

innocent-looking seeds drift on the wind, and tall, withered pods dot the landscape, sometimes bursting to release a seed or two. You'll quickly learn that the ruins are infested with carnivorous mobile plants that lash out on their long necks to grab prey from a distance. They sometimes transform into the seedpods when killed, and touching a seed transforms you instantly into a squirming mass of vines that immediately dies.

A third possible course in the desert will take you to a series of underground tunnels lined with glowing fungus and crawling with maggots. When approached, these maggots destroy themselves in a spurt of acid. The tunnels are also home to flying scarabs (see below) and giant crabs (see mission 1)

These giant super-maggots can take a great deal of damage before dying. Floating globules of acid break off from their corrosive tentacle-tongues, and dozens of maggots emerge from their bodies when killed..

Giant snails creep along the floors and ceilings of the tunnels, puking gouts of acid.

Oh no, mummies! Taking yet another hidden pathway in stage 4 pisses off a ton of dead pharaohs and their dogs, all of whom can breathe a purple dust that transforms your character into a mummy themselves. Green-tinted mummies can release deadly flying scarabs, and other mummies roll bombs at you. You'll also have to watch out for bats (which drop acid on you)

Marco, Eri, Tarma, and Fio as mummies. It's exactly like being zombified, except you only have your normal grenades and you can crouch (into an amusing pile of bandages, at that)

"Sol Dae Rokker", the boss of the fourth mission, is an impressive stone head with a variety of attacks. It can fire tiny red blasts from the gem between its eyes, unleash ghostly exploding wolves from the orbs on its sides and fire a big blast from its mouth that transforms your character into a bunch of gold coins.

## Mission 5

**MARTIANS!** After a long and grueling battle against the pseudo-nazis, their leader is revealed to be an alien imposter who'll kidnap whichever character you're currently playing and escape in a flying saucer. With space invaders threatening all of humanity, our heroes and their naziesque opponents join forces for the common good and launch a pursuit into the depths of space! You'll blast your way through a variety of spaceships on your way to the mothership, where hordes of angry martians await. Their guns fire strange, floating globs of energy.

These brain-powered robots take a lot of shots to destroy, and attack with rings of energy that you can only avoid by hopping through.

The small red robots swarm along the walls and attack by self-destructing, whereas the giant versions walk over you and drop bouncing green spheres from their undersides.

As you near the end of the alien hive, you'll find yourself under attack by evil, green-skinned clones of your captured comrade! When the clones are destroyed, they drop tiny eggs that melt away. You'll pick them up as items, but they give no points. Rescuing your friend initially kills the clones, but they'll



immediately rise as zombies...armed with the lethal blood cannon you may have utilized in mission 2!

The final boss and leader of the martian forces, "Rootmarks!" Yes...its name is Rootmarks. In the middle of stage 2 you'll battle its stationary form, which attempts to fry you with immense spheres of electricity. The second form attacks as you fall from the exploding mothership, initiating a long and grueling mid-air battle!

Mutants (Metal Slug 2)

Oh no, C.H.U.D.S! Mutants are the only enemy type from previous games not appearing in Metal Slug 3, but the smaller eye robots in MS3 are basically the same thing. Both enemies crawl on walls and ceilings and explode on you in exactly the same manner. Cool either way. Mutants can be found in the sewers of Metal Slug 2 and the improved version, Metal Slug X.

## 30 - Heroes of the Lance: DWARF RAGE!

Of all the hundreds of games that were released for the NES, there was none other quite like the oddity that is Heroes of the Lance. It is largely regarded as one of the worst games of all time, making several notable "worst lists", including Electronic Gaming Monthly's and Nintendo Power's. Many gamers who have played Heroes find it too difficult and frustrating to complete, which is a stark contrast to Nintendo Power's claim that it could be beaten in less than five minutes. Having finished it several times myself, I can safely say that both scenarios are an exaggeration, though the latter only because the characters move so damn slowly.

Based on a PC game of the same name (which I've never played), you take on the role of eight heroes from the DragonLance books (which I've never read), as they attempt to recover the Disks of Mishakal from the ruined city of Xak Tsaroth. What follows next is one of the biggest "how the hell could they have let it hit the store shelves like this?" gaming experiences you are ever likely to have.

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While any number of the game's drawbacks could easily stand out first, the play control and combat system will be amongst them. Characters move very slowly, starting at a walking pace and eventually gaining speed into a brisk trot the longer you hold down the direction pad. As an enemy approaches you can (and probably must) engage it in combat. Combat amounts to standing in one spot while repeatedly swinging your weapon, since you cannot attack while moving. You will inevitably take damage from your foe since there is no blocking or dodging. (A shield system like what Zelda 2: The Adventure of Link or Sword Master used would've been a step in the right direction.)

As you would expect from a Dungeons & Dragons game, there are also attack spells and healing spells that can be utilized if the correct characters are in the front row of the party. The spells are cast from a wand that has a limited charge, but the game is so short and the mp supply so abundant, I use the spells quite liberally and never come close to running out. If you hit upon the correct spell, (and since most are useless, you probably will), you'll find a way to pass by most enemies with impunity, which is my personal secret for beating this game.

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The world of Xak Tsaroth is a maze that is not really all that confounding, especially if you map it or take notes. What Xak Tsaroth is, however, is one of the most dreary and bleak videogame settings I've ever seen. The backgrounds are made up entirely of four colors: black, grey, a lighter grey, and a chartreuse green. (Someone probably should have informed the graphics designer that he wasn't working for a CGA system.) It's ugly, dismal, and though occasionally it manages an interesting visual in the earlier areas (like an inexplicable giant pot on a pulley and a weird statue room), the final area consists of a bunch of sewer tunnels that all look alike and are devoid of any pits or puzzles.

I'm suspicious the maze was originally planned to be larger than it is because the farther you go, the more you'll find East/West doors and North/South doors that both lead to the same room. Many items, including treasures, weapons, shields, and potions, are scattered around, but there is hardly need to collect any of them.

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The main problem with Heroes of the Lance is that it's very obviously unpolished and unfinished. You have eight heroes with varying stats, but very little of this matters, since the game is not designed to take full advantage of their unique traits. I usually rely on just three of the characters to get by, one to fight, one to heal, one to use attack spells and cross the pits. Oh, yes, the pits - the source of much dismay for gamers who have trekked far enough through Xak Tsaroth to come to them. Because most of the characters have extremely poor jumping abilities, it is menacingly difficult to jump the pits, unless you know a little secret that makes them a breeze. (No, I won't give it away here.)

Aside from some nice character portraits shown at the game's start, the graphics in Heroes are a mess, but the audio is more successful. Some of the music is actually rather good. The second area theme is my favorite song in the game with its foreboding tone, and the final area music is nice, too. The ending song is a decent reward for actually finishing this monstrosity. The sound effects are not spectacular, but serviceable (enemies have footsteps, spells and warps have good 8-bit quality). The voiceovers used for when you or an enemy takes damage are unfortunately cheesy. Enemies all have the same grunt when attacked, whether you're fighting a human barbarian or a spider. Even cheesier, the female in your party (Goldmoon) has the same voice clip as all the men!

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Despite all the "what-the-frackery" you will trudge through on your way to the final boss, nothing can prepare you for it, or rather, the ridiculous way in which it's fallen. Although the manual explicitly tells you what to do, it's almost hard to believe that's all there really is to it, until you reach that Moment of Truth. Of course, if you don't have the manual, it might be awhile before you figure out the whopping ONE step needed to complete your mission. (It's actually possible to screw yourself out of being able to do that during the course of the game if you aren't careful.)

The underwhelming quality of Heroes's design is especially odd when considering how much effort went into crafting the manual. Written by someone who apparently did their homework on the DragonLance books, it offers long, detailed explanations of who each character is and why they're on this quest. (The game itself contains neither.) Perhaps the manual's writers were under the delusion that this was going to be a great epic game, or maybe they were compensating for its shortcomings.

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I didn't come away from Heroes of the Lance hating it as much as the rest of the world does. It is so odd, so unusual, and has such a unique atmosphere, that it's almost worth playing just to see how weird it is. There isn't anything else quite like it, not even the Japan-only sequel, Dragons of Flame, that's

advertised in the ending. Which leaves me wondering... why be so quick to foist a sequel on us when the current game was so incomplete?