

# RETRO<sup>®</sup>

VIDEOGAME MAGAZINE



# EVERYTHING ARKHAM

WE HONOR & EXPLORE ROCKSTEADY'S INFLUENTIAL FRANCHISE

**PLUS!** THE HISTORY OF SUPERHERO GAMES, ARKHAM ASYLUM RETROSPECTIVE, DAVID BREVIK, TROY BAKER, RETRO GAME REVIEWS, COLLECTING GUIDE & MORE!



www.RetroN5.com

# RETRO<sup>N</sup> 5

For GBA / SNES / NES / GENESIS / FAMICOM

*The Most Highly Reviewed Retro Console Ever*



Kotaku



Wired

gameinformer



**H** HYPERKIN<sup>®</sup>  
PLAY WELL. LIVE WELL.



## THE ULTIMATE RETRO EXPERIENCE

The RetroN<sup>®</sup> 5 is compatible with cartridges from these systems: NES, Famicom, SNES, Super Famicom, Master System, Genesis, Mega Drive, Game Boy, Game Boy Color, and Game Boy Advance.

- 720p HD output and enhanced interpolated audio
- Included wireless controller with fully mappable buttons and macros
- Supports original NES, SNES, and Genesis controllers

# CHICKEN SHIFT will drive you MAD!



80's Arcade Action!

Play it FREE! iOS App Store and Google Play



The IndieGameMagazine

Indie game reviews, previews, & news

**SUBSCRIBE TODAY!**

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

# A seriously super issue

BY DANIEL KAYSER

We honor *Arkham* and explore the history of superhero games.



Let's be honest, videogames and superheroes haven't been the match made in heaven that some fans might expect. Although there are a wide variety of superheroes that come complete with intriguing backstories, compelling characteristics, and seriously awesome capabilities, half-hearted or rushed attempts at turning those elements into a compelling gameplay experience have largely fallen flat and left fans frustrated.

Thankfully, that trend is quickly changing — due in no small part to the impact and success of Rocksteady's *Batman: Arkham* franchise. As a series, it's raised the bar for superhero games by focusing primarily on how to make a great character-driven experience complete with tightly tuned mechanics and a robust roster of recognizable foes and allies. Most importantly though, Rocksteady consistently delivers great games that are interesting and accessible to both *Batman* fans and those who simply enjoy an engaging, immersive experience.

Now, with the third (and final) installment in the series upon us, we're dedicating this issue of *RETRO Videogame Magazine* to honoring all that Rocksteady has accomplished while exploring the history and evolution of superheroes in gaming. From David L. Craddock's inside look at the development of *Batman: Arkham Asylum* to Martin Goldberg's recount of the first official superhero videogame, this issue is jam-packed with content that any superhero fan, and gamer, will crave.

I hope you enjoy everything we've put together for you here in *RETRO Videogame Magazine Issue #8* and, if you think it's super, that you'll use your own superpower of influence to help us spread the word!

**RETRO Media Network**

Ph: 949.713-7204  
www.ShopReadRETRO.com  
www.ReadRETRO.com

**MAGAZINE TEAM**

Publishers | Mike & Tricia Kennedy  
Editor-in-Chief | Daniel Kayser  
Creative Director | Daniel Kayser  
Copy Editor | Alexandra Hall  
Production Manager | Monique Convertito  
Managing Editor | David Giltinan  
Associate Editor | Robert Workman  
Illustrator | Thor Thorvaldson  
Co-Founder & Emeritus Creative Director | Mark Kaminski

**CONTRIBUTORS**

Aaron Dennis-Jackson  
Brett Weiss  
Chris Ainsworth  
Chris Baker  
Chris Kohler  
David Craddock  
Graeme Mason  
Jeremy Parish  
John Gaudiosi  
Kevin Tambornino  
Luke McKinney  
Martin Goldberg  
Matt Barton  
Michael Thomasson  
Patrick Scott Patterson  
Preston Burt  
Reed Kalso  
Scott Johnson  
Shaun Hatton  
Warren Davis

**COVER IMAGE**

Mack Jolley created this issue's awesome cover image. You can view more of his work online at [mackjolley.com](http://mackjolley.com) and follow him on Twitter @mackjolley.

**ADVERTISING**

Advertising Director / Mike Kennedy  
T: 949.842.6671E: [sales@readretro.com](mailto:sales@readretro.com)

**COVERAGE INQUIRIES**

Want to see your product or story in the pages of *RETRO Videogame Magazine*? Email us: [contact@readretro.com](mailto:contact@readretro.com)

**PRINTING & DISTRIBUTION**

*RETRO Videogame Magazine* is published bimonthly in print and digital form.

**RETRO MEDIA NETWORK**

[ReadRETRO.com](http://ReadRETRO.com) / *RETRO Videogame Magazine*  
[ShopReadRETRO.com](http://ShopReadRETRO.com)  
[RETROMediaNetwork.com](http://RETROMediaNetwork.com)  
[GameGavel.com](http://GameGavel.com)  
[RETROArcadeRadio.com](http://RETROArcadeRadio.com)  
[RetroVGS.com](http://RetroVGS.com)

**DISCLAIMER**

*RETRO Videogame Magazine* is part of the RETRO Media Network. Reproduction in whole or in part in any form or medium without the express written permission of GameGavel, LLC is prohibited.

**COPYRIGHT**

RETRO © Issue #8 ©2015 RETRO Media Network. All rights reserved.



GET YOUR RETRO PRINT & DIGITAL MAGS, MERCH, AND MORE!

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

QUICK READS

- 05 Rise From Your Grave**  
We shine the modder spotlight on Rose Colored Gaming.
- 06 Arcade Archives**  
The secret history of Agent X.
- 07 Batman Pinball**  
Batman enjoyed three pinball adventures.
- 08 Homebrew Heaven**  
Find out what's happening in the homebrew scene.
- 10 Schwag Bag**  
We feature some seriously super schwag.
- 12 High 5**  
Here are the five worst heroes ever created for games.
- 14 Global Gamer Japan**  
Unmasking Tokusatsu reveals its impact on gaming.
- 15 Global Gamer U.K.**  
What are gamers in the U.K. up to?
- 16 Bat Gadgets**  
What if Batman used gaming gear?
- 17 From the Desk of the Commissioner**  
Gaming gets told with advice from The Commish.
- 18 Turtles Over Time**  
Three TMNT classics enter the ring, but only one can be champ.
- 38 Batman: Arkham Knight**  
10 reasons why you should be excited to play *Arkham Knight*.
- 52 Top 100 Console Videogames (1977–1987)**  
Where does *Popeye* rank?
- 55 The Reactor**  
What industry insiders think about less-than-stellar superhero games.

- 56 Multiplayer Madness**  
A tale of two Marvel-ous brawlers.
- 57 Not-So-Super-Shinobi**  
We nitpick this notable ninja's lack of legal licensing.
- 58 Rearview Reflections**  
Nerd Block's got one for racing-game enthusiasts.
- 59 Super Trivial**  
Guest writer Chris Baker highlights hilarious hiccups in superhero games.
- 60 Retro Rarities**  
We fuel your burning desire for *The Amazing Spider-Man: Web of Fire*.
- 61 Dungeon Hacks**  
Get a delightful (yet somewhat deadly) dose of David L. Craddock's new book.
- 62 Essential Comics for Gamers**  
These on-point gaming comics are worth collecting.
- 64 Proving Grounds**  
Summer is upon us! What better time to dive into *Pool of Radiance*?
- 66 Kohler's Collect-a-Thon!**  
Complete your collections for multiple obscure machines.
- 68 Origin Stories**  
From Spider-Man to the Smurfs, we explore the origins of superhero gaming.
- 70 Celebrity RETRO**  
Troy Baker discusses his various roles in the *Batman* universe.
- 71 Super Rad Raygun**  
Find out why this *Mega Man*-inspired game has such meaningful mechanics.
- 72 Experience Points**  
A comical look at what superheroes think about superhero games.

FEATURES

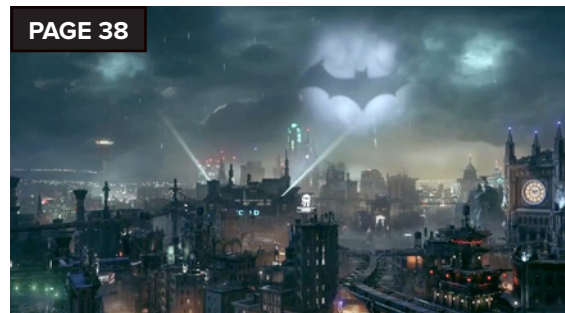
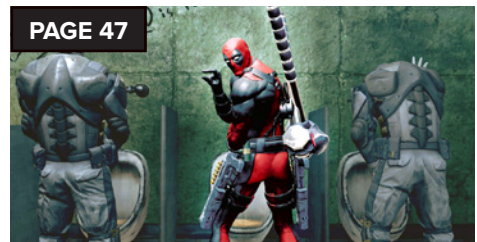
- 22 Zap! Boom! Pow!**  
The origin story of the greatest team-up of all-time: comics and videogames.
- 26 Console Kryptonite**  
Why did superhero games (deservedly) get such a bad rap?
- 30 Welcome to the Madhouse**  
Building the padded walls of *Arkham Asylum*.
- 48 Pro-Vid-Guard-Argus**  
The world's first superhero arcade game?

INTERVIEWS

- 19 David Brevik**  
From *Diablo* to DC and Marvel, find out how industry icon David Brevik thinks about the media's obsession with superheroes, the evolution of superhero games, creating a killer community, and more!
- 34 Dax Ginn**  
We speak to Rocksteady about the evolution and impact of the *Arkham* franchise.

REVIEWS

- 41 Snake Rattle 'n' Roll (NES)**
- 42 Spider-Man (Atari 2600), Spider-Man and Venom: Maximum Carnage**
- 43 The Amazing Spider-Man (Game Boy), Spider-Man (PlayStation)**
- 44 Batman Returns (Lynx), Batman Forever: The Arcade Game**
- 45 Batman: The Video Game (NES), The Adventures of Batman & Robin (SNES)**
- 46 X-Men Legends, X-Men (Arcade)**
- 47 Deadpool, The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction**





FIND THE PERFECT GIFT FOR THE GAMER IN YOUR LIFE!



COLLECTABLES  
JEWELRY  
AND MORE!



T-SHIRTS NOW IN STOCK!  
HUGE SELECTION!  
SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE!



WWW.8BITEVOLUTION.COM

# VIDEO GAME BOX PROTECTORS

Defend Your Collection



- ✔ Protective Cases
- ✔ Safe: P.E.T Clear Plastic
- ✔ Most Major Systems
- ✔ Clean Professional Look



Shield against

- ✔ Dust
- ✔ Dings
- ✔ Drops
- ✔ Scratches



PlayStation



Shop at [VideoGameBoxProtectors.com](http://VideoGameBoxProtectors.com)  
Enter "ReadRetro" at checkout and get 5% off.

# PORTLAND RETRO GAMING EXPO



## OCTOBER 17-18, 2015

CELEBRATING OUR 10TH YEAR OF RETRO GAMING  
PORTLAND, OREGON | [RetroGamingExpo.com](http://RetroGamingExpo.com)

# RISE FROM YOUR GRAVE

BY CHRIS AINSWORTH

## MODDER SPOTLIGHT:

Rose Colored  
G A M I N G



### WHO IS ROSE COLORED GAMING?

In late 2012, industrial designer Matthew Wiggins (known online as Wiggy) was starting to make a name for himself within the hardware-modding community. Initially introduced to the videogame modding scene while designing boxes for a collection of loose N64 cartridges, Wiggy began to perform his own modifications, starting with a front-lit mod for his Neo Geo Pocket Color, and shortly after, several more on commission. Thanks to his design sense and meticulous attention to detail, every mod he'd publish would result in more requests, forming an initial core workload that would steadily grow to become Rose Colored Gaming.

A year ago, Matthew met Spencer Marugg, an engineer who'd successfully built up The POP! Shop, a comics and gaming retail store in Sandusky, Ohio, near Cedar Point. After being introduced by a mutual friend, Wiggins and Marugg hit it off, and they soon began to collaborate on designing the Pascali, a scratch-built handheld. With

that project underway and an increased workload in general, Wiggy moved Rose Colored Gaming into a larger dedicated workspace in October 2014.

### WHAT DOES RCG MAKE?

Most of the company's initial output revolved around the modification of existing hardware, but as demand has grown (and the availability of parts for aging systems has fallen), Wiggy has begun to focus on developing more sustainable projects such as the Joi Stix (a series of high-end console controllers using arcade components and wooden enclosures), acrylic system stands, and the upcoming Pascali portable device.

Aware that the reputation of Rose Colored Gaming was built on intricately painted mods and customized handhelds, he plans to continue to offer them as long as the parts can be reliably sourced. In situations where sourcing is a problem, such as with the now out of production Game Boy Advance LCD screens used for backlit modding, Wiggy is working out new alternatives

whenever possible (in the case of the GBA, for example, he's switched to a more parts-available frontlight mod).

For the latest from Rose Colored Gaming, check out [rosecoloredgaming.com](http://rosecoloredgaming.com) or visit them on Facebook at [facebook.com/rosecoloredgaming](https://facebook.com/rosecoloredgaming).

How does one outfit a fully featured modding workshop? Here's just a taste of the machinery the Rose Colored Gaming team works with on a daily basis.

- Digital laser printing press
- Guillotine cutter
- Vinyl cutter
- Die press
- Acrylic laser cutters
- 3D printers
- Professional paint booth

...plus all the standard woodworking tools. It's quite an operation.

### PASCALI AT A GLANCE:

- 3.7v Li-Ion battery
- 3.5 inch LCD
- Raspberry Pi A+ powered
- Elastomer D-pad & buttons (four face, two rear)
- Common ground custom PCB
- HDMI output
- USB charging

Estimated cost: \$250

As part of the team's focus on original hardware, Rose Color Gaming has announced the Pascali, a handheld emulation console designed and manufactured inhouse. Based loosely on the form factor of the DMG Game Boy, this Raspberry Pi A+ powered device will be capable of handling emulation of systems up through the Neo Geo.

### Why acrylic?

The team originally considered plastic injection molding, but discovered costs to be exorbitant for a small run project. 3D printing was also considered, but hardware issues and inconsistent results made it unre-

liable for production quality work.

With acrylic laser layercake-style cases, Rose Colored Gaming struck a happy medium, allowing for a unique style with reasonable costs, all cut on affordable and dependable hardware. Open source hardware

Inspired by hardware manufacturer Adafruit Industries, Rose Colored Gaming will be giving away the Pascali schematics and code, allowing others to both tinker with and build upon the system's design. In addition to complete units, the handheld will also be available in a wonderfully moddable (and cheaper!) kit form.

**CHRIS AINSWORTH** (@driph on Twitter, say hello!) is a game designer and writer in Las Vegas, Nevada. He has been an avid gamer since that first satisfying click of a *Star Raiders* cartridge into the Atari 400, and blames the membrane keyboard for his two-finger typing style.

# ARCADE ARCHIVES

BY CHRIS AINSWORTH

## THE SECRET HISTORY OF AGENT X

In 1982, deep in the horseshoe-shaped Coin-Op building at Atari, Russel Dawe was busy working on his homage to *Robotron: 2084*. The action-espionage game featured Agent X, a super spy tasked with recovering stolen plans hidden deep within the recesses of the evil Dr. Boom's bomb factory.

As the game neared completion, 20 dedicated *Agent X* cabinets were built for field testing, borrowing the cabinet design of

### THE FOLLOWING MATERIAL IS FOR A-4 SECURITY CLEARANCE PERSONNEL ONLY

Even with the home system's sizable cartridge playing a prominent role in the film (resulting in many a kid dismantling their own cartridges in hopes of revealing secret microchips), the Atari 5200 port of *Cloak & Dagger* was still in development during filming. As a result, all scenes of the game being played were actually from the arcade version, controlled offscreen by Russel Dawe himself.

With the 1984 sale of Atari's consumer division and resulting layoffs, the 5200 port was abandoned and never completed.

20 years later, historian Curt Vendel found a bent diskette amongst a collection of boxes saved from Atari dumpsters, copied the contents, and discovered that he'd managed to retrieve the in-development code, thought lost forever. The prototype build of the game has since been made available online.

*Crystal Castles*, another game concurrently in development within the Atari lab. At the same time, Universal had started development of *Cloak & Dagger*, a family-friendly film about a boy who finds himself in the middle of a real-life spy thriller after being given a videogame cartridge containing secret plans. The original script called for the use of a *Donkey Kong* cartridge (colloquially referred to as a "tape" throughout the film), but meetings between Atari and Universal quickly led to the realization that the *Agent X* game and the *Cloak & Dagger* film were a perfect match, and a deal was signed.

The game and film's scripts were edited, the *Agent X* cabinet marquees swapped

out with new *Cloak & Dagger* art, and Russel, a cabinet, and a box-load of mockup Atari products were sent to the set for filming.

Once development was complete, *Cloak & Dagger* was sold by Atari only as a conversion kit, with some 4500 units shipped. This, combined with lack of other platform releases and the cult status of the film among Atari aficionados, has led to the rare dedicated version being one of the most sought-after arcade cabinets available. A well-kept dedicated *Cloak & Dagger* will easily set one back thousands of dollars, and good luck finding a machine with an original *Agent X* marquee. 📺

In the summer of 1984, *Cloak & Dagger* appeared as a double feature with *The Last Starfighter*, another film wrapped around the story of a boy and his videogame.

The *Last Starfighter* promised moviegoers that they, like the main character of the film, would soon be able to save the galaxy via the titular arcade combat trainer, but while the game was prototyped, production costs and a declining market halted its release.

Fortunately, the spirit of an arcade *Starfighter* managed to live on in 1991's *Starblade*, a notably similar on-rails shooter released by Namco one year after purchasing Atari's arcade assets.

The *Last Starfighter* met a similar fate on the home console front. With the arcade release on ice, the 8-bit versions of the game — already built on the code of an entirely different project called *Orbiter* — were retooled and released as *Star Raiders II* to evade licensing issues.

An entirely different *Starfighter* game for the Atari 2600 was also developed, and, thanks to the same licensing issues, eventually released as *Solaris*.





# HOLY PINBALL, BATMAN!

BY DAVID GILTINAN

## WHERE DOES HE GET THOSE WONDERFUL PINS?



**A**s a kid growing up in the '80s, I was too young to realize Adam West's *Batman* television show was supposed to be campy. Instead, I just assumed the '60s sucked. My other limited exposure to the caped crusader as a child was watching *Super Powers* on Saturday morning cartoons. If you've seen that show, then you know why I wasn't a huge *Batman* fan. I needed more action, more brooding, and apparently more Michael Keaton.

Tim Burton's *Batman* movie, which starred Keaton as the title character and Jack Nicholson as the Joker, was just the catalyst the *Batman* franchise needed. The summer the film was released, and for years afterwards, the bat symbol was plastered everywhere — t-shirts, bedsheets, shaved into people's hair, and yes, eventually on videogames and pinball machines. Due to *Batman*'s popularity, the pinball machine was a success and would eventually lead to the creation of two future games — more than any other superhero (Spider-Man had two and Superman only had one. Take that, Man of Steel!). So let's take a journey to look at how Gotham's winged warrior took the pinball world by storm.

### BATMAN (DATA EAST - 1991)

The promotional flyer for this game used the familiar movie catchphrase "Wait till they get a load of me!" and for good reason. *Batman*'s first pinball machine was pretty advanced for the time. It featured one of the first dot matrix displays (or DMD) ever used on a pinball machine (Bally's *Gilligan's Island* beat it by two months). Perhaps to save costs, the DMD used by Data East was slimmer than the current industry standard. Critically speaking, when compared to later iterations the game wasn't that great: two flippers, one main ramp, and cheesy music that didn't fully capitalize on the Danny Elfman soundtrack. Sure, it's fun and it has some

great artwork featuring Keaton, Basinger, and Nicholson, but it was mostly just a way for the manufacturer to cash in on the bat craze.

### BATMAN FOREVER (SEGA - 1995)

Riddle me this: What's big, mean, and green all over? No, it's not the Hulk, it's *Batman Forever*. Sega Pinball, which was essentially Data East under a new name, released this widebody game that was bigger and badder than its predecessor in every way: more ramps, more flippers, and a gigantic display. With the super-sized DMD, the game could accommodate up to six players and even allowed for team play where two players as Batman and Robin teamed up against Two-Face and the Riddler for a high-score showdown. Sound board technology had come a long way since 1991, so this game was able to showcase more advanced audio and even authentic movie clips featuring Val Kilmer, Tommy Lee Jones, Jim Carrey, and more. At only 2,500 units sold, it's hard to tell whether the sales suffered due to a declining interest (and increased campiness) in the *Batman* franchise, or whether there was just too much stiff competition from other pinball companies at the time.

### BATMAN (STERN PINBALL - 2008)

To use a fairy-tale analogy, Data East's game was too cold, Sega's game was too hot, but Stern's *Batman* pinball machine was juuust right! Designed by the great George Gomez (*Monster Bash*, *Revenge from Mars*) prior to becoming Stern Pinball's VP of game design, he capitalized on the *Dark Knight* trilogy's great story as players attempt to protect Gotham from Scarecrow, Two-Face, and the Joker. The game features some really satisfying shots and includes a moving wrecking ball/crane target, an accelerating Bat-

mobile return ramp, a mini upper playfield, and plenty of multiball action. Having transitioned from Data East to Sega Pinball to Stern Pinball, Stern was long the torch-bearer for all of pinball as the last surviving manufacturer. Its *Batman* game was released at a time when pinball was on life support, and theme, production cost, and gameplay were all critical, must-hit targets. *Batman* proved popular enough to keep breathing life into Stern and they have since tried to capture that success with numerous other superhero titles including *Iron Man*, *X-Men*, and *The Avengers*. I can't say Stern's *Batman* is the best pinball machine I've ever played, nor even the best superhero pinball machine ever, but it is hands-down the best *Batman* pinball machine in existence. 🦇



# HOMEBREW HEAVEN

BY MICHAEL THOMASSON

## READY FOR ANOTHER DIVE INTO THE WORLD OF HOMEBREW?

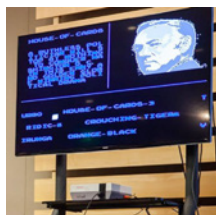
### WE BE JAMMIN'

It's becoming standard fare for homebrew projects to appear on classic gaming consoles and vintage computers, but the new JAMMA-compatible arcade shooter *SkyCurser* is a shocking development that might make me cry tears of joy. JAMMA is a wiring method that started in the mid-eighties, which became the standard for plug-and-play swapping of coin-op PCBs. It simplified cabinet operations for arcade operators, and if modern JAMMA games become a trend, it could bring new life to an industry on life support. In *SkyCurser*, a star releases a plague-like disease that infects living organisms as well as machines and you must take to the skies in your aircraft to destroy the source of the infection. This meat-on-metal horizontal shoot-em-up is easy on the eyes despite copious gore.



### NESFLIX

Many of us have used modern-day gaming services such as Xbox Live and PlayStation Network to stream video programming to our televisions. Amazingly, three enterprising Netflix engineers managed to hack the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) to stream Netflix video. Utilizing a unique 256KB cartridge, video content such as *House of Cards* and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* can be viewed in a pixelated and muddled gray and blue. Even key



Netflix features such as scrolling between programming and displaying synopsis pages are functional, albeit crude in appearance.

### CROSSING THE LINE

A horrifying graphic adventure novel, *Sacred Line Genesis*, is appropriately available for, you guessed it, the Sega Genesis. This choose-your-own-adventure-style game will have you making choices that determine the main character's actions and the plot's final outcome. Be warned though, this game is not for the kiddies as it includes strong language, explicit imagery, and topics that will be both sensitive and offensive to many. The ESRB would not like this game, but you very well might!



### FROM ZERO TO HERO

When *F-Zero* was released for the SNES, it was a massive hit for Nintendo and surely made many Sega fans jealous. Well, no need for Genesis fans to be envious anymore, as *G-Zero* is racing its way to Sega's 16-bitter. If that name sounds vaguely familiar, that is because it shares the name with the canceled Virtual Boy title. Not only does *G-Zero* play exceptionally well, but it is a technical marvel using software to scale and rotate the ground plane similar to the SNES' hardware-supported "Mode 7" graphics mode — thought to be impossible on the Genesis by many.



### KNOW WONDER

This issue's featured demake is still a work in progress, but consistently making headway. Sega's side-scrolling platform coin-op and Master System game *Wonder Boy*, also known as *Adventure Island* to NES players, is making its way to Atari's VCS. Soon you'll be riding a skateboard and tossing stone hatchets, and the game has once again been renamed; this time it's *Expedition Island*.

### NO KRAUT ABOUT IT

Coming this winter to the 16-bit Neo-Geo (AES and MVS) is *Kraut Buster*.



Circa 1936, the stage is set in Krautland, Europe. You'll play as John "Küken" Mal-lone or Jack "Handsome" Rowdy as part of the glorious Kraut Buster Corp. Your goal, in the words of the developer, "is to defeat the evil dictator Dolph Edelwolf and rescue all chicks!"

### BLAST FROM THE PAST

While not new, there was an amazing project by Mathias Nagler that slipped under the radar of even the most informed of homebrew hobbyists and needs to be revisited. The impossible was achieved when the 1985 Data East LaserDisc coin-op *Road Blaster* was ported to — are you ready for this — the Super Nintendo! Dubbed *Super Road Blaster*, the Big N's version monster-stomps the largest officially available SNES game (the 48Mb *Tales of Phantasia*) with a shocking 6320Mb file. Seeing Toei's animated masterpiece running off cartridge on the ol' cathode ray tube will certainly astound!

### GET TO THE CHOPPER

If you enjoyed protecting the convoy of tractor trailers in Activision's *Chopper Command* on the VCS, then you'll enjoy maneuvering your heli playing the Intellivision clone, *Copter Command*.

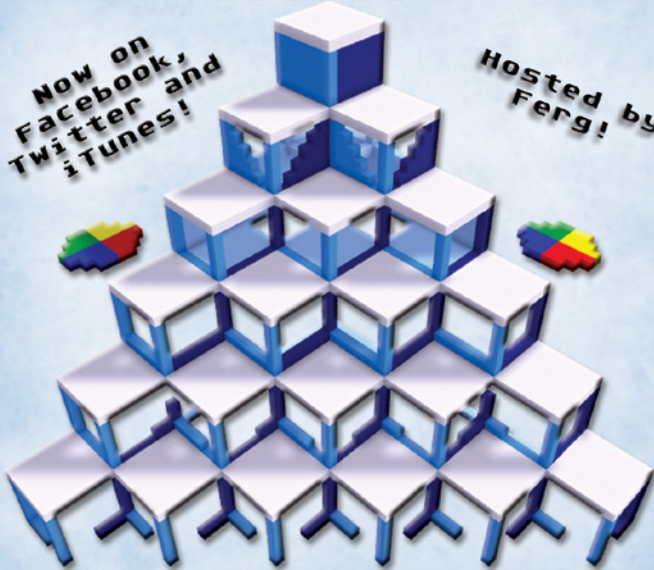


■ Well, that's it for this installment of *Homebrew Heaven*; until next time, when we discover together what's cool and new with everything old school! 🍻

The  
**ATARI  
2600**  
Game-by-Game  
Podcast

Now on  
Facebook,  
Twitter and  
iTunes!

Hosted by  
Ferg!



Listen to over 100 episodes  
of Atari 2600 game reviews,  
dissected in a way no other  
podcast has done before!

# COLECO VISIONS



Your vision is our vision!  
The Colecovisions podcast

Hosted By  
Willie,  
Gamester81 and  
SoCal Mike!

Find us on



@INTYPODCAST  
HELLO@INTELLIVISIONARIES.COM  
WWW.INTELLIVISIONARIES.COM  
FACEBOOK.COM/INTYPODCAST

THIS PODCAST IS  
KEITH ROBINSON  
APPROVED!

FEATURING - EXCLUSIVE AND ORIGINAL GAME DEVELOPER  
INTERVIEWS, GAME-BY-GAME EPISODES, BLUE SKY RANGER  
INTERVIEWS, HOMEBREW UPDATES AND SO MUCH MORE!

# THE INTELLIVISIONARIES PODCAST

HOSTED BY -  
PAUL NURMINEN - RICK REYNOLDS - WILLIAM OLDS

# RetroGaming Roundup.com

THE ULTIMATE RETRO GAMING PODCAST

Each monthly episode is overflowing with:  
Classic Gaming Guru Interviews  
Retro Computer and Console Game Rants  
Top Ten Lists  
Arcade and Pinball coverage  
Hardware and Software information  
Gaming Expo News  
Vintage Video Gaming and Computer Commercials

And Much More!!

game program™  
**GAMING GREATS**  
That Have Appeared On Our Show  
Use with Joystick Controllers

Al Alcorn	Mag Fest
Ted Dabney	Garry Kitchen
Jay Smith	Jay Golden
Mat Mercer	Jon St John
Keith Robinson	Tim Arnold
Phil Adam	Tom Humphrey
David Crane	Clark Coffey
Jeri Elsworth	Bill Fisher
8bit Heroes	Bob Smith
Vince Dickenson	Decendents of
Bob Polaro	Erdrick
Wes Johnson	John Sohl
Tim Arnold	Mike Meyers

PROGRAM CONTENTS © 1981 RetroGamingRoundup.com

# SCHWAG BAG

BY DAVID GILTINAN

SUPERIOR SWAG FOR SUPERHERO FANS.



## WOLVERINE MR. POTATO HEAD

SITE: [kryptonitecollectibles.com](http://kryptonitecollectibles.com)  
PRICE: \$19.99

Talk about a retro take on a popular superhero! Mr. Potato Head has been a mainstay in American pop culture since the '50s with kids constantly giving him new looks. I bet the little spud never imagined getting adamantium claws, though. While there are plenty of other prominent comic characters the toy line also takes after, I'm particularly fond of this take on the popular X-Man, especially with the molded mask and fanged tooth to show that this tater is no tot.

## AMAZING SPIDER-MAN TOASTER

SITE: [bigbadtoystore.com](http://bigbadtoystore.com)  
PRICE: \$39.99

Eek! There's a bug on my toast! Actually, that's just the end result of this neat little take on breakfast. Spider-Man invades your mornings with this fun twist on the common kitchen appliance. While having what looks like a spider on your toast might not seem all that appetizing, I can assure you that a quick spread of butter will turn you around. Besides, this toaster is worth it for the potential pranks alone.



## BATMAN COSTUME SOCKS

SITE: [superherostuff.com](http://superherostuff.com)  
PRICE: \$11.99

Tube socks were never really my thing, but they certainly make for a cute look on that special lady in my life. If you or your significant other already rock this style, why not go all-out geeky with this unique item? Your eyes do not deceive. Those are legitimately capes on socks! As if running around the house with a sheet tied around your neck wasn't enough, now give your feet the superhero treatment with this pair inspired by the dark knight himself.



## BATMAN FLIP T-SHIRT

SITE: [superheroden.com](http://superheroden.com)  
PRICE: \$19.99

I don't know about you, but if I was secretly a superhero, it'd be very hard not to want to tell everyone for instant cool points. Now you can pretend to do so in the most cost-effective way imaginable with this fun flip-up tee! I'm not normally big into shirts being more than just something that covers my non-superhero-like body, but when it's Batman, who can argue? At least it gives me an excuse to get in decent shape with beach weather fast approaching.



## CAPTAIN AMERICA SWIM TRUNKS

SITE: [hottopic.com](http://hottopic.com)  
PRICE: \$23.60

Show off your patriotism and geek cred with this pair of Captain America swim trunks! No matter the season, I like to show off my love for superheroes, and this is a great way to do just that at my next pool party. What's especially handy is that they fit great for any Independence Day get-togethers you may have, especially if it just so happens to be a cook-out at the beach. Wear them proud, soldier!

**THE HULK BUSTER SMASH LEGO SET**SITE: [shop.lego.com](http://shop.lego.com)

PRICE: \$29.99

I've long outgrown playing with LEGOs, but I gotta admit that the brick-building company has done an amazing job keeping itself relevant, especially when it comes to superheroes. Videogames, movies, and even classic toy sets are often graced with the comic-book world's best. Saying that, LEGO really outdid itself with this awesome Hulk Buster set. Based on the epic fight between Iron Man and the Hulk in *Age of Ultron*, you get the two heavyweights, complete with Scarlet Witch and Ultron himself to join in the action. I know a "smash" hit when I see one...

**NES BATMAN ACTION FIGURE**SITE: [amazon.com](http://amazon.com)

PRICE: \$20.99

If you're like me, *Batman* on the NES was one of your first exposures to the dark knight, at least in video-game form. Despite taking some liberties with the source material, it was still an awesome, albeit difficult, adventure. One of the odder things about this Sunsoft release, however, is the purple-blue color scheme used for the caped crusader's sprite. Now you can own a full-on replica of this bizarre rendition. What would really sell me on this though is if it could wall jump on command.

**'60S BATMOBILE REPLICA**SITE: [wbshop.com](http://wbshop.com)

PRICE: \$79.95

Perhaps you grew up on the campy 1960s *Batman* TV show. While I was always more of a Tim Burton guy myself, there's no denying how cool that old-school Batmobile looked. Everyone wanted to be Adam West and barrel down the highway in that mean, red-and-black machine! While owning the car itself may be a long shot, we can still live out our nostalgic fantasies with this well-detailed replica by Mattel. I think this would make an awesome addition to my desk, as well as yours.

**DEADPOOL PORTAL CAKE SHIRT**SITE: [superherostuff.com](http://superherostuff.com)

PRICE: \$21.99

Deadpool is one of my absolute favorite comic-book characters, mainly for his ability to break the fourth wall and humorously reference anything. That includes videogames, as is evident by this amazing callback to everyone's favorite lie involving pastries. Looks like Glados didn't hide this secret well enough as the "merc with a mouth" proudly pokes through a portal serving a delicious slice of truthiness. Now I wonder if he found a certain crowbar in there too...

**HARLEY QUINN DRESS**SITE: [shopdcentertainment.com](http://shopdcentertainment.com)

PRICE: \$30.12

There are few comic character whom I have as much of a crush on as Harley Quinn. Joker's gal pal has the looks and fun (read: demented) personality to make any fanboy fall head over heels. If you have a special lady in your life who shares your geeky passion, or are one yourself, this dress inspired by the classic Paul Dini costume is perfect summer-time fashion. An oversized mallet would complete the look. 🍷



# HIGH 5: THE WORST HEROES CREATED FOR VIDEOGAMES

BY LUKE MCKINNEY

THESE CHARACTERS HAVE GONE FROM HEROES TO ZEROES.

**S**uperheroes should be perfect videogame heroes, but, then again, machine guns should be able to shoot someone dressed as a bat. Logic stops working around caped crusaders. And even common sense fails around heroes created specifically for videogames. With that in mind, I present to you the five worst heroes ever created for videogames.

## SONIC BLAST MAN (SNES)

*Sonic Blast Man* incarnated the arcade gimmick, a machine designed to stand out in rooms which already felt like being swallowed by an epileptic R2D2. The machine gave hormonal teenagers a giant target and said “hit this as hard as you can.” It distilled our most hormonal fantasies into a single game mechanic and had the greatest level progression in history: You punched out a mugger, a truck, an entire skyscraper, a *giant crab before Sony ruined that*, then saved the world by punching out an asteroid.



he meets. I don't think they were even criminals, the makers just knew that anybody dressing like that would spend their entire lives having their ass kicked.

Worse, it's a single-player scrolling beat-em-up. They knew *Sonic Blast Man* was such a loser he wouldn't be able to find a friend for physical activity if it meant saving the world. When your game makes *Double Dragon* look like a strong storyline and a breakthrough in multiplayer you may have uninvented the concept of narrative. Or as this game's makers might have said, “oh god not in the face!” because there's no way



Still, at least he's wearing pants in the game. The cover looks like a lovers' tiff about his ruining their porn video with his stupid cosplay.

## CAPTAIN COMMANDO

Captain Commando combined captains and commandos with videogames and managed to make them all boring. He's literally what happens when a corporate trademark replaces creative inspiration, as he was designed to be Capcom's North American mascot. Because an overpowered action hero kicking the



■ He looks actively bored by saving the world in his own game.

hell out of everyone he meets was either good market research or absolutely fantastic '80s political satire. And yes, you are going to feel dumber just for realizing how “Capcom” became “Captain Commando.” Sorry.

He's the generic blonde gruffness on a team with a ninja, Mack the dual-knife-wielding mummy, and a baby steering a robot suit. When you choose him the game should ask “Do you really want to play, or would you rather just stare at a beige screensaver for a while?”

Captain Commando fights punks with electrified Captanium armor which can withstand temperatures of up to a “trillion degrees,” which is what happens when a writer gives the job to his seven-year-old and can't even be bothered to proofread the copy.

Overpowered equipment combined with a lack of attack variety makes you feel more like a bored bully than a hero. Captain Commando electrifying the ground itself to beat up street punks makes Batman look like a social worker.



■ Despite the shortcomings, I'll respect any hero who identifies the Circus Camp as home to greater threats than the Ninja House.

## BOOGERMAN

*Boogerman* appeared in Seanbaby's "worst mascots" article in *RETRO* #4, because anyone saying "worst" is the Boogersignal.

One of the saddest moments for the growing gamer is when they realize some games suck



because they were programmed by people who think kids are stupid. *Boogerman* is what happens when those people get to design it, too. This is the work of somebody who sat down to think, started picking their nose, and spontaneously cried "Done!" They likely think "eureka" is what Mario shouts when someone really needs a bath, and would still be laughing a year later if they'd managed to do so.

*Boogerman*'s not even a one-joke idea, because bodily emissions aren't a joke. Nor, technically, are they an idea, because they're something a body would still do even if it was on life support after its entire brain had been removed. Trust me, this is one game that nobody should pick.

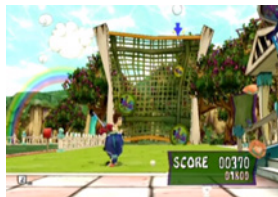
## CAPTAIN RAINBOW

*Captain Rainbow* is what happens when two Nintendo wiki editors try to out-obscure each other and the chatlogs are accidentally released as a game. You're playing as the civilian alter ego of a canceled TV superhero. That's more levels removed from being a superhero than



it is from being Kevin Bacon's intestinal bacteria. Which would be a less shitty experience, because *Captain Rainbow* is all minigames. That's the opposite of superpowers. That's not even videogame powers. Minigames are the gaming equivalent of chores — which is exactly how they function here, as tasks you must complete because other people told you to.

You talk to minor Nintendo characters and collect stars to make their dreams



come true. Which does sound like one of our dreams come true — we do love retro characters — but *Captain Rainbow*'s cast would make their own programmers ask "Which is the one on the left again?" Fictional action figures from *Chibi Robo*'s supporting cast should be unlocked as concept art for 100% completion, not primary characters.

The love interest is Hikari from the Famicom Disk System, which means you can only even remember her if you stand on a shrine in the shape of the Triforce while pure of heart. Birdo should have brought some star power, except Nintendo really shouldn't draw attention to what happens



■ Whatever is happening here can't be good.

to her. She starts the game locked in a cage on criminal suspicion of not being a girl, and when you free her she's sent to live on a segregated part of the island. It's sort of impressive: No matter what position you take on the gender spectrum that is seriously messed up.

*Captain Rainbow* only sold about 23,000 copies. Obviously, this is one rainbow that didn't end with a pot of gold.

## ALEX MERCER

*Prototype*'s Alex Mercer is the apparent result of a market demographic being bitten by a pile of radioactive gravel. I'm not saying they couldn't be bothered to create a character, but he's a stubby dude with a healing factor and amnesia, and spoiler: Everything turns out to be his fault. I'm not talking about spoiling the plot — that would be like spoiling a straight line — but spoiling the entire idea of stories having twists.

Alex looks like they loaded a character model to "DEFAULT," forgot about him until the deadline and then claimed it was on purpose. He spends the game eating people and whining about how awful it is to have incredible superpowers, like a goth *Pac-Man*, but without even that level of originality. (And that's not technically original at all, because being trapped in an inescapable maze where you have to eat the dead is about as goth as it gets.)

Alex Mercer isn't a superhero, he's what happens when bacteria evolve in AAA gameworlds made entirely out of brown grit...but without the same depth of character. He's the only hero here who could lose a fight to Captain Rainbow as he'd be unable to see the bright colors. And, oddly enough, we'd be cheering Rainbow all the way. ☹



■ "I am dark and conflicted!"

# TOKUSATSU AND YOU

BY KEVIN TAMBORNINO



## WE UNMASK TOKUSATSU TO REVEAL ITS IMPACT ON GAMING.

**N**ot many Westerners know the meaning of “Tokusatsu” (特撮), but there’s little doubt you’d recognize this form of entertainment if you saw it. Whenever a masked superhero, seemingly in his pajamas, karate kicks a giant rubber monster in the face, that’s tokusatsu. The word means “special filming” and the genre has been popular in Japan for more than half a century. Like all very popular things in Japan, tokusatsu also has a place in gaming.

Tokusatsu can refer to any live-action production with heavy use of stunts or special effects. Monster movies like *Godzilla* fall into this category, but for now let’s focus on the tokusatsu superhero shows. The most famous of these are *Ultraman*, *Kamen Rider*, and *Super Sentai*. All of these shows have had English versions over the years. *Ultraman* was released in the west with its original name, *Kamen Rider* became *Masked Rider*, and if you grew up in the early ‘90s you know *Super Sentai* as *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*.

In every episode of these shows there would be some giant, unbelievable-looking monster destroying part of the town. The heroes would dress in their helmets, gloves, and jumpsuits so they could attempt to fight it. The first time they battled they would always fail to destroy the monster. However, after some flashy special effects and intense yelling they would transform into their more powerful form and defeat it. Kids eat this stuff up.

So, what does this have to do with gaming? From the days of the Famicom up until the current generation of consoles there has been a constant stream of games based on these properties. Tokusatsu superhero titles are nearly always action games or fighters since those genres fit so well with the source material. There are some interesting exceptions though.

The Super Famicom game *Battle Soccer 2* brings characters from *Kamen Rider*, *Ultraman*, and the anime series *Gundam* together for a friendly game of soccer (which is apparently what defenders of the earth do in the off-season). Another oddball title is *Ultraman Hiragana Dai Sakusen* for the Bandai Playdia. It’s a learning game made to teach kids to read and write phonetic Japanese while battling full-motion video monsters. Needless to say, a lot of these titles never left Japan.

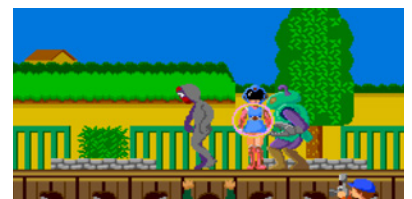
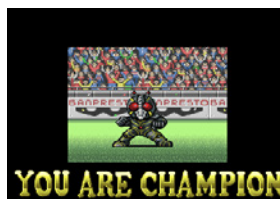
One title that did make its way to the English-speaking world is the fan favorite *Viewtiful Joe*. Hideki Kamiya directed this game in 2003 as an attempt to mix the tokusatsu style with American comic books. The superhero, Viewtiful Joe, has moves, transformations, and poses straight out of the tokusatsu playbook.

*Viewtiful Joe* was not the only time director Kamiya would use tokusatsu for inspiration. A decade later he directed *The Wonderful 101* which is an all-out

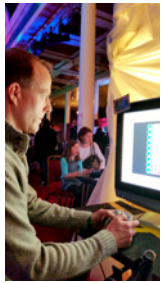
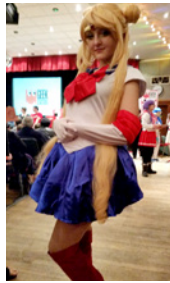
homage to tokusatsu superheroes. The game is not based on any specific television show or movie but takes the best parts from this entire style of entertainment. It’s a love letter to the genre.

Lastly, I would like to recommend a game that wasn’t localized but needs no Japanese skill to play: the arcade and PC Engine game *Wonder Momo*. This quirky beat-em-up is a parody of other tokusatsu superhero shows and games. You play as a high-school girl named Momo, who must fight a constant barrage of cheap-looking monsters. Mostly she just does a lot of leg-revealing high-kicks until there’s a chance to transform into Wonder Momo, a futuristic, jumpsuited heroine. What makes this game interesting is its framing device: It takes place on the stage of a tokusatsu live performance. You can see the pixelated audience watching the show/game from the sidelines. Because of this, the game makes it clear that everything happening is just pretend. Despite any perceived threat the enemies pose, it’s all just a show. This biggest actual threat are the photographers in the crowd trying to take upskirt shots of Momo.

As you continue to collect and play Japanese games be on the lookout for tokusatsu superheroes. They wear masks to conceal their identities but you know that deep down, they really want to be seen. Find them. 📷







# GLOBAL GAMER U.K.

BY GRAEME MASON



## FROM GOING GEEK TO SHOPPING WITH SEGA, HERE'S WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH GAMERS IN THE U.K.

Last issue I reported on a number of retro-themed publications that are proving popular here in the U.K. at the moment. If books aren't your thing, *From Bedrooms to Billions* is a U.K. film documentary that has gathered considerable attention over the last few months. It tells the remarkable story of the British videogame industry, an industry that began in the late '70s and rose to prominence in the early-to-mid '80s, just as the American market was suffering a calamitous collapse. Created by husband-and-wife team Anthony and Nicola Caulfield, the film features interviews with many key contributors from game development, publishing, and journalism and covers the story all the way up until the late '90s. This fascinating documentary is a must for any videogame fan and can be ordered at [frombedroomstobillions.com/shop](http://frombedroomstobillions.com/shop).

As I also mentioned last issue, the retro expo season began in February with the GEEK show in Margate, Kent. While the show had much more of a modern feel to it this year, there was a plentiful array of retro consoles for attendees to test their skills on. Proving most popular were the various Nintendo consoles, with gamers able to experience *Super Mario Kart* on the Super Nintendo, *F-Zero GX* on the GameCube and, of course, Game Boy *Tetris*, along with a wealth of more modern games. There were also plenty of *Minecraft* activities including a competition to design the best *Minecraft* amusement park and a version of the game running on a Raspberry Pi, the

low-cost and credit card-sized computer. There will be more virtual building fun in July when Minecon hits London — more on that soon! But back to GEEK. Over the course of three days the event was well-attended, especially by families, making its return in 2016 likely. Cosplay was also well represented, with a popular competition for the best-dressed character. The winner was *Adventure Time*'s Fiona closely followed by that famous web-slinger and star of a multitude of videogames, 'ol Spidey himself.

There's a strong homebrew community here in the U.K., based not just around its native consoles, but also those from further afield, such as the Commodore 64 and Vic 20. However, the latest amazing homebrew game is an incredible effort by veteran British coder Jim Bagley. Jim's career spans 30 years and includes credits such as *Doom* on the Sega Saturn, *Striker* (Genesis), and an assortment of Game Boy titles, while his crowning achievements remain squeezing bright and colorful arcade machines such as *Cabal* and *Midnight Resistance* into the 48K ZX Spectrum back in the '80s. With his latest project, Jim's gone even further by creating a demo of the famous LaserDisc game, *Dragon's Lair*, on the Spectrum's forebear, the ZX81. The ZX81 had just 1K of memory, although Jim's using an expansion pack which also permits access to an SD card, allowing the streaming of video. Nevertheless, it remains a very cool piece of work and the coder hopes to get all the sequences working in time for the game

to be fully demonstrated at the next major retro show.

An interesting eBay auction popped up recently, although the seller was based in France rather than the U.K. The Commodore 65 was a prototype follow-up to the immensely popular American computer, and looked like it was going to add some impressive upgrades, including a built-in disk drive. Yet despite its features, this ill-fated computer began development much later than it should have and was scrapped by Commodore in the early '90s. Speculation as to how many of these computers exist varies from 200 to 1000, but they are undoubtedly very rare and desirable machines for collectors. This was reflected in an incredible final selling price of almost £15,000 (over \$23,000).

And finally for this issue, cool clothes shop Urban Outfitters hit the news recently. The Nottingham branch of the chain, no doubt noting a high percentage of bored husbands and boyfriends, decided to install a brace of Sega Genesis consoles into an unused area of the store. With carefully selected games available to play all day, the consoles are proving a hit with men looking for some respite from all that retail therapy. Here's to games consoles in shops!

Next month, in addition to regular news items, I shall be bringing you the first report on one of the U.K.'s retro videogame shops. Until then, play well, retro fans! 🎮

# WHAT IF BATMAN USED GAMING GEAR?



BY LUKE MCKINNEY

**BATMAN'S BATEQUIPMENT** is secretly developed by Wayne Industries, but they'd have to be the only company on the entire planet to hide that much tech. And even then only if we lived in a world where people used grappling hooks instead of cars. (Note: I want to live in that world.)

He'd be better off using videogame companies. They're already infamous for pumping out ridiculous gadgets that no one ever takes seriously, and if they look like something a superhero would use that only helps their cover story. Which is why I'm looking at how the most ridiculous gadgets in gaming history could help Batman fight crime.



## POWER GLOVE

The Power Glove tried to make punching things with nerd toys look badass. Batman spends billions of dollars on exactly that. The Power Glove's problem was that it didn't actually register when you punched with it. Batman does not suffer from that problem. When he hits something with his special gloves, even robots know they've been thumped. And unlike the NES, the Batmobile has enough options to use all those buttons.

## VIRTUAL BOY

Batman's a good guy because he uses cruel and unusual punishment instead of killing people. No, I don't get it



either, but we'll let it slide because we've seen what happens to people who argue with him. He nonlethally intimidates thugs by bat-roping them upside down from the top of buildings, but that must take ages. Carrying a thug up 50 floors of stairs can't be inefficient crime-fighting. With a handy Virtual Boy he could subject goons to the same darkness, staggering disorientation, and intense headaches with much less hassle.

**SECRET BAT-WARNING:** This system will not work against Deathstroke.

## GENESIS PADS

I was joking, I didn't know Batman was really building equipment through gaming companies. I'm expecting Batman to crash through the office skylight and Power Glove me in the face for blowing his secret any moment, and *RETRO* doesn't even have a skylight. But that's the only explanation for Sega Genesis pads looking so much like batarangs. Just as his superhuman flexibility is the only possible explanation for having the ABC buttons spread out like the world's worst and smallest piano. It's obvious: for aerodynamics. And the long cables are perfect for tangling up the legs of fleeing crooks.



## AURA INTERACTOR

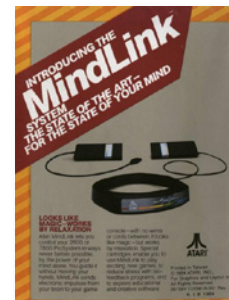
The Aura Interactor was for people who wanted their own console to bully them for playing games. Bass speakers in the chest thumped you with every impact, and if you believed that you deserved the several thousand extra thumps you were about to receive because the Aura Interactor only



listened to the soundtrack of the game. But it looks like exactly the kind of overengineered armor Batman would wear. And since he clearly lives in a world where bullets don't work, it's only fair that he wear something that lets him pretend to get hit.

## MINDLINK

We now know that the Atari Mindlink was just a forehead detector, triggering inputs depending on how hard you arched your eyebrows. (Tragically it still hasn't been used for a James Bond romantic minigame.) But this unreleased disappointment of '80s ambition could save Batman's life. It would fit under his mask, and his enemies' insane insistence on never taking that off means that instead of having to dislocate his own shoulders to reach his utility belt, he could just scowl super hard to trigger his smokebombs and Bat-handcuff-cutting-laser. Note: The Mindlink's scowling baseline would have to be heavily recalibrated to Bat-standards.



## VITALITY SENSOR

Comic heroes treat death as a revolving door, dying, resurrecting, and retconning so often the Grim Reaper doesn't know whether he's reaping or sowing. Nintendo's canceled Vitality Sensor could avoid all this confusion. It turned out that it wasn't good enough for games, since it could only tell if you were alive or not. But that's all comic-book characters need! It could be used when you were finished playing around and wanted to make sure the hero was actually dead this time. Wait, that's a bad idea for Batman. Oh my god, that's why Nintendo canceled it!

\*sounds of breaking glass and vigorous Power Gloving\* 🎮



# FROM THE DESK OF THE COMMISSIONER: OLD-SCHOOL ITEMS AND NEW-SCHOOL EXCUSES

BY PATRICK SCOTT PATTERSON

**D**isorder and chaos have ravaged the videogame landscape for far too long. I have no choice but to try and stop it. Until the Videogame Matrix of Leadership is found, we need a go-to guy. Someone who doesn't judge who a "real" gamer is based off of how many hours they've put into shopping on Steam. Someone who understands the history of videogames and wishes to see it preserved for future generations. Someone who realizes that anyone over the age of 20 sounds foolish when publicly speaking the word "noob."

So, I am declaring myself the commissioner of videogames, effective immediately. The final draft of the official proclamation will come across my desk shortly.

To fully understand the current state of videogaming you have to know the past. Each month from this point forward, I shall be passing down official rules that must be followed by gamers of all ages. Failure to comply may result in suspension and/or mandatory gameplay time on 8-bit LJN titles.

## KNOW YOUR HISTORY Recent Dates of Significance

- **April 21, 1984** – *Duck Hunt* releases in Japan, testing people's patience with sarcastic canines.



- **April 25, 1986** – *Up, Up, Down, Down, Left, Right, Left, Right, B, A, Start* debuts as *Gradius* hits the Nintendo Famicom.



- **May 5, 1992** – *Wolfenstein 3D* popularizes the first-person shooter genre, which people thought was cool at the time.

**PATRICK SCOTT PATTERSON** is a multimedia personality who has been gaming since the dinosaurs roamed. Yes, he's serious.

### PROCLAMATION 1:

**Gamers shall not use artifacts to create common household items.**

You know that old Nintendo or Atari you have sitting around? Keep it as a Nintendo or Atari.

I have seen far too many vintage videogames "re-purposed" into other things. I've seen NES consoles turned into alarm clocks and toasters. I've seen an Atari turned into a lunchbox. I've seen Nintendo's Zapper guns and NES Advantage joysticks turned into lamps and have even seen Super Nintendo cartridges turned into a urinal.

They don't make these things anymore. Most older videogame items have already been relegated to the landfill or left to rot in some basement or attic, where mice and roaches procreate inside of them.

Turning your old Sega Genesis into a giant belt buckle or your Intellivision into a Victorian-era hat does not make you cool. It makes you a destroyer of our history.



If you want a lamp or a lunchbox, go to Target rather than destroy the history of our hobby. I, for one, am happy to take anything that "no longer works" off your hands for free if it means it won't be turned into a "retro-gaming-themed diaphragm" or whatnot.

### PROCLAMATION 2:

**"That was before my time" is not an excuse.**

A recently spotted Facebook post saw someone asking if \$10 for a Radio Shack TRS-80 computer was a good price. He said he'd never heard of it before, an excuse as mind-numbing as a slow-motion Kardashian interview.

I've heard that response countless times over the decades. They say "that was before my time" as if it somehow excuses their lack of knowledge on the subject.

George Washington was before my time, but I don't stare at the \$1 bill wondering who the grumpy-looking old man is. Beatlemania was before my time but I know it has nothing to do with collecting creepy bugs. Babe Ruth played baseball way before I was born yet I don't think that's the name of a WWE Diva. Therefore, I expect and frankly demand that anybody who calls themselves a gamer or gaming collector knows the storied past of our industry and culture.

Also, for the record, any complete videogame console or early home computer is going to be worth \$10 in a flea market. I could write a whole other column about that.



### PROCLAMATION 3:

**Check back here next issue.**

The Desk of the Commissioner is now officially open for business and it is mandatory that you turn here in each successive issue of *RETRO* to assist in maintaining our beloved gaming culture. You may also contact the office with your concerns on Twitter, at @OriginalPSP. 🐦



# NOW YOU'RE PLAYING WITH (TURTLE) POWER!

BY REED KALSO



THE HEROES IN A HALF SHELL GO HEAD-TO-HEAD AS WE DETERMINE WHICH TMNT GAME WAS THE BEST!

**T**he Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and Konami proved to be a surprisingly strong couple. Nothing shows this better than the *Turtles in Time* trio. You have the arcade beat-em-up bearing that name, the SNES port *Turtles IV: Turtles in Time*, and the Genesis reimagining *Hyperstone Heist*. In all three, the premise is simple: Shredder and Krang abduct the Statue of Liberty for vaguely evil purposes, and the Turtles set out to stop them. So, let's break these legendary titles down to determine which one offered the most *cowabunga!*

## GAMEPLAY/CONTROL:

The arcade original's biggest advantage is its support for up to four players. On the other hand, the console versions have more precise controls. You can throw enemies in all three versions, but it occurs randomly in the arcade, while specific button combinations achieve this on consoles. They also supply boss life meters. One version was made to eat quarters; the others were paid for up front, and it shows in the design.

Between the consoles, *Hyperstone* has faster gameplay, with enemies that are greater in number and aggression. *Turtles IV* offers some extra modes, namely Time Trial and Versus. The extras are appreciated, but neither are particularly deep or engaging.

*Hyperstone Heist* has the speed of the arcade version and the precision of the SNES. *Turtles IV* plays the slowest, but its extra modes and superior controls allow it to hold serve with the arcade version.

## AUDIO/VISUAL:

The arcade version really shines here. Its animation is gorgeous, it has extra details, some weather effects, and extra boss poses. There are far more voice samples, and they sound best in this version. The music is a wash, with all three playing to their strengths and delivering an awesome soundtrack. *Hyperstone* is generally smoother and more detailed than

*Turtles IV*. Both include the option to portray the turtles in their comic color schemes, which is another surprisingly considerate extra.

## LEVELS/ENEMIES:

As the name would imply, both versions called *Turtles in Time* share most locales. Meanwhile, *Hyperstone* covers a lot of similar territory in different contexts (for instance, instead of going back in time to a pirate ship, you surf to a "ghost" ship — with no ghosts). Each console version has an exclusive stage.

All three versions share only three boss fights: Leather Head, Krang, and Shredder. *Hyperstone* comes up on the short end here, only adding Rocksteady (weirdly, without Bebop), Tatsu, and Baxter Stockman.

Both *Turtles in Times* share Stockman (different from the Genesis fight), Metalhead, Tokka/Rahzar, and a second Krang fight. The SNES version replaces the arcade's Cement Man (who is such a nobody that this game is probably his best-known appearance) with Slash, then presses the advantage by adding Rat King, another Shredder fight, and Bebop and Rocksteady (in custom pirate garb!). Both console versions add a couple different types of robot enemies that were in the cartoon. *Turtles IV* also provides some mode 7 magic in its hoverboarding stage, helping it stand out a bit more.

The bosses really slant this in *Turtles IV*'s favor. It's not just providing several more

fights (and familiar characters), but you get more variety, with a couple dual bosses and a Shredder fight that I'd describe as "second-person perspective," where you toss enemies at him. Plus, I think the SNES version flows best, with Shredder sending the Turtles back in time from his own tricked-out base in desperation, rather than appearing in the middle of a sewer and deciding they're doing the time warp.

## OVERALL:

This is a tough call to make, making me long for a definitive version including all three's exclusive features. As it stands, the SNES version feels like the most complete experience to me. You get the most characters from the source material and the most locations, while enjoying the more convenient controls and options that both console versions share. The additional modes are nothing great, but the other versions don't have them.

The arcade version is an absolute classic, and if you have more than two people around, it's clearly the best way to play. It's smooth, colorful, and sounds great.

*Hyperstone Heist* really didn't get its fair shake, even though it's probably the best gameplay experience pound-for-pound. I love the effort to give each platform a unique experience, and I certainly wouldn't feel shorted in the *Turtles* department if I were a Genesis kid.

**WINNER:** *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles IV: Turtles in Time* (SNES) 🐢





**ONE IN A**

**gazillion**

**BY DANIEL KAYSER**

## WE SPEAK TO DIABLO CREATOR AND MARVEL HEROES MASTERMIND DAVID BREVIK ABOUT HIS CAREER IN GAMING.

**M**arvel fans have had a mountain of media to consume over the last several years, with the most talked-about content coming out of Hollywood. Of course, those films have produced a variety of gaming experiences as well, with the likes of Spider-Man, the X-Men, Iron Man, and Thor receiving plenty of exposure on the interactive entertainment front. Amongst these titles, Gazillion Entertainment's *Marvel Heroes* has gone the farthest to bring a quality Marvel gaming experience to the masses with its free-to-play approach and robust roster of both iconic and obscure characters.

After launching in 2013 and being rebranded as *Marvel Heroes 2015* last June, the gang at Gazillion has delivered a variety of updates and enhancements. The team remains hard at work delivering dynamic content as it seeks to maintain interest while gathering momentum with each and every bit of Marvel hype.

I recently had the chance to speak with industry veteran and Gazillion Entertainment president and COO David Brevik about the company's approach to making *Marvel He-*

*roes*, the media obsession with superheroes in general, and how the shifting landscape of business is making our beloved hobby more complex, and interesting, than ever before.

**RETRO:** What has it been like working on *Marvel Heroes* and *Marvel Heroes 2015*? Is there an aspect of the project that you are particularly proud of?

**DB:** Working on *Marvel Heroes* has been an incredible experience. I'm extremely proud of how the game is playing today. The game has changed considerably since its launch two years ago. I'm really proud of the team and the hard, dedicated work they've put in, turning a mediocre game into something fantastic.

**RETRO:** Part of Gazillion's mission statement is to deliver "breakthrough experiences" in the products it creates. What types of breakthroughs do you feel Gazillion has already delivered and what type do you hope to achieve in the future?

**DB:** At Gazillion, I want to create games that no one else is creating. That has always appealed to me. I don't want to make a clone of a popular product. We have created

breakthrough experiences in that it is the first ARPG that is also an MMO and the first ARPG with raiding. In the future we will offer games that are even more groundbreaking.

**RETRO:** The relationship between content creators and consumers has changed drastically in recent years with the advent of DLC, the introduction of the free-to-play model, and continually updated games. What's your take on the relationship between companies and consumers in this connected age of gaming?

**DB:** Game making today is in a very different place than it was years ago. People now expect more and more content, and





that content takes money to create. The new business models try to figure out how to add content and keep their product relevant while still being profitable. It is a hard balance to strike, but the key is your community. Committing to your community in a big way will grow your business. Respect and communicate directly with your customers in this highly connected age of gaming. I personally stream *Marvel Heroes* several times a week. I answer questions on Twitter, and everyone in the company is encouraged to post on the forums. Turns out the key is to not worry about the business model, but to create a good game and engage your customers. The money will be a side effect of that effort.

**RETRO:** How involved is Gazillion with the *Marvel Heroes 2015* community? Do you take suggestions regarding content, design, and enhancements?

**DB:** We pride ourselves on being extremely involved with the community. We have daily interactions on the forums, Twitter, and streaming. We get feedback on new ideas and upcoming heroes, we have them vote on next costumes and many other things. The feedback is invaluable, and it is the part of making the game that is most enjoyable to me.

**RETRO:** The free-to-play arena has been challenging for some companies and ultra successful for others. What elements do you feel are at the core of a F2P game that can be both critically and commercially successful?

**DB:** It depends on your audience and the type of F2P you are making, but for us, focused on the hardcore gaming market, a F2P game cannot charge for power in the West. If you charge for power, the hardcore gaming market will rebel against the game. That is the one consistent trait I have heard time and time again. Everything in *Marvel*

*Heroes* can be earned for free by playing. We give out a currency while you play that you can purchase new heroes, team-ups, and many other things with. There are ways to buy Fortune Cards through playing, which contain boosts. You can even get costumes for free. We also give out daily rewards for logging in. For example, if you log in a second time we give you enough in-game currency to buy a second hero. I feel and have found that if you are generous with the players, they will be generous back.

**RETRO:** Let's go RETRO for a moment — Having worked on 16-bit titles like *Justice League Task Force*, what do you feel has been the biggest advancement in the design of superhero games over the last decade or two?

**DB:** Well, there have been many changes over the years. Most of it has been technical in nature, but the ability to create more immersive content has made superhero games today much more interesting than they were 25 years ago. When we made *JL Task Force*, there were about 10–15 people working on it. Now, many superhero games will have teams of 100. That means more content, deeper content, and more engaging experiences. Game design and game making have come a long way as well, and that has created much more enjoyable products.

**RETRO:** Speaking of *Justice League Task Force*, what has it been like working on both DC and Marvel properties? Have any particular creative or technical challenges been presented with either brand?

**DB:** Working with an IP always creates challenges. When you are in charge of your own IP, you can do whatever you want to suit the needs of your design. Working with an established IP brings you an audience and a great marketing tool, but it can cre-

ate design challenges. That is some of the fun, though. Coming up with creative solutions to make it work for everyone, both the game and the IP, is very rewarding. I've really enjoyed working with IP because I like the challenge — and when you love the IP, it makes it even easier!

**RETRO:** Over the last few decades there have been way more unsuccessful superhero games than successful ones. Why do you think this is?

**DB:** It's hard to say, but usually there are a variety of factors. Sometimes there isn't enough funding, bad game design, over-ambition, or technical problems. It isn't just limited to superhero games — this is true across all gaming. I don't think that there is a different ratio when it comes to superhero games than any other type of games. When you do it all right, you will have success.

**RETRO:** From beat-em-ups to fighting games, MMOs, and adventure titles, we've seen superheros in pretty much every genre of gaming. Is there a particular genre that you feel lends itself the best to fulfilling the fantasy of being a superhero?

**DB:** The best fits, in my opinion, are the action-oriented, story-driven products. Superheroes are about story and character. Being that character and living that story is what you dream of when you are reading the comics or watching a movie. Capturing that spirit in a game makes for the most immersive experience. That said, I think you can have captivating superhero experiences in almost any genre of gaming. There are great superhero beat-em-ups, pinball games, fighting games, and others. Having a connection to the heroes that you love will help your enjoyment of any product that features them.

**RETRO:** We're honoring the *Batman: Arkham* franchise in this edition of *RETRO*

**Videogame Magazine. What do you feel the gang at Rocksteady has done to influence the superhero genre of gaming? Are there any design elements of the Arkham games that have inspired you personally from a design perspective?**

**DB:** First, they have made some of the best superhero games of all time. That series is superb. I would say that all single-player, story-driven superhero games should strive to capture the magic that those games have created. The games that I make are very different, and a lot of the design doesn't transfer very easily. Someday I will make a more story-driven game, and there are many great aspects of *Arkham* that could be used.

**RETRO: After such a long and successful career that includes the creation of one of the industry's most iconic franchises, *Diablo*, what inspires you to create new and exciting experiences today?**

**DB:** I mainly create the games I want to play. This is exactly why *Marvel Heroes* exists. I am a game creator, and it is all I will ever be professionally. I love creating games and have way more game ideas than I will have time to make. I continue my passion by creating what I want to play along with playing many other products. Other products inspire me, challenge me, and keep everything fresh. I am always looking forward to new technologies and new ways to play games as well. With the new technology comes new ways of interacting with games and it keeps everything interesting. The industry is always changing, and that is exciting.

**RETRO: Beyond gaming, what do you think about the wave of superhero-themed films in recent years? Are they good for maintaining mainstream interest or is there a tipping point where it becomes overkill?**

**DB:** It is the golden age of superhero movies. The run of late is way, way beyond any other time in history, and many of the movies have been really good. They maintain interest, and we won't see any slowdown in creating these movies. They are making too much money. At some point, maybe, people may tire of them — but they have been making *James Bond* movies for how long? The only way the bottom falls out is if they have a string of terrible movies. It has been long

overdue for superheroes to have a movie run like this, and I don't see it going away.

**RETRO: What about the comics themselves? Do you collect them, and what's your take on the evolution of comic books over the years?**

**DB:** Yes, I do read and collect comic books. I personally think that the last few years at Marvel with their *Marvel NOW!* run and the current *Secret Wars* stuff has been the best run at Marvel in a long, long time. There are some really talented writers, and the stories have pushed classic comic trends and ideas in new directions, and I really like that. Changing Thor into a woman, the new Kamala Khan Ms. Marvel and the fun Hawkeye series are just a few great reads as of late. I think we are going to enter a new era of comics that will be talked about for years to come.

**RETRO: What can you tell us about the remainder of the year and beyond for *Marvel Heroes 2015* and *Gazillion*? Are there any major updates that you'd like both fans of the game and newcomers to know about?**

**DB:** Well, we just had a major update to the game where we introduced an Ultron mode and an extremely deep achievement system. We patch the game every week and have new updates all the time. We have a new hero each month, so there is always something new to do. Next month is our anniversary and we will have really fun things planned the whole month, including some big updates. As the year progresses, we will update to *Marvel Heroes 2016* and have some amazing new features added. We are quite excited about the future.



**RETRO: OK, I've gotta ask, do you have any favorite superheroes? If so, who and why?**

**DB:** Oh man. Do I have to choose? It's hard, but Rocket Raccoon, Hulk, and Captain America are a few of my favorites. Rocket Raccoon because he is so strange and I love the cosmic storylines. Hulk because I like and relate to the inner rage vs. nerd parts of his character. Captain America because I love how straightforward he is as a leader.

**RETRO: Thanks so much for taking the time to chat with me in our superhero edition, David! Best of luck to you and the team on the continued success of *Marvel Heroes 2015* and whatever else you're cooking up over at *Gazillion*. 🍷**



# ZAP! BOOM! POW!



## THE ORIGIN STORY OF THE GREATEST TEAM-UP OF ALL TIME: COMICS AND VIDEOGAMES

For America's youth of the '50s through '70s, television and comic books were amongst the primary outlets that fueled adolescent fantasies. Providing a compelling visual universe that was comprised of their favorite superheroes, old west cowboys, and sci-fi fantasies, many a child grew up reading their cheap pulp comics and drifting toward the television for Saturday morning cartoons.

That began to change during the 1970s, with the introduction of videogames into the household. Fans no longer had to be content with staring at a static fantasy world on a page, or wish they could actually be in that animated, fantastical world on the glowing television screen. Now they were able to directly interact with the subjects of their imagination, even if the crude videogame images were a far cry from the detail of other mediums. It was during this era that comic heroes first made the logical

leap to videogames, forever tying the two together. And it was Warner Communications and its two subsidiaries, DC Comics and Atari Inc., that led the exciting move, creating a lasting partnership between DC Comics and gaming that lasts to this day.

### DC COMICS AND WARNER

The history of DC Comics itself goes back to 1935 and a person by the name of Major Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson, who's considered the founder of "the comic book." It's only fitting that the company which played a major role in comic-based videogames started with someone who by all accounts was equally as colorful. A journalist who joined the U.S. Cavalry just before World War I, his unit had served John J. Pershing's command in 1916 hunt-



ing Mexican revolutionary Pancho Villa. He continued serving under Pershing the following year by fighting Muslim Moros in the Philippines and then serving alongside a Cossack troop in Siberia.

After further far-flung service, his career came to an end after writing a letter to the *New York Times* publicly criticizing Army command. Followed by accusations against senior officers, and countercharges by those officers, the Major was ultimately court-martialed for violating an article of war with his open letter...but not before what some consider an Army-sanctioned attempt to assassinate him. All the afore-





mentioned happened by his early 30s, so it's not hard to imagine the Major creating a medium that would become synonymous with adventure.

That's exactly what he did. After a period of writing novels and short stories for pulp magazines, the Major started National Allied Publications in the fall of 1934. His introduction of comic books to children everywhere began with the release of *New Fun: The Big Comic Magazine #1* in February 1935 and *New Comics #1* in December 1935, the later of which eventually evolved into *Action Comics* and would introduce the world to the iconic Superman in 1938. It was the comic line he introduced in December 1936 however, *Detective Comics*, that would one day lead to the publishing company's iconic name.

Unfortunately, due to financial problems, in order to get *Detective Comics* off the ground, the Major had to take on publishing magnate Harry Donenfeld as a partner. Forming Detective Comics, Inc., the partnership lasted just a year before the Major was forced out. Detective Comics, Inc. swallowed up National Allied Publications whole in bankruptcy. The combined companies were now National Publications, but due to the popularity of Superman, it had been branding itself as Superman-DC comics since 1940, which was usually shortened to DC Comics. (The company didn't officially adopt the name DC Comics until 1977.) National Publications also merged with All-American Publications, adding characters like Wonder Woman and the Flash to its stable of popular comic action characters.



In 1967 National Publications was purchased by a rapidly growing Kinney National Services, inc., which started only a year before following a merger with a New Jersey cleaning and parking company. 1967 was the young and enigmatic Steve Kinney's big year of buying up entertainment companies, and National Publications was joined by film equipment company Panavision and film studio Warner Bros. - Seven Arts. Due to a scandal surrounding operations in its parking division in 1971 (insert your favorite *Sopranos* reference here), everything non-entertainment was



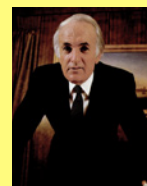
spun off as National Kinney Corporation and the remaining entertainment conglomerate was named Warner Communications in 1972.

Under the continued strength of its entertainment divisions and a revitalized Warner Bros. putting out a string of hit movies, Ross continued his buying spree through much of the early 1970s.

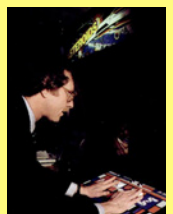
**ENTER ATARI**

In 1976, videogames were still considered a fad by many, and the increasingly crowded home market seemed to be eroding. At the top of this emerging entertainment form was Atari Inc. Still recovering from financial woes in 1975, Atari had been looking for investors to help solve its problems. While Atari's efforts to find investment bolstered its bottom line, it became apparent by the end of that year that it simply wasn't enough. The company's financial problems were soon compounded as it looked to bring its next-generation console to consumers in early 1976. Atari was earning, make no mistake about that, but its internal operational costs were leaving it strapped for cash. It was time to consider selling Atari to someone with deep pockets that could give the company the financial support it needed to reach the next level.

Cofounder Nolan Bushnell turned to Gordon Crawford of California Capital Investments — one of the investors the company had brought in for its previous solution. At the same time, Atari 2600 codesigners Jay Miner and Joe Decuir were starting work on the console's graphic chip. Bushnell asked Crawford to assist in locating potential buyers who would have an interest in purchasing Atari. What Bushnell didn't know was that Crawford owned a 10% stake of a large entertainment company through a previous investment his firm had made. That company was Steve Ross' Warner Communications and the timing, they soon discovered, couldn't have been better.



Back in Warner Communications' offices in New York, mild-mannered Emanuel "Manny" Gerard had been looking to expand the company into new areas. Gerard had initially started his career as an entertainment research analyst on Wall



Street before joining Warner Communications in 1974 as its executive vice president. Warner's bread and butter, the entertainment sector and specifically the record industry, were in a major downturn. Gordon Crawford thought that bringing high-tech entertainment together with a growing media powerhouse like Warner could be a perfect match. He rang up Manny. "I've got a line on a hot company out west looking to be bought in order to finance its already-skyrocketing growth. It's called Atari Inc."

Wanting to know more about the possible investment, Gerard began to investigate Atari and its products to explore a potential fit. What Gerard sees is contrary to the fad many other analysts are seeing. He saw Atari as smack dab in the middle of explosive new growth in "entertainment through technology" — a company that had its name out in all of the various arcades and entertainment centers across the country, and was then in the process of invading the home with several products for use with home television sets. It turned out to be exactly the new blood that Gerard had been looking to bring into Warner's entertainment division.

Interestingly, while Gerard was doing his research on Atari, Steve Ross (CEO of Warner Communications) and his son Mark had just gotten off Space Mountain at Disneyland when they wandered into an arcade adjacent to the ride. Recently added by Disney to deliver high-tech entertainment machines within its Tomorrowland area, Steve and his son Mark played several rounds on the Atari/Kee *Tank* arcade game. When Gerard came to Ross and presented the idea that Warner Communications should consider negotiating to purchase Atari, Ross immediately asked him, "Are they the ones who make the *Tank* game?" With that, Warner's intent was sealed.

One would think that the merging of comics and videogames was a given at that point, but just like a confrontation between two comic characters, Steve Ross and Nolan Bushnell met on the battlefield of egos. Their propensity to play poker against one another made sure the negotiations between Atari and Warner were long and tenuous. For example, at one point during negotiations National Semiconductor ap-



proached Atari about buying out its consumer operations, from which Atari had already poached a lot of staff. It was a quick conversation and the answer was "no." But when Warner found out there had been a meeting between the two, Bushnell let Ross and Gerard think it had been about National purchasing Atari.

Ross, not being a man to lose an opportunity or give up a fight for something he wanted, did what he had to do to counter: He played to Bushnell's ego. When Bushnell and investor Don Valentine planned to fly to New York for a negotiating meeting, Ross arranged to not only have the Warner corporate jet pick them up, but to have the flight make a quick stop to pick up actor Clint Eastwood (who was on the way to a shoot his upcoming movie *The Enforcer*). To further sweeten Warner's appearance in the negotiations, Ross arranged that the pair from Atari would also be put up in the ultra lavish Waldorf Towers while in New York. With those carrots dangled in the form of luxury perks, Warner Communications all but fully ensured it would be the only company at the table negotiating to buy Atari. The purchase completed in June 1976, and by October (most likely because of the success of the purchase) Gerard became Warner's chief operating officer.

### UP IN THE SKY, IT'S A BIRD, IT'S A PLANE...

While Gerard and Warner Communications were busy tweaking Atari's infrastructure to bring it further out of "startup mode" and make it into more of a rising superstar corporation, Warner Bros. Pictures was working on a project to bring DC Comics standard *Superman* to the big screen. Principle

shooting began in March 1977, and while Christopher Reeve was starting his tenure as the iconic character, Gerard and company were looking for unique ways to cross-promote the film. One of the ideas was to leverage their new subsidiary Atari to make *Superman*-themed games, a move that while obvious now was revolutionary at the time. This decision would have a long-lasting impact on the entertainment industry.

The parties finished licensing by the end of the year and in 1978 Atari began developing its first game with a licensed property. The thing was, it wasn't a videogame — it was a pinball game. The project started when Atari Coin Department exec Gene Lipkin ventured over to Atari's Pinball Engineering group and met with future pinball designer legend Steve Ritchie, telling Ritchie that he decided to make the assignment of the next project into a contest between Steve's team and fellow designer Gary Slater's. Whomever designed the best-playing and -sounding game would have their game become *Superman*.



Of course Ritchie's design won and the game was released in March 1979. It's interesting to note that Superman's sound hardware was initially developed by future Atari 2600 programmer extraordinaire Rob Fulop (*Night Driver*, *Space Invaders*, *Missile Command*, *Demon Attack*), but was completed by Eugene Jarvis (*Defender*,

*Robotron 2084*). As a result, Atari's *Superman* pinball, then and now, is considered by many to be Atari's best pinball machine for its quality gameplay and superior sound effects.

During the pinball game's development, work also began on a *Superman* game for the 2600, which would be the world's first comic-book videogame. The thing is, it also almost didn't happen. 1978 was a year of rising tensions between Atari's employees and their new owners Warner Communications, as Warner continued to implement its "adult supervision" (which ultimately lead Bushnell and some of the old-guard management to leave by the end of the year). The game programmers specifically felt that they were being treated as technical engineers instead of the creative sorts they considered themselves to be. Ironically, as recently as three years earlier, all the game developers actually *were* engineers. Regardless, when Warner Communications tried to push its pet project movie tie-in, the response was less than enthusiastic and it sat untouched for a time.

One less-than-enthusiastic developer was Warren Robinett. Starting in June '78 he had been working on a game that he kept secret from Atari management because his bosses had told him not to pursue the project, thinking the text adventure that inspired his nascent game couldn't really be ported to the 2600. Keen to prove them wrong, he developed a proof of concept that had multiple screens for an "expansive" environment, a small square cursor that the player could move around to pick up little colored shapes, and a dragon that would chase the cursor.



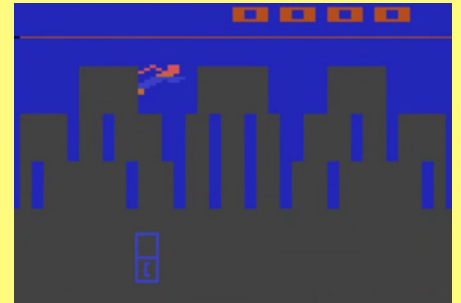
Turning it into management to show them his idea could be done, he went on vacation. Expecting to have permission to move ahead when he got back, instead they wanted him to turn it into a Superman-themed game. Robinett deftly dodged the requests like a superhero himself until another programmer saved the day by accepting the project. This allowed Robinett to get permission shortly thereafter to pursue his passion for that square pixel and the dragon, better known to gamers everywhere as the classic title *Adventure*.

John Dunn was the programmer to take on the historic task of turning *Superman* into pixels, and it was most likely driven by Dunn's desire to do videogames with a positive message. Dunn knew he wanted to separate the look of his game from the common content that Atari was putting out in the console's early days. Single-screen games with very basic shapes and spartan backgrounds like *Combat* or the newly released *Outlaw* were the standard during this primitive time. Dunn wanted his game to really represent the *Superman* comics and to look far more colorful.

The problem was that Atari's games were all 2K of memory due to expense, and he'd need 4K to divide between the graphics and game play. So he drew a line in the silicon sand and said that the only way he'd take the project was if he could have his 4K. Wanting a tight deadline to try to get the game to coincide with the movie's holiday release, management capitulated and *Superman* became the first game to be slated for 4K.

Dunn knew that in addition to the comic-book-like graphics, his game would have to involve a more expansive environment than a single screen would provide. That's where Warren Robinett came to the rescue. While he didn't want to develop his proof of concept code into *Superman*, he wasn't averse to letting someone else do it. And so it was that Robinett's proof of concept was used as a framework for Dunn to develop *Superman* off of.

When *Superman* was completed, John Dunn had not only succeeded at his vision for the game, but also at successfully proving that mixing comics and games was as fun as people had hoped. The storyline was



simple enough by comic-book standards — you play as Superman and his alter ego Clark Kent as Lex Luthor blows up the Metropolis Memorial Bridge. Rushing back to a phone booth to change into Superman, you battle and capture Lex Luthor and his henchmen while trying to find pieces to reconstruct the bridge. If you're taken out by kryptonite, only a touch from Lois Lane can revive you. Add to that a mysterious helicopter that randomly acts as both a foe stealing parts and ally whisking kryptonite away, and you have the colorful world of *Superman* come to life as a videogame, block by city block.

When it debuted later in the year, it was in stark contrast to Atari's other offerings. Branded as part of Atari's "Special Edition" line used to herald its new 4K games, *Superman* fans everywhere now had the chance to play as one of the most popular comic characters of all time. And it proved just as popular for Atari, still being sold and marketed as a top title two years later alongside the newly introduced home versions of *Asteroids* and *Missile Command*. At one point during its sales, the trio of Warner/DC/Atari even pioneered pack-ins by including in a free *Superman* wallet for lucky purchasers.

The team-up of comics and videogames pioneered under Warner Communications only grew in the years to come, as did videogame superhero movie tie-ins. Superman was joined by other characters from the DC universe such as Batman and DC Comics itself was soon joined by rival Marvel Comics. Over the next two decades the genre proved popular, though it was the renaissance of superhero movies in the 2000s that drove superhero videogames into a new golden age that has led to popular modern titles like the *Batman: Arkham* series. And this all began because a group of real-life characters decided to team up nearly 40 years ago. 🦹

# WHY SUPERHEROES SUFFER FROM CONSOLE KRYPTONITE

LUKE MCKINNEY

## WHILE IT SEEMS LIKE A GREAT IDEA, IT'S USUALLY NOT.

Videogames and superheroes should be like peanut butter and jelly: a combination of everything we loved as children and are increasingly unashamed about loving as adults. If superheroes were any better suited to becoming videogame characters they'd have controller ports in their necks. (Which is an actual plan most of their enemies have tried.) But decades of superhero games have shown the combination to work like peanut butter and gellignite: The components are still awesome, but they didn't quite get it right, and the result blew up in their faces.

That's why I decided to find out why consoles are Kryptonite to most superheroes.



■ She's not looking impressed by the gender ratio.

### SUPERMAN

Superman is an iconic superhero and worse for videogames than having your planet exploded. He's god mode incarnate, but when you're not allowed to ragdoll civilians into exploding petrol tankers, all god mode does is remove any challenge. In the stories they can counter his all-dominating powers with tricks and twists, by going outside the rules and confounding him. If Lex Luthor was truly your enemy in a videogame, your LexBox would crash and you'd have to pay LexCorp technical support to fix it.

But games are all about the rules — they have to establish and then literally play by them. So instead of building a world which could challenge the Man of Steel, most developers lazily cripple him into the standard "punch and blast" template. We end up with Superman staggering down the street punching people. That's not the world's greatest hero, that's an asshole drunk on Halloween.

Unfortunately, a true Superman game would be the most frustrating game ever made. The Game of Steel wouldn't be a punch-a-thon, but an open-world physics sandbox stuffed with catastrophes. It would truly capture Superman's struggle, but would also be a game made entirely of timed sections, permanent failure, and non-stop escort missions. That's not a game, that's a *Superfriends* villain's plot to destroy the concept of fun.



### WONDER WOMAN

Wonder Woman suffers the worst case of console Kryptonite. The other heroes are all weakened, but Wonder Woman is eliminated entirely. Reading her ludography you'd swear her superpower was "appearing in." Every extended cast includes her, so she's not forgotten, but she doesn't star in a single game. We don't have a Wonder Woman game for the same reasons we don't have a Wonder Woman movie, and they're all as depressing as Hades.

Wonder Woman is the perfectly powered videogame hero. She can kick more ass than any idiot in a suit, but isn't an omnipotent everything-solver who has to be prevented from flying around the planet until the game ends. You've got a super-strong warrior who still leads the charge into enemy hordes all by herself, with a wide cast of villains and mythical monsters, and an assortment of magical equipment — she could be Arkham of War all by herself. And that's the greatest game idea I've ever heard.

## FLASH

The Flash has the twin boosters of an ongoing television series which doesn't suck and DC's desperate attempts to start making Marvel-grade movie money. But he still doesn't have a good game. The problem is he's a one-note wonder, the king of the gimmick powers — great for special effects but bad for ongoing entertainment. Super speed isn't a sophisticated suite of abilities, it's an idiot-inducer, because the character has to keep being an idiot to keep the story going. Properly employed super speed would mean you don't have any enemies. The instant someone started opposing you they'd instantly get wrecked, without ever seeing you coming.

Gimmick game mechanics are even worse. *Max Payne* already made the big hit with bullet time, but that didn't introduce a new age of gaming. It introduced a few tired *Max Payne* rip-offs. And he still couldn't keep people's interest, even though he had personality aspects other than "wears Lycra to stare at enemies moving really slowly."

The few race levels he's gotten are even worse because they're lazy licensed ports instead of original ideas. A true Flash racer could be the most amazing time trial ever, sciencing up challenges based on trajectories, air resistance, even relativistic physics as you plot the perfect route through battles while saving civilians for time bonuses. But he's a big enough name to mean any game would have to be a standard mass-market AAA graphics-fest, with the "AAA" relegated to the middle of a great big yAAAwN.



## IRON MAN

Iron Man is Marvel's number-one earner in both fiction and reality. But in videogames "dudes in robot suits" are so common they're practically civilians. And everything that makes Tony Stark more than meat filling in another concussion chamber is everything that doesn't work in videogames.

The closest consoles come to simulating "super smartness" is appallingly out-of-place puzzles. How much did you enjoy stopping *BioShock* every few minutes to play a poor port of *Pipe Mania*? It was so dumb that "blowing things up" actually became the smarter option. Because console games can't risk making any puzzle too difficult for a lowest common denominator, they all end up stupidly simple. *BioShock Infinite* asked you to ring three bells and still made your character hold out the instructions to do it.

And then *Iron Man 2* made it even dumber.

Tony's other interesting aspect is that he's heavily armed while drunkenly chasing sexytimes. But drunkenness in videogames means "annoying interruptions to your control while blurring the graphics," and sex means cutscenes, which do the exact same thing.



## AQUAMAN

Aquaman is always the most-mocked hero, and that's outrageous. He's a super-strong partial-telepath with dominion over three quarters of the planet. He makes every other hero and villain on Earth look like squabbling children. But in the hierarchy of videogame heroes he really is as bad as everyone makes out, because his games have to include swimming, and pretending to swim on a console is even less fun than a real swim with a console...that's still plugged in to the mains. 3D swimming with a 2D joystick is how you simulate inner-ear damage. At least Aquaman wouldn't suffer from the standard oxygen time limit.

But Aquaman has hope with the new range of virtual reality helmets. He could star in an Adrift-with-the-Discovery-Channel, an environment exploration game where millions of years of evolution have already done the character design.

Or we could have a true Aquaman title — a resource and politics game where you start as king of three quarters of the world, and the other quarter is eternally pissing in your backyard. There's a chance for some amazing asymmetric-environmental mechanics, *SimCity* from the point of view of a potential megavillain. Seriously, Aquaman should make Lex Luthor look like your local supermarket manager. But instead of bringing a dedicated fanbase to a game which doesn't deserve it (oh hey, I just worked out why most superhero games suck), it would reduce the game's audience to the overlap between strategic gamers and superhero fans. So even if we built his perfect game, Aquaman's involvement would still screw it up, because a big name doesn't just prevent innovation, it actively mandates against it.

**X-MEN**

The X-Men are incredible, astonishing, uncanny, and every other adjective they can get to describe their incredibly diverse powers. So it's a shame they always end up as slightly differently dressed mannequins walking down the same slidey-walled corridors where the only difference between heroes is which color of special effect takes 10 hit points from each enemy.

It's another effect of lazy game design overwriting original ideas. Writing a different game for every character would be a lot of work, so instead they smooth down everyone from Armor to Zala Dane to fit the same punch-ranged-special mechanics. And even that was far too optimistic, because it's always the same standard Cyclops-Iceman-Colossus crew.

A true *X-Men* game would give you a *Grand Theft Auto*-grade sandbox and let you rampage with unbalanced abilities. It would understand that being able to stomp straight through to the goal as Colossus isn't a flaw in the level design, it's awesome fun. Especially when you can earn achievements by going back and ghosting around as Kitty Pryde, or *Hitman* through as Mystique.

**HULK**

The Incredible Hulk alternates an invincible god mode with an utterly vulnerable scientist, a combo that would suck even if you could control both at the same time. Even James Bond couldn't make "escorting the geek" fun, and he once turned a cello into an action-packed chase sequence.

The comics have dozens of solutions to this split, such as an Indestructible Hulk being turned into a S.H.I.E.L.D. smartbomb, or the Asunder Hulk plagued by an insane megavillain Banner in a wonderfully reversed Jekyll and Hyde. But videogame licenses have to be aimed at the greatest market share — the hero's only function is bringing in new players, so they can't be limited by specific stories those players might not have read. Which means the heroes are always reduced to their most basic elements, and every game ends up the same.

Hulk also suffers from the problem of strong guy scaling — he's the strongest one there is, but in a game built specifically for him he's also the only one there is in a world engineered around that singular strength. So him throwing a tank feels about as impressive as me lifting a slice of pizza, and less satisfying. Meanwhile Banner becomes the world's smartest idiot tiptoeing through forced stealth sections. Meaning he's even dumber than the Hulk, who at least does things that should be fun.

## SOME SUPER IDEAS

Superheroes have inspired us to solve problems, so we've come up with some perfect play mechanics for a few of them. Here are the games we'd like to see.

**BLACK WIDOW**

*Hitman*-style game where you have to use the environment, special tools, and tactics to take out superpowered targets, or interfere with ongoing super battles.

**BLACK PANTHER**

A perfect Black Panther game would be an even cooler *Arkham*. Unfortunately even Wakandan technology can't fight against lawyers.

**STORM**

A weaponized weather simulator, a top-down world where you fight (or create) disasters with wind and lightning. Because when you're playing in a sandbox, Storm should be a JCB.

**PUNISHER**

Instead of just another shooter, Frank Castle should star in one part *Hitman*, three parts *Rainbow Six* — a tactical termination game where you set up plans to eliminate whole swathes of criminal targets. At least until every news agency in the world teamed up to ban the game.

## WOLVERINE

We know Wolverine shouldn't get a whole separate entry from the X-Men, but someone needs to tell Hollywood because every stubbly movie hero already heals from crippling injuries. All Wolverine's healing factor does is draw attention to the silliness of pretending there was any danger. Plus he's structurally stupid, literally built to bring knives to gun fights.

It's even worse in gaming. Most modern heroes heal at a rate which makes Wolverine look like he's regenerating from lichen. The most anonymous army grunt can get shot by half a Guns & Ammo catalog then squat it off after five seconds behind cover. Wolverine's only claim to fame is crying "but I'm meant to be able to do this!" while being sniped from halfway across the map.



## GREEN LANTERN

Green Lantern incarnates the problem of superhero videogames — he has the power to create anything he can imagine, but it's always a stupid blast of brightly colored energy that hits things. And for the same reasons — laziness and stupidity. Green Lantern should be able to save everyone in the world simultaneously, but he only ever saves his writers from having to think too hard. Green Lantern is holding the most powerful tool in the universe. If he faces a problem for longer than a minute, it's only because that's easier than writing a real challenge.

Which makes Green Lantern the greatest RPG candidate imaginable. Most games force you to play a specific stupid role with unskippable choices or cutscenes. Green Lantern forces you to simulate his inherent idiocy with the very physical form of the console controller. He has the most powerful tool in the universe in his hands, but all you've got is a controller with a few preset buttons. You can only conjure the few things he can think of. The game mechanics simulate you having the same stupidity-damage that stops him from solving everything in seconds, which is the most genius way anything has ever sucked since astrophysicists worked out black holes.



## DEFEATING KRYPTONITE: WHY BATMAN IS THE BEST

Consoles might be machines designed to destroy everything admirable about superheroes, but Batman beats machines like that every day. As a regular human, Kryptonite simply doesn't work on him. He's struggled through more terrible tie-in bombs than every other hero, but now we know that was just training. Struggling out of being tied in to awful bombs is his job!

The *Arkham* games are what we'd been waiting for all this time. Detective Vision lets you feel like the vengeance of the night itself, while the rhythmic combat is the perfect expression of superior ability — get it right and you can annihilate an entire room of thugs, but just one misstep staggers you into failure. This only makes victory sweeter.

Instead of the amateur hour "press A to proceed" insults, an assortment of always-on button combinations turn your controller into an entire utility belt. Pull off the right move and you feel genuinely skilled. Even the tutorial challenges are perfect, dressing up lessons as Batman-style training. And the challenge mode alone is likely better than most superhero games ever made.

Batman is infamous for working out how to defeat all his fellow heroes. But now we need him to help them succeed. We can only hope he inspires others to build games around heroic mechanics instead of licensed images. 🦇

## JAMIE MADROX

The mutant Multiple Man creates expendable clones of himself when he hits things. Now imagine a ragdoll-physics *Pikmin*.

## DAREDEVIL

We could use virtual reality to simulate the disorientation, pain, and confusion of his radar-sense replacing your vision, and of course he's all in red. He could be the first perfect Virtual Boy game.

## HELLBLAZER

John Constantine's game would be designed so that the only way to win is hacking the world's rules and cheating. Because that's what John Constantine and magic do.

## CAPTAIN AMERICA

A *Burnout Crash!*-style arcade download where you have one throw to resolve various superpowered situations, bouncing a single shield shot through minion meleys to save civilians.

## CAPTAIN MARVEL

A superpowered space pilot with flight and energy blasts. Carol Danvers could be an uber Starfox and she wouldn't need a wimpy ship.

# WELCOME TO THE MADHOUSE!!!

## BUILDING THE PADDED WALLS OF BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

by David L. Craddock

### A SUPERSTITIOUS AND COWARDLY LOT

From Superman and Iron Man to Captain America and the Flash, superheroes have been prime candidates for beat-em-up games. It makes sense: Most superheroes boast super strength, fighting prowess, or both, and those abilities translate well into exciting, accessible action games.

Unfortunately, the marketability of punches and laser beams fails to do justice to the complexity of superheroes. Batman didn't earn the moniker of "world's greatest detective" by bludgeoning Penguin and the Joker with magnifying glasses and jabbing them with pipe stems. He can throw down with the best of his costumed cohorts, but he is also cunning, furtive, and clever enough to solve conundrums fashioned by supergenius villains.

More interestingly, Batman is still flesh and blood. To thwart crimes, he must rely on his mind and the gadgets in his utility belt. To survive, he must be cautious, stalking prey from the shadows and whittling away at their numbers until only two or three remain, half-mad from terror and desperate to escape the predator picking off their friends.



And that's the rub. Outside of *Metal Gear Solid*, few games grounded in slow, methodical gameplay put up numbers that make them worthwhile investments for triple-A publishers. Fortunately, Eidos Interactive and Rocksteady Studios dared to challenge the norm.

### RELATIVE UNKNOWNNS

You'd be forgiven for wondering how such a small studio ever landed the opportunity to redefine Batman in videogames. Founded in 2004 by Jamie Walker and Sefton Hill, Rocksteady is squirreled away in Highgate, London, amid bucolic meadows, nature reserves, and pubs. Two years later, Rocksteady released its first game, a tactical first-person shooter called *Urban Chaos: Riot Response*. Published by Eidos for PS2 and Xbox, *Urban Chaos* let you

choose between gunning enemies down or showing restraint and placing them under arrest. Your riot shield absorbed enemy fire, but you could not shoot while raising your shield, forcing you to approach conflicts tactically.

Shortly before their freshman effort went to market, the team at Rocksteady be-

gan building experimental prototypes using Unreal Engine 3. A few months later, in the spring of 2007, Eidos inked a deal with Warner Bros. Interactive to develop a game starring Batman. During a check-in at Rocksteady, Eidos executives were impressed by Rocksteady's prototypes and asked the team what they would do with a game featuring the caped crusader.

Walker and Hill considered their options carefully. Unreal Engine 3 was powerful, but their team wasn't experienced enough in the Unreal tech to build a massive city environment. They came up with an attractive alternative: What if, instead of patrolling the mean streets of Gotham, the Batman was confined in a smaller, more intimate environment?

They scoured pop culture for influences and hit on two major touchstones. The first was *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth*, a dark and gritty graphic novel penned by Grant Morrison that locks Batman in the madhouse with Killer Croc, Joker, and other notorious psychopaths. The second was Irrational Games' *BioShock*, a first-person shooter featuring tense, brooding atmosphere and a compelling storyline — two fundamental aspects of the *Batman* mythos, yet conspicuously absent in most *Batman* games.



Walker and Hill turned their artists loose on sketching concept art for their take on Arkham Asylum. Roaming London, they gleaned inspiration from the Victorian construction of St. Michael's Church and the gothic tombs of Highgate Cemetery.

Inspired, Rocksteady hit on Arkham Asylum as the perfect stage on which their drama would unfold. They envisioned it as a handful of Victorian edifices set on a rural island connected to Gotham City via a bridge. The idea was that you would be able to see Gotham's glittering skyline off in the distance, but would be unable to reach it — left with no choice but to pacify the evildoers on Arkham Island or die trying. *Batman: Arkham Asylum* seemed a fitting title.

When it came to the particulars of that story, Rocksteady was uncertain. Since any plot they came up with would unfold in the madhouse that contained Batman's rogues' gallery, it seemed a given that the Joker would play a central role. For guidance, they turned to Paul Dini.

### THE NEW WARDEN

Dini doesn't mind if you call him a *Batman* geek. He's quite comfortable in his skin. "I knew everything — about the comics, about the '60s show, about Batman's guest appearances on Superman's old radio show. If it came from the Batcave, I knew about it."

Setting his sights on writing, Dini honed his craft and eventually broke into the entertainment business penning episodes of *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe*. In 1989 he took a job at Warner Bros. Animation to write on *Tiny Toon Adventures*. A couple of years later he caught wind of the nascent *Batman: The Animated Series* cartoon and begged his bosses to let him work on the show. "Happily, they did," he said of his promotion to lead writer and producer.

Premiering in September 1992, *Batman: TAS* went on to become a smash hit among dedicated Batfans looking for a regular fix of the character's bleak violent roots. The series tackled adult themes, was one of the first cartoons to depict physical violence, and never dumbed down the writing to draw in younger viewers.



■ *Arkham Asylum's* gothic settings were influenced by architecture in and around Highgate, London, where Rocksteady Studios is based.

Late in 2007, executives from DC approached Dini about taking the helm as lead narrative writer on *Arkham Asylum*. "I knew while I was looking at the preliminary artwork at our first meeting that Rocksteady had an incredible vision for *Batman* and the Arkham world. It was dark, it was disturbing, it was — to my Yankee eyes — very British. And I thought those were all wonderful elements from which to craft a game."

Even more appealing to Dini, *Arkham Asylum* was to be an original *Batman* game rather than one handcuffed by the character's cartoon, movie, or comic-book lore. He and Rocksteady could add a pinch of this and a dash of that from across the Bat's mythos, cooking up a story uniquely their own.

*Arkham Asylum* soon turned into a WB Animation reunion for Dini. Although Rocksteady and the coalition of companies publishing *Arkham Asylum* did not want

to tie the game to any one mythos, it did make sense to hire voice actors responsible for arguably the most iconic takes on the characters: the cast of *Batman: TAS*. Among other returning talents, Kevin Conroy reprised his gruff and grating Batman, Mark Hamill's gleeful and maniacal Joker laugh rang through the studio, and Arleen Sorkin reassumed the persona of Harley Quinn, the Joker's murderously off-kilter henchwoman.

Dini collaborated with Rocksteady writer Paul Crocker to assemble *Arkham Asylum's* narrative. At the outset, a short cinematic would follow Batman as he dragged Joker back to the asylum from which he had recently escaped. Again. Once inside Arkham, you are given control.

From your first step in Batman's steel-toed boots, Rocksteady's objective became clear. They did not want you to merely play a *Batman* game. They wanted you to be the Batman. Tilt the analog stick for-



■ Acclaimed *Batman: The Animated Series* scribe Paul Dini wrote the narrative for *Arkham Asylum* and its critically acclaimed sequel, *Arkham City*.



■ To the delight of fans, beloved cast members from *Batman: The Animated Series* returned to voice their characters. Mark Hamill once again played the Joker.



■ “I have your scent, Batman.”

ward and the dark knight strides down a long, crumbling corridor. His cape flutters behind you, and his boots bite into the cracked concrete floor. Spin the camera around and you’ll get an eyeful of the character’s stony mug, unruffled by the jeers of the prison inmates leaning through cell bars all around you.

Just ahead, the throng of police officers and Arkham guards escorting the Joker — strapped to a gurney that rolls along in front of you — board an elevator. The lights flicker, and you hear a fading hum as the power cuts out. The Joker’s deranged laugh cuts through the blackness and panicked cries of the guards. A second later, the power snaps back on. Guards scramble and shout, trying to restore order and find their courage. Batman, of course, has the situation well in hand.

“The whole first scene with Batman dragging the Joker into Arkham was a lot of fun. It seemed very natural to me that when the lights go out, Batman instinctively grabs Joker by the throat,” Dini recalled.

Minutes later, the Joker puts his master plan into action. He overpowers his guards, regroups with Harley Quinn, and takes control of the asylum. As if that weren’t enough, Quinn throws a switch that opens every cell in the place. Your objective becomes crystal clear: Round up the inmates with extreme prejudice before they can get off the island and plunder Gotham.

“Arkham Asylum was basically ‘Batman in a box,’” Dini says, speaking to the story he and Crocker mapped out. “It’s a big box, but he’s stuck there in the asylum and on the island, and he can’t leave until the job is done.”

### “AND AT THE END OF FEAR: OBLIVION”

Haunted houses play a pivotal role in haunted-house stories. Every room, every great parlor, every passageway must exude presence to drag you deeper into the atmosphere and story until the creepy grounds feel as familiar to you as your own home.

With *Arkham Asylum*, Rocksteady crafted a memorable house of horrors through finely tuned exploration and a penchant for tantalization. Arkham Island collects a spread of rolling lawns, cliffs wet from waves crashing in from Gotham River, run-down sewer systems, and five monolithic buildings.

By confining its game to a limited area, Rocksteady was able to imbue the island’s sprawling grounds and warren of cells and halls with a distinct atmosphere and personality. The medical building is large and sterile, while the penitentiary’s halls are narrow and lined with cells. But the real joy comes from stumbling across the rooms inhabited by supervillains. Mr. Freeze’s cryo chamber is lined with ice, Quinn built a shrine to her beloved “Mistah Jay,” and Catwoman’s goggles are on display in an administration wing. Even obscure villains like Calendar Man get their due. For hardcore fans, exploring Arkham Asylum is like embarking on a self-guided tour of *Batman* lore.

Dini and Rocksteady’s developers showed off their exhaustive knowledge of the dark knight by handcrafting encounters with legendary foes. Killer Croc stalks you through abandoned sewer tunnels and can kill you in a single pounce. Riddler planted challenges throughout the asylum such as riddles that require you to use your cowl’s scanner to take a snapshot of a particular item hidden in a room or



■ Scarecrow’s nightmarish character design and visions stole the show.

scene. As you solve his riddles, the Riddler goes from cocky to increasingly incensed, going so far as to accuse you of looking up answers on the Internet.

Arguably the most popular encounters, however, were the nightmares triggered by Scarecrow’s fear toxin. Nightmarish visions — such as the corpses of Bruce Wayne’s parents whispering that he had failed them, and of your console appearing to freeze before flipping the script and replaying the game’s intro with Batman as the Joker’s captive — led into stealth sequences where you had to sneak past a giant-sized Scarecrow without being seen.

Scarecrow’s nightmares, and Arkham Asylum as a whole, were grim and unsettling — exactly what Dini and Rocksteady wanted to achieve. “The consensus was to make the game, and thereby the world, more dangerous, and more adult.” Rocksteady’s more mature story and themes extended to characters. Joker wore the Glasgow smile worn by Heath Ledger in 2008’s *The Dark Knight* film, Scarecrow touted syringes for fingers, and Poison Ivy and Harley Quinn were heavily sexualized.

“As we have to keep the game moving, there wasn’t much of a chance to explore the more adult Harley’s personality, outside of brief scenes with Ivy and in some of the recorded sessions with the Joker,” Dini says. (Harley got the spotlight in *Harley Quinn’s Revenge*, a DLC pack for 2011’s *Batman: Arkham City*.)

### BE THE BATMAN

Progress in *Arkham Asylum* unfolds according to a gameplay model shaped by exploration-driven titles such as *Super Metroid* and *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night*. Find a new item and use it to access new areas, or circle back to break into previously inaccessible areas that were visible yet frustratingly out of reach.

Batman’s gadget implements range from familiar to brand new. The Bat-claw lets you pull down weak walls and rip ventilation covers high up on walls. A hacking tool disables electrical gates, while explosive gel rips through certain floors and walls. Batman’s staple Batarang comes in several flavors, such as a boomerang that emits sonic waves able to distract enemies.

Although progress is ultimately linear, Rocksteady left the pace of that progress in your hands. If you want to push ahead and see what happens in the story, you can. Or you can take the scenic route, solving every riddle and exploring every nook and cranny. “You walk a fine line writing a game like *Arkham*. On the one hand, you want to make it true to Batman’s world, and make it an engaging experience, but you always have to keep in mind: It’s a game first, and a movie not at all. Even the most die-hard *Batman* fan is going to lose interest if the game elements suffer at the expense of adding more story.”

Rocksteady’s player-first manifesto extended to *Arkham Asylum*’s three primary game systems: Freeflow combat, Predator stealth, and Detective Vision. Freeflow combat consists of strikes, cape whips, and counters. Each action is mapped to a specific button. Press strike repeatedly to perform a combo. Press counter, and Batman will grab fists and weapons in mid-swing, shooting the assailant an irritated look before casually backhanding them and turning back to more pressing matters.

String those buttons together, and you become the conductor of a symphony of violence. Mash the strike button to rearrange the nearest thug’s face. Tap counter to swat aside the lead pipe arcing toward your head, then tilt the analog stick toward the goon unlocking the gun box bolted to the far wall and press strike to vault over and put them down. “Freeflow” combat lives up to its name: Moves flow together seamlessly, making action a joy. Leveling up unlocks new moves such as throws, the ability to add Batarangs and other gear to the mix, and instant takedowns, brutal finishers that leave thugs whimpering on the floor and cradling broken limbs.



■ Easy to pick up yet difficult to master, the Freeflow combat system let you chain together moves effortlessly.

Walk into a room crawling with armed thugs and Batman goes into Predator mode, challenging you to dispatch enemies without attracting attention. Crouch-walking silences your footsteps, letting you sneak up behind an enemy to choke them out. If you want to get fancy, you can rappel up to gargoyle statues and perform glide kicks, hang from ledges and pull enemies over, hide in floor grates and spring out at opportune moments, or paint walls in explosives and detonate them when enemies wander by.

Batman has the advantage in Predator mode, but he’s still just a man. Rocksteady implemented an AI capable of responding to your actions. When thugs become aware of you, they buddy up, walk back to back, and become trigger happy. Rocksteady’s designers force you to adapt to new crucibles as the game progresses. Gargoyles are lined with explosives, so you won’t be able to hide in the shadows when the going gets tough; and some thugs wear shock collars that trigger alarms when you render their owners unconscious.

Detective Vision is your great equalizer. Enable it, and your vision changes to an X-ray-like filter that highlights important elements such as destructible walls, enemies carrying guns, and clues to problems you must solve to advance the story. “That was fun because the special functions of the cowl allowed Batman to get very ‘Sherlock Holmes’ with his analysis, examining blood, chemicals, and so on,” Dini recalls.

### NEW BREED

Little touches, like the way Batman stands motionless during combat, waiting for Joker’s cronies to strike first, and the seamless animations as you flow from strike to counter to Batarang and back again, speak to Rocksteady’s commitment to capturing the character’s deadly grace.



■ Detective Vision helps you follow clues and prioritize threats. Thugs carrying firearms are red, while less dangerous enemies appear blue.

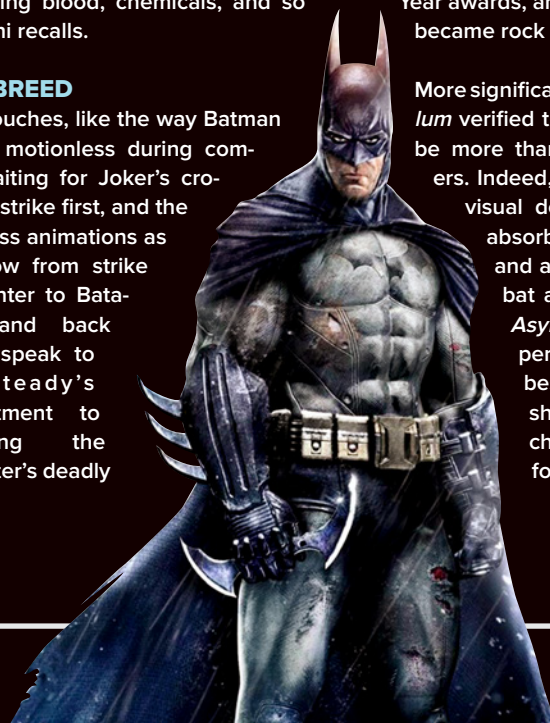


■ In Predator mode, you must pick off enemies one by one to even the odds of survival.

More than ever before, *Arkham Asylum* let you become the Batman and inhabit his dangerous world.

Yet few fans and critics expected *Batman: Arkham Asylum* to amount to more than yet another licensed superhero beat-em-up when it launched on Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, and PC in October 2009. To say they were pleasantly surprised would be a gross understatement. The game raked in high scores and multiple Game of the Year awards, and the crew at Rocksteady became rock stars virtually overnight.

More significantly, *Batman: Arkham Asylum* verified that superhero games can be more than mindless button mashers. Indeed, its confluence of striking visual design, gripping narrative, absorbing exploration elements, and an addictive blend of combat and stealth make *Arkham Asylum* more than a great superhero game. It is one of the best games ever made, and should be a blueprint for all character-driven games that follow. 🦇





# INSIDE ARKHAM

BY DANIEL KAYSER

WE DISCUSS THE DEVELOPMENT, IMPACT, AND INFLUENCE OF THE BATMAN: ARKHAM FRANCHISE.

It's been a little over a decade since London's Rocksteady Studios embarked on its journey to becoming one of interactive entertainment's most successful and well-respected developers. Having cut its teeth with 2006's *Urban Chaos: Riot Response*, the studio would quickly move out of obscurity and into the spotlight with the 2009 release of *Batman: Arkham Asylum* — a critical and commercial success that would rocket Rocksteady to stardom and put both *Batman* and superhero gaming back on the gaming map in ways previously unimagined. Now, after surpassing all expectations with its 2011 sequel *Batman: Arkham City*, the team at Rocksteady has readied what appears to be a fantastic finale to the *Arkham* franchise that is seemingly bigger, bolder, and better than its predecessors in every way. With excitement (and expectations) through the roof, I caught up with Rocksteady's marketing game producer Dax Ginn to discuss the impact of *Arkham* on gaming, the evolution of the series, and why the studio itself is excited to once again answer the Bat signal by bringing one of this year's most highly anticipated games, *Batman: Arkham Knight*, to Xbox One, PlayStation 4, and PC.

**RETRO:** *Arkham Knight* is the most ambitious entry in the series to date. Which aspects are you and the team at Rocksteady looking forward to fans experiencing the most?

**DG:** There are a load of things that the team at Rocksteady are very excited about and you're right when you say that this is the most ambitious game that we have created — we've been killing ourselves for almost four years to make

something that we hope will earn the love and respect of gamers and *Batman* fans around the world. The top feature has got to be the Batmobile. We began the development of the game with this legendary vehicle right at the center of our thinking and everything revolves around that, so we think that fans are going to love driving it as much as we do!

**RETRO:** When Rocksteady set out to design the original *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, was there a core objective of addressing industry-wide concerns about the quality of superhero games or were you simply trying to make the most kick-ass *Batman* game possible?

**DG:** We didn't really think too much about the broader state of the industry or the superhero genre specifically, we were just a bunch of *Batman* fans wanting to make the kind of game that we wanted to play — it really was that simple! Looking back, it seems obvious that a great *Batman* game would need to be much more than just a fighting game, but at the time it seemed that previous games had focused on that element of Batman's abilities and not a lot more. We took the opportunity to take a step back and think about Batman as an expert in loads of different areas such as crime scene investigation, gadgetry, and stealth. So that was where we began and of course he has a massive list of enemies that all bring something to the table which is why *Batman: Arkham Asylum* feels like such a rich and varied game — it was just a reflection of the key elements in Batman's world.

**RETRO:** As a character, why do you think Batman has become so compelling to play as in the *Arkham* series?

**DG:** I don't think there is one single thing that makes him work, it's a combination of different factors that all work together. For me, his movement feels perfect.

When controlling Batman in navigation or combat he feels heavy and powerful, so just getting around the place feels very addictive. The challenges that he is presented with also make you want to keep going and this has as much to do with the level design and mission flow as it does the villains that keep coming at Batman throughout the game. I also have to add





■ *Arkham Knight's* array of allies and foes aims to please *Batman* fans.



that I think that Kevin Conroy's voice acting is a big part of his appeal. Kevin is such a class act and whenever Batman opens his mouth you just get that feeling that he is in charge, like a total boss!

**RETRO:** *Rocksteady has done an amazing job of implementing the interesting characters that comprise the Batman universe. How did the team look to take the roles of both Batman's allies and villains to new heights in Arkham Knight?*

**DG:** We focused quite heavily on the villains in the first two games, but this time around we are diving very deeply into the emotions and relationships that exist between Batman and his allies and between the allies themselves. Barbara Gordon's relationship with her father for example, as well as Robin and Nightwing's connection to the Bat family, are all examined very closely. The core idea here is the sacrifice that they all make to support Batman, but Batman is essentially a solitary hero. This dynamic creates a very interesting tension that keeps the story of the game alive and driving forward.

**RETRO:** *The combat system in the Arkham series has always been very satisfying. How did it come about in the first place, and what changes have been made for Arkham Knight?*

**DG:** The first incarnations of the Freeflow combat system were a rhythm/action kind of implementation. We were trying to create the sense of Batman's very orchestrated and precise combat style. In the end we moved away from the interface of rhythm/action, but underneath the combat, I think gamers can feel that there is a rhythmic flow that you get into when you have really mastered the combat system. The biggest development that we have implemented for *Batman: Arkham Knight* has been the creation of dual-play combat where Batman teams up with an ally and goes to work in tandem against massive hordes of thugs. It's pretty awesome.

**RETRO:** *Batman's gadgets are obviously central to the Arkham experience. Have there been any gadgets that the team at Rocksteady are particularly proud of implementing throughout the series? What's new in Arkham Knight?*

**DG:** We are generally proud of everything that we do, so it's tough to pick out a particular feature, but if I had to pick one that comes up a lot it's the explosive gel. Since its critical role in defeating the Joker at the end of *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, we all have a soft spot for this particular gadget. There are some new gadgets in *Batman: Arkham Knight* that are very exciting to use such as the disruptor that has a sniper scope and allows Batman to tag vehicles or override weapons and drones from a distance.

**RETRO:** *The Batmobile isn't just being introduced to the series with this entry, it also has a very prominent role in Arkham Knight. At what point did the team at Rocksteady decide to include it in the game and how did that decision impact Arkham Knight's overall design?*

**DG:** The inclusion of the Batmobile was genuinely the very first design decision that was made. We had wanted to build the Batmobile for a long time and it was something that gamers had been asking that we do. We knew that if we were going to do it, we needed to do it right. This is why we transitioned the game to the new-gen consoles so that we could make a game that was big enough that the Batmobile could hit its top speed and ensure that players had a great experience and could indulge in a very authentic and complete Batman power fantasy.

**“THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSON THAT WE HAVE LEARNED OVER THE LAST 10 YEARS IS THAT QUALITY IS ALL THAT MATTERS.”**

**RETRO: Speaking of the Batmobile, how difficult was it to tune the player experience to prevent the vehicle and associated moves being too overpowered or too underpowered? What role do the pursuit and battle modes for the Batmobile play in achieving this balance?**

**DG:** Tuning the gameplay is a challenge in the development of every game so this wasn't something that only we have had to work very hard on during the creation of this game. The balancing act for us was to create offensive and defensive capabilities for the Batmobile that were integrated with the threat posed by the Arkham Knight and his forces. This vast and varied military muscle is the primary threat to Gotham City and the Batmobile needed to be able to deal with each and every facet of the Arkham Knight's army. Pursuit and battle mode are both needed against this threat and are critical to the balance of the gameplay because not only does Batman need to get from one point of need to another very quickly, but he also needs sufficient hitting power to bust through any obstacles that stand in his way.

**RETRO: The traversable area of *Batman: Arkham Knight* is approximately five times larger in scale than Rocksteady's previous entry, *Batman: Arkham City*. Was making the game that much bigger a priority from day one of development? Also, how has Rocksteady attempted to make individual areas of such a large space feel unique?**

**DG:** The size of the game evolved over time as we developed the capabilities of the Batmobile, so it wasn't set at day one, but we had it locked in by about the end of 2013 so that it was big enough to give the Batmobile a chance to stretch its legs but not so big that we couldn't fill it with life and detail. Making every inch of it feel unique and hand-crafted is just a matter of hard work by the Rocksteady art team. We have always made games that feel very detailed and a lot of love has gone into every street, rooftop, and back alley of Gotham City.

**RETRO: *Batman: Arkham Knight* has been specifically designed for the new crop of consoles. In what ways do you feel the game best takes advantage of the more sophisticated hardware?**

**DG:** This game leverages the power of the new consoles in a couple of important ways. The most significant is the speed at which Batman can drive or glide through the city. One of the key features of the Batmobile is the ability for Batman to drive at massive speeds and then seamlessly eject out into a glide. If you think about what this requires in terms of processing power, it's immense. To go from the detail of street level to the complete skyline of Gotham City at an insane altitude in a matter of moments required a huge amount of horsepower and that's what the new consoles give us. On top of that, the game's atmosphere is very specific to Gotham City and this relies on lighting and environmental effects like rain and reflections to create that feeling of being in Gotham and not just a generic city.

**RETRO: Do you feel that *Batman: Arkham Knight* deserves the "M" for Mature rating that it has received from the ESRB after the "T" for Teen ratings assigned to previous installments? Why do you think this was and what impact do you think this rating will have on the game's reception?**

**DG:** The game's story deals with some fairly mature themes, but the important thing to us was that we were free to make the game that we had envisioned. Our attitude was to just make the best game that we could and let it be received in the way that it will by both the ratings boards and gamers. We're very proud of the quality of our work and hope that players understand our creative decisions once they have played the game.

**RETRO: As we've all learned in recent years, shipping a game doesn't mean that it's officially done. What post-launch plans are in place to further support *Batman: Arkham Knight* through DLC?**

**DG:** There are some post-launch plans in the works but we haven't made any major announcements at this stage, apart from Batgirl — she's going to be awesome.

**RETRO: With *Arkham Knight* closing out the series for Rocksteady, what would you say has been the most important thing the studio has learned about itself from its work on the *Arkham* franchise?**

**DG:** I think the most important lesson that we have learned over the last 10 years is

that quality is all that matters. There is a lot of pressures on a development team during the creation of a game and you have to really focus on what's important. For us, the only consideration is quality and so we constantly push ourselves to make the highest-quality gameplay experiences that we can.

**RETRO: Looking down the line, what would you say (or hope) the series' biggest influence on the gaming industry has been?**

**DG:** I hope that our games have changed the perception of games that are built around a preexisting character and shown that it is possible to create a very high-quality game if you focus your efforts on what makes that character appealing and stay true to that. A lot of people tell us that the *Arkham* games have changed the reputation of "tie-in" games, so our hope is that more games are made using fantastic preexisting characters in new and interesting interactive ways.

**RETRO: Thanks for taking the time to chat with me, Dax! The team at Rocksteady has truly made an impact on interactive entertainment with its work on the *Arkham* franchise and we here at *RETRO Videogame Magazine* congratulate you on all of your success. We can't wait to see what Rocksteady cooks up next!** 🍷



# 10 REASONS TO PLAY BATMAN: ARKHAM KNIGHT

BY REED KALSO

HERE'S WHY ROCKSTEADY'S LATEST (AND LAST) ARKHAM ENTRY IS SO ENTICING.

**R**ocksteady's third and (supposedly) final foray into its acclaimed *Arkham* saga is upon us and the celebrated developer has certainly set the bar high for this entry. But what exactly makes it worth the hype? Let's take a look at the top 10 aspects that make *Batman: Arkham Knight* worthy of your attention.

## DC COMICS INPUT

Licensed games have had a shady history since at least *E.T.* That's why it's always encouraging to hear someone involved with the source material is on board for the game. In addition to those members of the cast and crew that have worked with previous *Arkham* titles and animated *Batman* products, we also have DC scribe and chief creative officer Geoff Johns and artist Jim Lee contributing to *Arkham Knight*. They were tasked with helping create the eponymous new foe. Superhero-based games have had original characters before, but having actual comic creators involved with the process lends further authenticity.

## EXTRAS

Downloadable content is almost guaranteed to draw a mixed reaction from players and critics. Still, the sheer amount of add-on content is impressive, and it pro-

vides some nice material for fans of different characters and eras. Alternate costumes (such as the Adam West-style '60s suit) are once again available, and this time, they can be used from the start. Even the Batmobile gets a retro color scheme. There are also additional storylines that let you play as Red Hood, Harley Quinn, and Batgirl. Or you can take the Batmobile out for a spin on a racetrack. This is all very interesting, but keep in mind that Rocksteady seems to be playing favorites with Sony, as most of the extras will be PS4 exclusive, at least until this fall.

## EMBRACES THE POTENTIAL OF THE NEWEST HARDWARE

Director Sefton Hill says "It's not a challenge to move to next gen. The real challenge is making sure you're getting the best out of the machines." *Arkham Knight* is bucking the trends of a lot of recent AAA games. For one, there won't be a version on the previous generation of consoles. There also won't be any multiplayer mode. While I'm always fond of more options in gaming, multiplayer modes in primarily single-player games can feel like a token, obligatory effort (same with sticking campaigns into games that are meant to be multiplayer experiences). It's refreshing to hear them declare their intention to create the best single-player adventure possible

on current hardware, and the game certainly doesn't appear to be cutting corners in that respect. The detail and sheer scope of activity on display are very impressive.

## VOICE ACTING

Many of the cast members from previous *Arkham* games will reprise their roles. Perhaps most notably, Kevin Conroy returns to give voice to Batman. A fan favorite ever since he voiced the dark knight in the '90s animated series, Conroy was absent from the non-Rocksteady-developed *Arkham Origins*. Other *Arkham* alumni include Tara Strong as Harley Quinn, Nolan North as the Penguin, Troy Baker as Two-Face, and Wally Wingert as the Riddler. The cast is joined by TV and film veterans, with *Breaking Bad*'s Jonathan Banks taking on the role of Commissioner Gordon, *Twilight*'s Ashley Greene voicing Oracle, and John Noble (from *Sleepy Hollow* and *Fringe*) voicing Scarecrow. Whether they have experience with the *Batman* franchise or not, that's a lot of big names to be excited about.

## EXPANDED GOTHAM

*Arkham Knight*'s playable world is expanding further than ever before, encompassing the entirety of the city limits. Under the threat of Scarecrow's chemical warfare, much of Gotham's civilian population has



evacuated, leaving the city as a battleground for criminals, cops, and capes. It's an obvious excuse to let you run wild, but reality is sacrificed for entertaining gameplay all the time, and the prospect of having an entire cityscape to explore without little things like civilians to worry about is a worthy result. Rocksteady estimates the new Gotham covers about five times the ground as *Arkham City*, without much overlap between the two games. It's distributed over three interconnected islands, giving distinct identities to different districts.

### NEW GADGETS

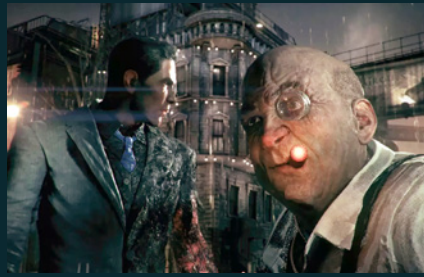
One aspect of Batman that has always been a good match for the gaming medium is his gadgetry. Plenty of his previous *Arkham* equipment makes the jump into *Arkham Knight*, but choosing from your repertoire is now more seamless than ever. Batman's latest suit is a high-tech armored outfit, helping him keep up with the other billionaire genius superheroes out there.

His upgrades include a Batarang sensor that allows you to gain information from a distance. The new suit's gliding will be refined, giving you longer flights, as well as more control and maneuverability. There's also the disruptor, a tool that saw use in previous games, but is now completely overhauled. You can use it to track vehicles, jam enemy firearms, and even force them to self-destruct. The disruptor, like much of Batman's gear, can be upgraded to perform additional functions.

### BATMOBILE

Perhaps the most hyped addition to *Arkham Knight* is the Batmobile. Rocksteady contemplated its inclusion ever since *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, but wasn't prepared to implement it until now.

The Batmobile can be summoned with the push of a button, allowing Batman to drop directly in and transition right into driving. It can also eject him into the air, going right back to gliding and prowling rooftops. The vehicle is armed to the teeth, and will be useful for dealing with the Arkham Knight's forces. In addition to the civilian-free roads, the prioritization of fun over realism can be seen in how the game handles collisions. Scraping walls



and other cars won't hamper the Batmobile's speed, letting you savor the joy of driving a superhero's car without worrying about trifling annoyances. It's not like realism is out the window, either — the environments are destructible, and reckless drivers will leave their mark on Gotham's architecture. The attention to detail extends to Batman's "no killing" policy. His weaponry resembles nonlethal riot gear, and if you attempt to simply run down a thug, they'll be repelled by an electric security system.

### THE ARKHAM KNIGHT

The titular villain himself, Arkham Knight, is a new antagonist to the streets of Gotham. Rocksteady and DC Comics collaborated to create him specifically for the game. Like other Bat-doppelgängers before him, *Arkham Knight* is a mysterious figure who harnesses the familiar bat motif to dole out a harsher, more twisted brand of justice. He even plays on the concept of Batman's endless wealth and variety of gadgetry, leading a militarized force of drones, autonomous land vehicles, and other high-tech terrors to patrol Gotham.

*Arkham Knight's* identity remains a closely guarded secret, fueling a good deal of speculation. The character has created a lot of buzz among fans, while the forces under the Knight's command make sure that there's plenty for the new Batmobile to do.

### EXPANDED COMBAT

*Arkham Knight's* combat offers a more flowing experience than its predecessors. Combo streaks don't halt as easily. You can counter enemy attacks as well. There's also a new element known as the Fear Takedown. Playing on Batman's role as a mysterious, feared avenger who strikes from the shadows, you gain advantages by taking down enemies while remaining



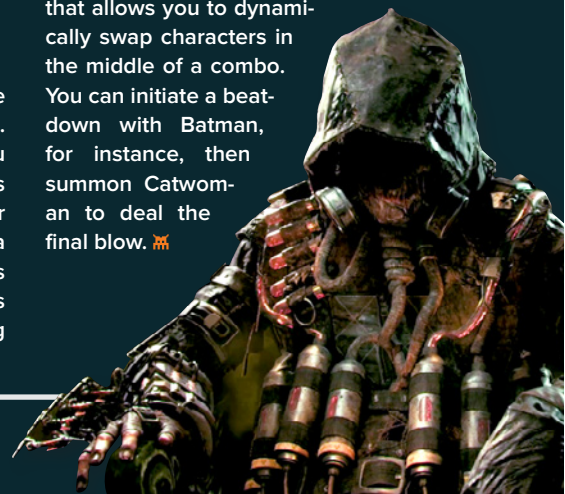
unseen by their fellows. Time slows down, giving you greater opportunity to bring down your next victim. This allows you to swiftly take down small groups without resistance, as long as you stay out of sight. It's an interesting way of translating Batman's traditional "strike fear into the hearts of criminals" shtick into gameplay. But enemies haven't just turned into cannon fodder. They've learned some new techniques, too, and have a wider variety of moves at their disposal.

### CHARACTERS

Despite his loner reputation, it seems like a host of allies always watches Batman's back. *Arkham Knight* gives several of them chances to shine. Ever-determined police commissioner Jim Gordon helps and interacts with Batman on some missions. His daughter Barbara Gordon, otherwise known as Oracle, serves as mission control and tech support, with an expanded role (visible for the first time in Rocksteady's *Batman* games). Rocksteady wants to spend some time exploring Batman's relationship with his allies, showing the strain that this war on crime has put on them.

In addition to DLC characters, you'll also have the opportunity to play as Catwoman, Nightwing, and Robin in the primary story mode. Tying into the expanded combat features, there's a fun new mechanic that allows you to dynamically swap characters in the middle of a combo.

You can initiate a beat-down with Batman, for instance, then summon Catwoman to deal the final blow. 🦇





ARE YOU READY TO RUMBLE?  
 VISIT [SHOPREADRETRO.COM](http://SHOPREADRETRO.COM)  
 TO DOWNLOAD THE FULL  
 DIGITAL EDITION OF OUR  
 SPECIAL FIGHTING-GAME ISSUE

**FOR JUST \$3**

WHO'S NEXT?



**MORTAL KOMBAT X**



# RETRO®

VIDEOGAME MAGAZINE

DOUBLE DOWN & SCORE THESE PAST DIGITAL EDITIONS  
 FOR JUST \$2 EACH WHEN YOU USE THESE PROMO CODES!

ISSUE PREVIEWS AVAILABLE AT [SHOPREADRETRO.COM](http://SHOPREADRETRO.COM)



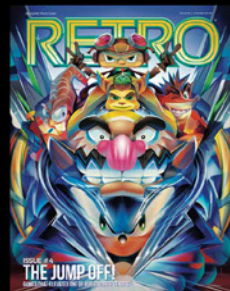
MIGHTYFINE



PUNCHANDKICK



RPGFORME



RUNANDJUMP



METROIDVANIA



POINTANDCLICK

# Snake Rattle 'n' Roll



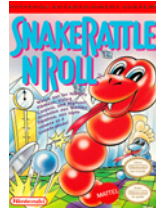
These snakes are charmers.

■ DEVELOPER: Rare ■ PUBLISHER: Nintendo ■ PLATFORMS: NES, Genesis ■ RELEASE DATE: 07.01.90 ■ PLAYERS: 1–2 players ■ ESRB: NA

BEFORE *BANJO-KAZOOIE*, before *Donkey Kong Country*, and yes, even before *Battletoads*, Rare released a unique platformer that still has no equal to this day. In *Snake Rattle 'n' Roll*, one or two players simultaneously take control of snakes slithering their way through 11 stages to eat a bunch of pellets (or Nibblely Pibbleys as they're called here). The exit to each stage is controlled by a carnival-style weigh-in bell, which means you must become heavy enough by eating said pellets. You'll have to master tricky platforming, perilous obstacles, and an assortment of random enemies (including a big, stomping foot and a purplish shark / piranha / barracuda thing) before moving forward. If you were a fan of *Marble Madness*, *Snake Rattle 'n' Roll* may feel familiar (especially since Rare also developed the NES port of that Mark Cerny classic). Admittedly, though, that game's marble physics were a little more pre-

cise than are the physics of a hopping snake here. Platforming in an isometric viewpoint is pretty tough as is, but combine that with the low, floaty nature of Rattle and Roll, and you have a game that can be challenging for the wrong reasons. At the same time, there's satisfaction in completing the trickier platforming elements, especially in the later levels. You can nab certain items by testing fate and jumping into danger only to redirect yourself back to a platform in mid-air. There's also one part that requires some precise timing when you're floating to an exit on a magic carpet that continually stops and disappears. The level design provides a fun challenge, though the floaty controls and isometric camera can get in the way of total enjoyment. Ultimately the worlds are enjoyable and varied enough to make them worth traversing. There's a water-themed stage with perilous jumps, a waterfall you can

swim up, and an exit that is a truly memorable leap of faith. Sticking with the same theme, another level has you swimming underwater to gobble up Nibblely Pibbleys shaped like fish, not to mention adding in extra-floaty jumps (thanks, buoyancy). Clearly a predecessor to *Battletoads*' fourth level, an ice stage has the snakes slipping on sloped terrain avoiding sliding ice blocks looking to ruin your day. Just be glad evil snowmen haven't made their way in too. *Snake Rattle 'n' Roll*'s presentation is worth mentioning, with good graphics for the time and a soundtrack that lives up to its name. There's nothing absolutely awe-inspiring here, but it gets the job done in looking appealing, rather than appalling, even in this day and age. Rattle and Roll themselves, although a mere color swap, show a fair bit of a personality in their level complete portraits. If you've read *Of Mice and Men*, Roll is clearly the George of the pair. *Snake Rattle 'n' Roll* still holds up as a NES classic worth checking out, if only for the fact it's unlike most any other game on the system. Each level presents a set of challenges different enough from the others to keep me coming back for more. Although the isometric view and floaty controls can be a hassle, the level design and fun music make this Rare gem worth a hiss. 🐍 —DAVID GILTINAN



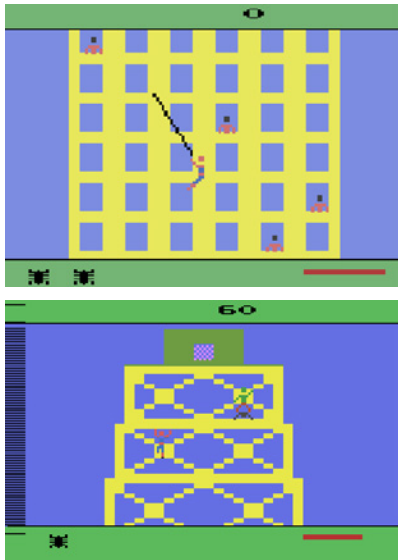
OUR RATING: ♥♥♥♥♥

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** This review was a special request by Gregg Schiebel, who supported *RETRO Videogame Magazine's* Year Two Kickstarter. Thank you, Gregg, and thanks to everyone who backed our publication!

# Spider-Man

Not bad for a first try.

■ DEVELOPER: Parker Brothers ■ PUBLISHER: Parker Brothers ■ PLATFORMS: Atari 2600  
 ■ RELEASE DATE: 1982 ■ PLAYERS: Single-player ■ ESRB: NA



AS THE FIRST VIDEOGAME to depict the character, there was no precedent when making *Spider-Man* on Atari's popular home console. This blank canvas provided plenty of opportunity and the developers were not afraid to break ground. In *Spider-Man*, you play as the spandex-clad wall-crawler as he makes his way up various buildings to take out bad guys, defuse bombs, and stop the maniacal Green Goblin. How? By web-swinging up those buildings to grab the magical checkerboard up top! No, seriously. As you shoot your web either directly up or in a diagonal direction, a meter gradually depletes indicating the Goblin's "super bomb" is set to go off. If Spidey can't make it to the top of the building before this runs out, you lose a life. Taking out enemies in the windows (by swinging into them) and defusing smaller bombs (same deal) will effectively buy you more time. If your web touches an enemy, doesn't stick to a part of the building, or if you touch the Green Goblin, then you start to fall. Thankfully, you can recover with a well-placed web shot.

It all adds up to a cool idea considering the limited hardware capabilities, and it makes perfect sense for a Spider-Man game. Unfortunately, the controls themselves aren't very intuitive, and it can be tough to get into the swing of things (no pun intended) as you desperately try to figure out the delayed timing involved with releasing your web. This gets especially tricky near the top where you have to aim almost perfectly at the pixel-sized girders. Despite these flaws, *Spider-Man* offers a fun experience and a good challenge if you stick with it (I swear, the puns write themselves). Later stages throw more bombs and more Goblin encounters your way, forcing you to patiently plan how you approach each ascension, which adds to the gratification of reaching the top. Ultimately, *Spider-Man* on the Atari 2600 is a cool idea that offers a decent attempt to bring Spidey to the home console. Give its web-slinging action a whirl for some nostalgic fun. 🕸️ —DAVID GILTINAN

OUR RATING: ♥♥♥♥♥

# Spider-Man and Venom: Maximum Carnage

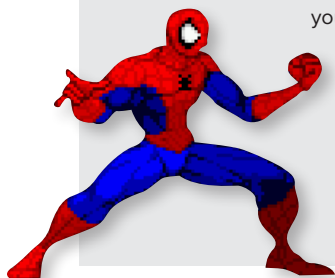
Kinda cool carnage.

■ DEVELOPER: Software Creations ■ PUBLISHER: LJN ■ PLATFORMS: Genesis, SNES  
 ■ RELEASE DATE: 09.16.94 ■ PLAYERS: Single-player ■ ESRB: MA-13

BEAT-EM-UPS were all the rage on 16-bit consoles, with everything from *Ninja Turtles to Streets of Rage* consistently competing for players' attention. So it should be no surprise, then, that LJN adopted the format for one of its *Spider-Man* tie-in games, *Maximum Carnage*. The shock here, though, is that it wasn't half bad, despite some missed opportunities. The game puts you in control of either the webslinger or his goo-covered adversary, depending on the stage, as you battle against various foes in the hopes of bringing the vile Carnage to justice. A job easier said than done, mind you. *Carnage's* controls aren't quite as sharp as they could've been, as both the climbing segments and the general web-slinging seem a bit off. When it comes

to fisticuffs, though, the game is satisfactory, with plenty of opportunities to knock hobos, thugs, and other enemies on their butts. I also enjoyed the way you could summon other characters from the Spidey universe, such as Deathlok, Iron Fist, and Black Cat, among others. The presentation was fairly good for its time. The visuals represent the comic-book series faithfully and Green Jelly's soundtrack fits the bill. The only major downside is that the game comes to an end way too quickly — and you have to go through it solo, since there's no two-player option to speak of. A lot of SNES brawlers did this (like the original *Final Fight*), but it's a shame that LJN couldn't give us the option to have Spidey and Venom fight side by side. *Maximum Carnage* may not be the Marvel-ous fighting debut *Spider-Man* fans were hoping for, but it's a decent brawler to rummage through on a Friday night. 🕸️ —ROBERT WORKMAN

OUR RATING: ♥♥♥♥♥



# The Amazing Spider-Man

What tangled webs we weave...

■ DEVELOPER: Rare ■ PUBLISHER: LJN ■ PLATFORMS: Game Boy  
 ■ RELEASE DATE: 07.31.90 ■ PLAYERS: Single-player ■ ESRB: NA

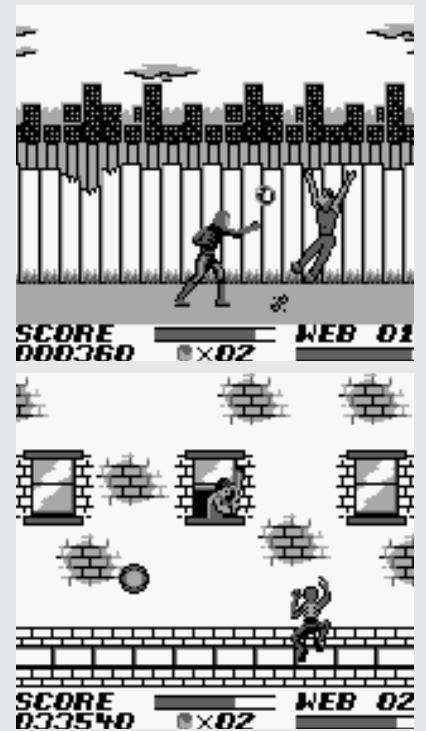


THE DREADED RAINBOW OF DOOM strikes again! As many traumatized gamers know, LJN developed a terrible reputation for publishing some of the worst licensed games, and not even everyone's favorite neighborhood wall-crawler was safe. The *Amazing Spider-Man* for Game Boy features six levels to punch, kick, and swing your way through, each with their own entry from Spidey's famed rogues' gallery to defeat as you search for the kidnapped Mary Jane. Intermissions feature some deliciously cheesy insults. The comic-book banter makes sense, but walkie-talkies? That's the '90s for you. In terms of gameplay, never before has our favorite webhead felt more like he was walking through, well, webs. Button presses are delayed, and the difference between short and long jumps feels nonexistent. Even web-swinging is inconsistent. The best approach I found to activate this essential element of the game is to mash the A and B buttons together — then pray. Levels are comprised of streets, rooftops, subways, parks (more streets), and sewers. The rooftops in particular will infuriate because of the aforementioned poor jumping and web-

swinging mechanics. In fact, it's possible to end up in a situation where you're trapped between roofs. Boss battles are equally infuriating. For example, Mysterio moves around in a damaging smoke form, and Spidey isn't fast enough to properly avoid damage and land his delayed attacks. Forget about dealing with the Hobgoblin's raining pumpkin bombs in the next level. It's not all bad though — there are times when Spider-Man will have to crawl up a building while avoiding enemies and falling projectiles. These sections can actually be fun since they move quickly and make you feel a bit like Spider-Man. *The Amazing Spider-Man* is hardly the handheld gaming experience that this legendary superhero, or his fans, deserve. Despite a nice presentation and some decent wall-crawling sections, the core controls for platforming and attacking are simply too abysmal to save Spidey this time out. Pepper in frustrating boss battles, and you have yourself quite the menace, just like what J. Jonah Jameson always warned us about. 🦋

—DAVID GILTINAN

OUR RATING: ♥♥♥♥♥



## Spider-Man

An experience that sticks.

■ DEVELOPER: Neversoft ■ PUBLISHER: Activision ■ PLATFORMS: PlayStation, Nintendo 64, Dreamcast ■ RELEASE DATE: 08.30.00 ■ PLAYERS: Single-player ■ ESRB: E



DEVELOPER NEVERSOFT MAY BE GONE (it "absorbed" into Infinity Ward last year), but its legacy certainly isn't forgotten. Along with countless *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* games and its millions of racked-up points, the studio also created one of the more noteworthy comic book-based games back in "the day" of the Sony PlayStation, amongst other platforms. Simply titled *Spider-Man*, the game lets you guide the web-slinger through a full 3D adventure, crawling around and inside buildings battling adversaries of all sorts, from Venom to Rhino to Mysterio, among others. Neversoft spared no expense in cramming as much of the Spidey universe as it could into this game, and it paid off in spades. Part of the game's appeal lies in its controls. It feels wonderful guiding Spidey through his various challenges, whether you're swinging across rooftops in the city or battling thugs using a number of slick attack techniques. It just feels like a natural translation of Spidey's capabilities into

a simplistic yet snappy control scheme. The other half is the presentation, which is rock solid (on PlayStation, anyway). The visuals look stunning, providing a strong representation of the city and offering a few winks to comic-book fans, namely with comic-book issues hidden here and there. The voicework is a trip too, with strong support for all characters. Of course, Venom steals the show with "Surf the web, surf the web!" Featuring hidden goodies aplenty (including alternative costumes) and a comical ending that will put a smile on your face, *Spider-Man* delivers in every aspect — which is more than I can say for other games that followed over the years. *Spider-Man 3*? Yuck. Come back, Neversoft! 🦋

—ROBERT WORKMAN

OUR RATING: ♥♥♥♥♥

# Batman Returns

The dark knight disappoints.

■ DEVELOPER: Atari ■ PUBLISHER: Atari ■ PLATFORMS: Lynx  
 ■ RELEASE DATE: 1992 ■ PLAYERS: Single-player ■ ESRB: NA

ONE OF THE COOLEST THINGS about reviewing older games is getting wowed by something you overlooked in the past, which unfortunately doesn't happen nearly as often as finding out that something you loved back in the day is simply a big pile of suck. And then — as this version of *Batman Returns* sadly proves — sometimes you find that what was nothing more than mediocre back in the day is even worse than you remember. This movie tie-in takes its cues from the vastly superior SNES version, in that it's a side-scrolling beat-em-up, but this Lynx game is rife with elements that turn a great genre into a crappy one. Poor striking distance for the main character, an incredible dearth of attacking options, too many enemies with unblockable projectile attacks, and high difficulty (due to incredible cheapness on the AI's part) punctuate the poor choice to give you but a single life. These elements all add up to deliver a deep sense of disappointment. There's no real hook or excitement here, just varying levels of frustration. Obviously, this



would be an incredibly easy game to write off if not for the fact that there could have been a half-decent experience hidden among the cheap foes and awful combat. I mean, by Lynx standards, the graphics are fine, and if you're going to complain about audio quality then you should probably be reminded what system you're actually playing. The game itself isn't poorly programmed; the designers just made unfortunate gameplay choices that render the whole thing a bland, frustrating experience. For example, if you decide you can't be bothered with the awful combat, you can get through a majority of hostile areas by just moving forward and jumping. If that's not poor design, I don't know what is. If you're traveling cross-country via bus and all you have with you is a Lynx, this game, and a billion double-A batteries, it might be worth playing. Otherwise, skip this seriously unsophisticated take on being Batman. ❌  
 —AARON DENNIS-JACKSON

OUR RATING: ❤️❤️❤️❤️



# Batman Forever: The Arcade Game

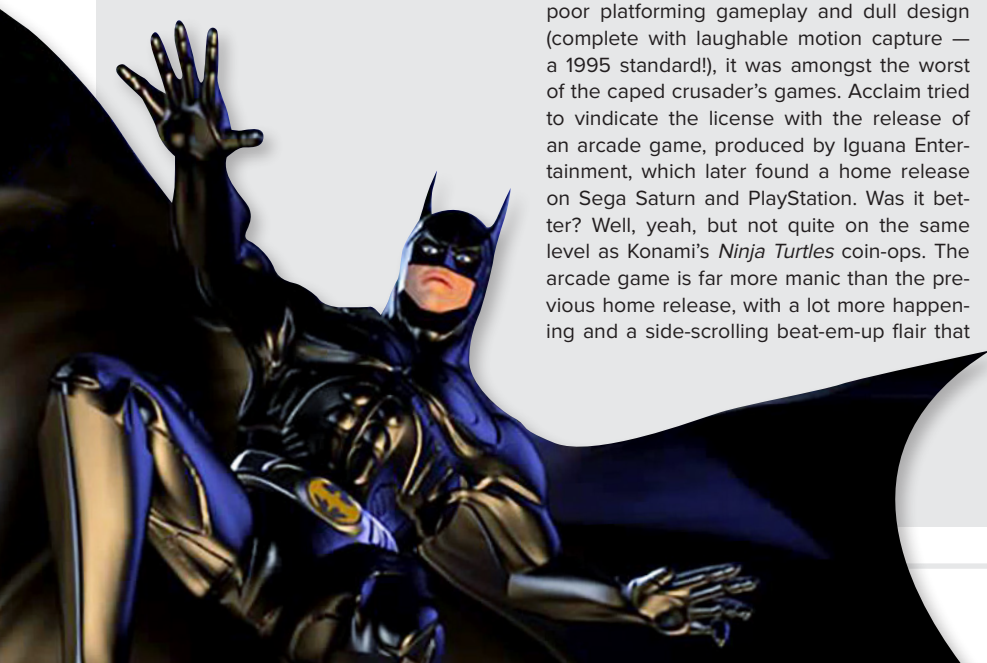
Nothing lasts forever.

■ DEVELOPER: Iguana Entertainment ■ PUBLISHER: Acclaim ■ PLATFORMS: Saturn, PlayStation  
 ■ RELEASE DATE: 11.30.96 ■ PLAYERS: 1-2 players ■ ESRB: E10

WHILE THE FILM *BATMAN FOREVER* may have garnered mixed reactions (Val Kilmer? Really?), it's pretty clear that the SNES/Genesis game based on it was a real dud. Featuring poor platforming gameplay and dull design (complete with laughable motion capture — a 1995 standard!), it was amongst the worst of the caped crusader's games. Acclaim tried to vindicate the license with the release of an arcade game, produced by Iguana Entertainment, which later found a home release on Sega Saturn and PlayStation. Was it better? Well, yeah, but not quite on the same level as Konami's *Ninja Turtles* coin-ops. The arcade game is far more manic than the previous home release, with a lot more happening and a side-scrolling beat-em-up flair that

makes it somewhat more enjoyable to play. Plus, being able to use Batman's special abilities, like the Batarang and Bathook, is a nice touch — oh, and Robin's here as well, so you can have a friend join you in the fray. Despite good intentions, though, the game is just too manic. *Batman Forever* has so much going on that it's easy to get lost in the chaos, and the hit detection is so spotty that you'll find yourself getting thrown across the room by enemies that aren't even near you. On top of that, the graphics get flashy to a point where the screen consistently slows down — it's like a Riddler trick that's gotten out of hand. Of course, if I had to choose between this version and the SNES/Genesis mess, I'd pick *The Arcade Game* every time, because it's at least playable. That said, Iguana could've done more to keep the game's action in check, so that it wouldn't repeatedly go into overload. ❌  
 —ROBERT WORKMAN

OUR RATING: ❤️❤️❤️❤️



# Batman: The Video Game

One of Batman's best.

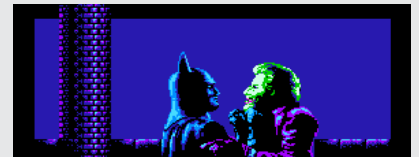
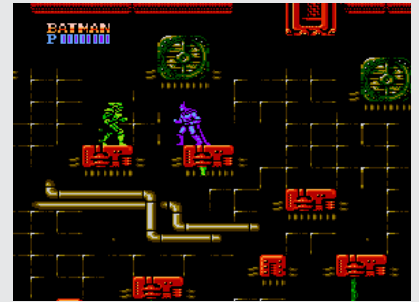
■ DEVELOPER: Sunsoft ■ PUBLISHER: Sunsoft ■ PLATFORMS: NES  
 ■ RELEASE DATE: 02.19.90 ■ PLAYERS: Single-player ■ ESRB: NA

BATMAN HAS BEEN A FIXTURE in gaming for ages, which makes me wonder why he's appeared in so many crappy games when one of his earliest outings remains one of his best. It's been a long time since I've had so many "Damn, am I good!" moments playing a game, and I'm incredibly grateful to *Batman: The Video Game* for letting me have them via its difficult-but-never-impossible platforming and creative implementation of Batman's wall-jump ability. Sure, the experience can get more frustrating than satisfying in the later sections, but it's definitely within acceptable limits, and besides, you'll tolerate that in exchange for the next time your skills make you feel like "the man." Batman is, of course, known for punching chunks out of bad guys, and though clever platforming is the primary focus, combat is a close second. What I love about taking on the enemies in this game most, though, is how Batman's tools come into play. Generally in a *Batman*

game, there's a certain section or level where you have to use one of the caped crusader's gadgets, and then it may as well no longer exist; this is not the case here. Once you collect some ammo, you can wield your Batarang, "dirk," and speargun, and it's up to you when, where, and how often. It's kind of freeing to be able to use this iconic gear without the usual limitations, as ammo drops come frequently. Graphically, the game is an example of fantastic design: Enemies, platforms, and the Bat himself are all clearly defined and you're never at a loss for what can be utilized and where you need to be. *Batman: The Video Game* is up there with *Castlevania* when it comes to design elements done perfectly. Even after all of these years, this is a game that still has a lot to teach and a lot to offer. ♣

—AARON DENNIS-JACKSON

OUR RATING: ♥♥♥♥♥



# The Adventures of Batman & Robin

True to the source.

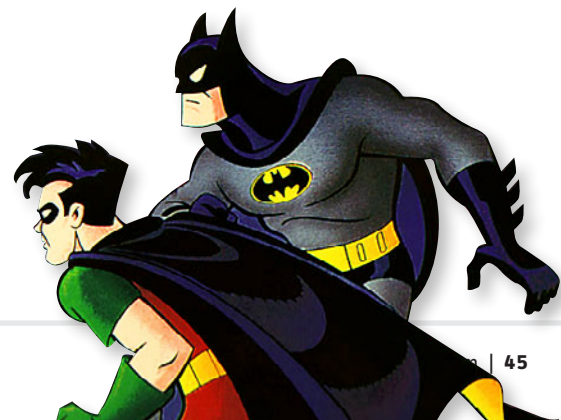
■ DEVELOPER: Konami ■ PUBLISHER: Konami ■ PLATFORMS: SNES  
 ■ RELEASE DATE: 02.07.94 ■ PLAYERS: Single-player ■ ESRB: K-A

IT'S ALWAYS NICE to fire up a game from the past and find that certain flourishes are just as impressive as they were the first time around. In *The Adventures of Batman & Robin*, I was immediately wowed by the quality of the animation. The way that first thug reacts to a fist in the face is still sublime, and establishes how graphically true to the source material the game itself is. The still-cool art-deco design that made the *TAoB&R* cartoon so awesome is on full display — though understandably not as clean as the cartoon's — and the sound provides what's necessary to complete the presentation. This isn't a flat-out beat-em-up but more of an action-adventure, which means you'll be spending a decent amount of time on certain levels. As a result, the music could potentially get annoying, but thankfully this isn't the case, even though "not annoying" is about as good as it gets. It strives to bring the orchestral sounds of the show, but doesn't quite manage. The gameplay is something we don't normally get from 16-bit *Batman* titles, in that it's actually rather good. It presents itself as a brawler — and brawl you will — but opens up the adventure to a pretty wide degree on certain levels, par-

ticularly where the Bat has to track down items or people to progress. And then there's the rogues' gallery with its iconic representations from this era, and their SNES versions contain all the cool design features that make them so popular. The overall package achieves the goal of giving fans a playable version of the cartoon, and it succeeds in more ways than skeptical superhero fans might think. In fact, it's turned out to be one of a handful of '90s licensed titles to actually meet fan expectations, making it one adventure that remains worthy of your time. ♣

—AARON DENNIS-JACKSON

OUR RATING: ♥♥♥♥♥



# X-Men Legends

Slightly shy of legendary.

■ DEVELOPER: Raven Software ■ PUBLISHER: Activision ■ PLATFORMS: PlayStation 2, GameCube, Xbox  
 ■ RELEASE DATE: 09.21.04 ■ PLAYERS: 1-4 players ■ ESRB: T



IN 2004, the idea of using then-blistering technology to finally fulfill the fantasy of being a superhero was intoxicating, so when *X-Men Legends* was released, a lot of folks were keen to control a kick-ass, three-dimensional Wolverine (plus a few weirdos wanted to be Jubilee). It was an exciting time, and *X-Men Legends* offered an interesting take on how action games could evolve. You take full control of one of the X-Men, but also pick another three to complete your team. While they're predominantly AI-controlled, you can jump into any one of them on the fly. As you play through the story your chosen team obtains XP primarily through combat (used to level up your mutants and unlock the various skills the X-Men are famous for), making this a fittingly team affair for a group renowned for working together, an element rarely seen in videogame form. It's a fun, solid experience, but a variety of issues make it less than satisfactory. The biggest of these? The simple fact that the game suffers for being the first of its kind. *X-Men Legends* is easily eclipsed by *X-Men Legends II*, and abso-

lutely buried by *Marvel Ultimate Alliance* and its sequel. All of the elements that make those games great — the cel-shaded graphics, the destructible environments, the combo-based combat — were first featured here, but in *Legends* the mix just wasn't right. Your characters perpetually feel underpowered, the ability to gain more XP from team-up attacks is wasted as they happen by accident rather than by design, and the X-Men uncharacteristically get their butts handed to them by low-level thugs. The voice acting ranges from acceptable to abysmal, and the roster offered at the outset is slim — all the cool characters need to be unlocked as the game progresses. It's fun playing through it with a friend or three, but you can get a much more refined experience from the subsequent games. Despite its design downfalls, *Legends* deserves a lot of props for providing the cloth from which its superior successors were cut. ❧

OUR RATING: ♥♥♥♥♥

# X-Men

Arcade X-cellence from Konami.

■ DEVELOPER: Konami ■ PUBLISHER: Konami ■ PLATFORMS: Arcade  
 ■ RELEASE DATE: 02.12.92 ■ PLAYERS: 1-6 players ■ ESRB: NA

"WELCOME TO DIE!" With those words the fan in me was born. While the *X-Men* arcade game didn't have a perfect grasp of the vernacular, what it did have was a presentation derived purely from the comics. Running around, blasting Sentinels, and using your mutant powers to clean house felt like you were in control of action that until then was only reserved for print. The most impressive aspect, however, was the ability to play six players at once. That alone made *X-Men* a fan favorite, but Konami didn't stop there. You had a choice to play as some of the most popular heroes (and Dazzler) as you faced off against a whole slew of baddies, including Juggernaut, Nimrod, Pyro, and future X-Men member Emma Frost (known as the White Queen here). Every character is voiced and they even give opening quips (which you can hilariously interrupt). Choosing a character requires a bit of thought, especially since they all play noticeably differently from one another.

While normal attacks vary, the differences are most apparent in their mutant powers. They're all cool in their own right, but certain characters (Nightcrawler, Colossus) clearly drew the long straws with the ability to destroy enemies all around them instead of just in front. Another thing to keep in mind is that this is an arcade beat-em-up, and the difficulty falls in line as such. The first level is pretty easy, including the Pyro boss fight. After that, however, you're introduced to free-roaming turret guns that know how to zone you perfectly and lunging lizard people who will tail whip you into submission from offscreen. That's not to mention the boss gauntlet during the final stage. I would go so far as to call *X-Men* the best arcade beat-em-up ever. Being able to play alongside five friends, the comic-quality presentation, and those cheesy lines just make this game an absolute blast. You'll simply never get sick of unleashing your mutant powers and going to town on Magneto and his goons. ❧ —DAVID GILTINAN

OUR RATING: ♥♥♥♥♥





# Deadpool

Dive on in.

■ DEVELOPER: High Moon Studios ■ PUBLISHER: Activision ■ PLATFORMS: Xbox 360, PS3, PC  
 ■ RELEASE DATE: 06.25.13 ■ PLAYERS: Single-player ■ ESRB: M



**SPEAKING AS A DIE-HARD FAN** of the titular character, *Deadpool* is everything I hoped for in terms of style and attitude. It's irreverent, crude, and shatters the fourth wall right out of the gate with its amazing opening scene. Even with all of that, however, there still needs to be a fun game to play. Luckily, the combat in *Deadpool* is satisfying and holds up well compared to most third-person action titles. While not as fluid as, say, *Bayonetta*, it's also far from bad. Basic combos utilizing light and heavy slashes will dispatch most enemies in due time, and teleporting offers a decent way to move away from danger. There's even a counter system that's useful for staying on the offensive and racking up big combos. An upgrade tree helps make Deadpool even more awesome than he already is, with perks such as higher damage and extra points for kills. A variety of weapon unlocks offer a nice mix of melee and long-range options. Using different close-range weapons also presents additional animations for stealth kills, which are hilariously over the top and true to character. The stron-

gest aspect of *Deadpool* is by far the script, which is a metastory involving developer High Moon Studios along with several *X-Men* characters, including Wolverine, Psylocke, Rogue, and Cable. Even Death herself, a known love interest of the game's hero, makes a great cameo. No stranger to playing Deadpool, Nolan North really lets loose with a humorous onslaught that drives the frenetic plot. (That's not to say that some of the combat banter can't get repetitive.) Level design is nothing special, and can even be confusing to navigate. It would have also been nice to see gun and melee combat flow more seamlessly together, but as it stands, it's serviceable enough. If you are a fan of the character in any way, *Deadpool* is certainly worth diving into. Stay for the comedy, and let it move you through the above-average combat. It's certainly not the crown jewel of superhero games, but for die-hard *Deadpool* fans, it's definitely worth checking out. 🍷  
 —DAVID GILTINAN

OUR RATING: ♥♥♥♥♥



# The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction

A smashing good time.

■ DEVELOPER: Radical Entertainment ■ PUBLISHER: Sierra Entertainment ■ PLATFORMS: PlayStation 2, GameCube, Xbox  
 ■ RELEASE DATE: 08.23.05 ■ PLAYERS: Single-player ■ ESRB: E10

**AFTER 2003'S HULK MOVIE** turned out the way it did (I didn't hate it, but...), it's good to see Radical Entertainment bring the big guy back to form with *The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction*, which remains one of the best comic-book games in recent memory. Why? Because not only does it perfectly capture the state of the hero you're playing, it's just so damn fun! Case in point: Most of the missions in *Ultimate Destruction* rely on sheer destruction, whether it's chasing after one of the staple villains from the comic books or bringing down a taskforce that thinks something so trifling as helicopters can damage you. (You respond, of course, by picking up a car and knocking them out of the air — one of the game's many great moments.) The gameplay is easy to get into, and you'll quickly adapt to Hulk's many abilities, whether it's stomping your way up the side of a building (take that, Spidey!), ripping a car to shreds to create a pair of makeshift boxing gloves, or angling a charging punch attack at

an unfortunate target. There's a lot of delightful destruction here. Radical Entertainment did an amazing job with the game's 3D engine, as the city bustles with life. The voice work is strong, too, with Hulk letting loose — along with his adversaries — in full-tilt comic-book glory. *Ultimate Destruction* also has a ton to unlock, including behind-the-scenes snippets, additional skins and costumes, and plenty of hidden content. It's really sad that Radical Entertainment isn't around anymore to bring us more adventures of the Hulk, because a modern version of *Ultimate Destruction* — with the chance to bring down buildings with a few well-timed punches — would certainly hit the spot. At least we have the original game to return to though, and it's still got all the impact of a thunderclap. Don't miss it. 🍷  
 —ROBERT WORKMAN

OUR RATING: ♥♥♥♥♥



# WAS THIS THE WORLD'S FIRST ARCADE SUPERHERO GAME?

# PRO-VID-GUARD-ARGUS

BY WARREN DAVIS

**T**hey say you always remember your first, but for me it's kinda fuzzy, and I remember feeling all thumbs during most of it. I'm speaking, of course, about the first videogame I ever worked on, which also happened to be the first superhero-themed video arcade game ever made...well, that *would* have been made. My game was never released, you see, and who knows what other unreleased superhero games might have been cooking back in 1981? The world's very first superhero game was 1978's Atari 2600 *Superman* (explored in this very issue of *RETRO*). But in 1981's arcades, where graphics were just moving from "blocky pixels" into something approaching "cartoony," no superhero games had yet emerged.

Some backstory. In 1978, Warner Brothers released *Superman: The Movie* to great success. The tagline was "You'll believe a man can fly." And the movie did not disappoint. It was leaps and bounds (no pun intended) beyond the previous live-action incarnation of *Superman*, the George Reeves TV show of the 1950s. The story was too big for one film, so it was broken up into two, the second film focusing on three Kryptonian villains released from the Phantom Zone in the first. The 1970s also saw the blossoming of the

video arcade industry. The earliest videogames (*Pong*, *Space War*, *Tank*, etc.) were hugely successful and everybody seemed to want to jump on the bandwagon. Especially poised to make that leap were pinball manufacturers. For one thing, they already had an infrastructure of assembly lines to build games. And they already knew "coin-op" (the industry term for coin-operated machines). Plus they were facing a desperate reality — videogames were displacing pinball machines in the arcades. If they wanted to keep their doors open, they had to learn to diversify. Of the major pinball manufacturers, Bally was the first to enter the videogame market, with Williams, Stern, and Gottlieb to follow.

Gottlieb licensed a couple of Japanese-designed games (*New York, New York* and *No Man's Land*), and manufactured them in its Bensenville plant. But it knew that if it was going to enter the videogame business for the long haul, it needed to create an in-house design team. To that end, Ron Waxman, VP of engineering, and Howie Rubin, VP of marketing, started hiring. Most of the team was inexperienced — expected for a new industry — so they hired a "guru"... someone with a track record who could design their first in-house game and be a mentor and inspiration to the new hires. That guru was Tim Skelly, known for creat-

ing such games as *Rip-Off* and *Star Castle* for Cinematronics, and that first game was *Reactor*.

As Skelly developed *Reactor*, Waxman and Rubin gave the other programmers a simple edict — "Make us a videogame!" There was no oversight, no planning, or even a strategy as to what sort of games to make. The idealist in me wants to believe that management knew on some level that videogames were a developing art form in which very few design rules had yet been established. More likely, they realized that no one at Gottlieb could tell a good game idea from a bad



■ A screenshot of one version of *Pro-Vid-Guard-Argus*. The hero is in red and yellow.

one. So they gave the programmers (who were also the designers) free reign.

One of those programmers was Tom Malinowski, a self-taught coder who had written some simple games for his home computer. Malinowski was inspired by the movie *Superman II*. One of the big set-pieces in that movie is a battle between Superman and the three Kryptonian villains in the streets of Metropolis amidst skyscrapers and pedestrians. Superman and the villains slam each other into buildings, throw buses and manhole covers at each other, and endanger the citizens of Metropolis. But they have identical powers so they couldn't manage to kill each other. At some point, General Zod realizes that Superman cares about the earthlings, and purposefully puts them in harm's way. In order to protect the citizens, Superman realizes he's got to move the fight away from the population. So he leaves.

Tom envisioned his game as having a similar scenario, albeit without the "running away" part. The only problem (initially) was that *Superman* was a property of DC Comics, which was owned by Warner Brothers. Gottlieb, at the time, was owned by Columbia Pictures. The idea of Columbia licensing a property from a competitor was distasteful. Plus, Howie Rubin had previously worked for Atari and had some bad experiences there in the development of the 1979 *Superman* pinball machine. So with a *Superman* game being particularly unlikely, Howie contacted Columbia's licensing department to see if it could get the rights to any superhero. The answer was no, and as Howie puts it, "We tested some waters, but were not very aggressive."

So without an actual superhero to license, Tom had no choice but to create his own. Jeff Lee, who provided the graphics for the game, has a copy of a design doc handwritten by Tom dated January of 1981 called "*Super-Hero*." Whether Tom was hopeful to get the *Superman* license at that time or knew that it was never going to happen is unclear. But sometime in 1981, Tom got the green light to proceed with his concept. Jeff designed a suitably generic superhero character, and Tom was off and running. So what was the game? Well, our un-

## ALTHOUGH I HAD A FEW YEARS OF EXPERIENCE OUT IN THE "REAL WORLD," I HAD NEVER PROGRAMMED A VIDEOGAME BEFORE.

named hero battles a bunch of supervillains but can't kill them. The main goal is to protect pedestrians on the street. The player uses a trackball to fly around. Most of the screen is just empty sky to fly in, but on the right and left side are the edges of buildings. Other locations appear in later levels, notably a bridge. On the bottom is a street/sidewalk where pedestrians and vehicles pass from one side to the other. The villains can fly into the buildings, creating rubble which blasts out and falls somewhere on the street, potentially crushing pedestrians. They also could grab pedestrians to carry them away and pick up vehicles to drop on them. Superman, err...I mean, our hero, could grab a pedestrian or car from a villain by crashing into them and then returning it to the ground. He could also pulverize falling rubble before it hit the ground. There were more features, but I'm not sure if they were part of the initial design or came later — the game would go through at least four iterations and have four different titles in its struggle to reach the production line.

I was hired by Gottlieb in January of 1982. Although I had a few years of experience out in the "real world," I had never programmed a videogame before. But I was familiar with assembly language, which was the language of all videogame hardware at the time. Still, I needed to learn some basics before I could be entrusted to develop a game by myself. As it turned out, Tom was in need of some help. The game was turning out to be bigger than anything he had done before, and he was a bit overwhelmed.

He assigned me to deal with the rubble. As I mentioned earlier, the villains could crash into the sides of the buildings and create piles of rubble which fell onto the street below. The problem was...what do you do with these piles of rubble? As they accumulated, they eventually covered the street, leaving no room for new rubble and using up foreground objects (sprites

that our hardware could display in limited quantity). Looking back, I can't remember why we just didn't have rubble disappear after a few seconds. It's possible we may have tried that and Tom didn't like the way it looked. But for whatever reason, I was tasked with programming a bulldozer that would come out from one side of the screen and push any rubble sprites off the screen. When enough rubble accumulated, the bulldozer would reappear in the opposite direction to perform the same task.

In addition to the bulldozer, I also worked on the game's diagnostics. This was a mode that could only be entered when the coin door was open. A switch inside the cabinet allowed an operator to put the game into diagnostic mode where they would get a menu consisting of tests (typically memory, sound, switch, and sprite tests) and settings (difficulty, extra life level, number of lives per coin, etc.). This was also a good learning experience for me since it involved all aspects of the hardware.

At some point, the game became ready for testing outside of Gottlieb. It needed a name, and that name was "Protector" — presumably because "Super-Hero" was a little too meta for that era. In fact, the term



■ Another screenshot, from the bridge level, showing some energy bolts falling down.



■ Marquee created for the inhouse joke version of *Pro-Vid-Guard-Argus*, featuring a rotund hero based on Gottlieb's VP of Engineering, Ron Waxman. (courtesy of Jeff Lee)

“meta” wasn’t even known then, except as a prefix. At any rate, some time after *Protector* was deemed testable, I moved on and began experimenting with gravity and randomness (two topics I did not get to explore on *Protector*) on a playfield of my own design, a pyramid of “cubes,” which eventually became *Q\*bert*.

I should point out that Gottlieb’s videogame division was working out of a separate plant from pinball — one with a large manufacturing area currently sitting empty. *Reactor* was being field tested in local arcades and Tim Skelly was still making adjustments to it, but it would be several months before it started production. And although at that time Gottlieb didn’t enforce deadlines or milestones on any project — adopting a freedom it would in some cases regret later — it was keenly aware that once the production line started rolling, it wanted to keep it rolling. Shutting down the production line meant laying off workers and losing momentum, which translated into lost revenue. The pinball industry was used to ups and downs, but it always did what it could to keep the line rolling — usually by lowering the production output (the number of games built per day) rather than shutting down completely. So management was very hopeful that after *Reactor*, *Protector* would be the second in-house game released.

Field testing in local arcades was essential for any new game, for a couple of reasons. First, we (those of us working on the

game) would often go to the arcade and watch people play. This is not as creepy as it sounds — watching other people play was not uncommon. But while others would watch just to see what a new game was about or how good the current player was, we would watch to see how the player responded to the game. Did they pick up the controls easily? Did they get frustrated? Did it seem too hard? Too easy? Were they having fun? Any number of us might go to watch a game on test, but it was up to the designer/programmer to make the changes. Management and others might offer advice or suggestions, but the programmer was the one to fix it.

The second valuable piece of information we got from field testing was monetary. How many quarters were going into the coin box? New games almost always tended to get a lot of play initially as players checked them out. After a week or so, if the numbers dropped, that was a clear indication that players weren’t coming back. Another way we used to get feedback on a game was through focus groups. There would be a small group of people in a room with a one-way mirror who would play the game for a while, then sit down and answer questions posed to them by a moderator.

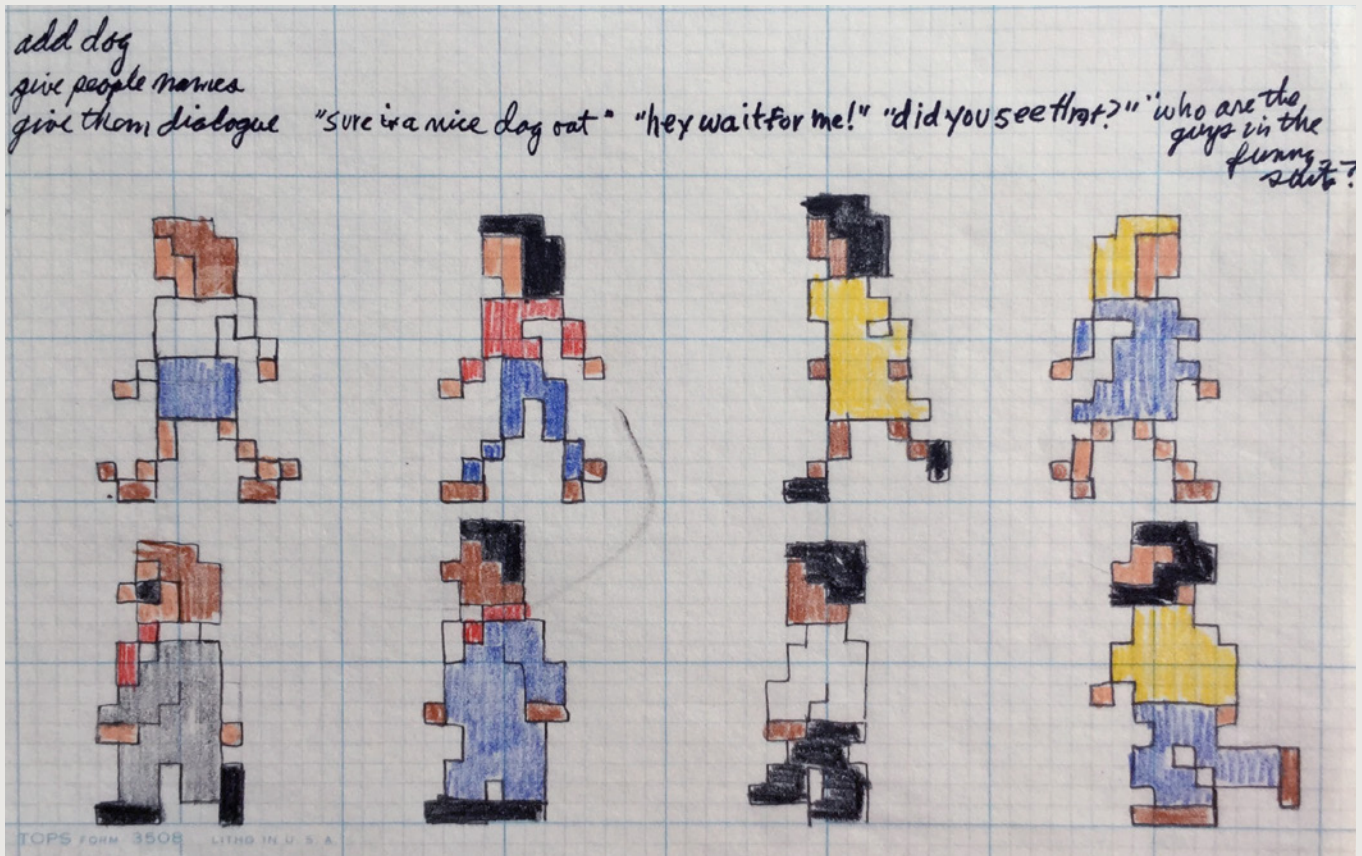
Unfortunately, the test results for *Protector* were not good. A number of factors may have contributed. One was that you controlled *Protector* with a trackball. Pre-

cision was likely an issue, as was the lack of any force feedback when you slammed into a villain. Another problem was in the design. You didn’t actually kill the villains, you just tried to knock them away and keep them from smashing the buildings or picking up cars and such so you could save the pedestrians. This could be unsatisfying at best, or psychopathic if you enjoyed letting the pedestrians die. Changes had to be made.

It didn’t help that the game suffered from some technical issues, due mostly to Tom’s inexperience as a programmer. Kan Yabumoto, a fellow Gottlieb programmer best known as the creator of *Mad Planets* and the Escher screen which was my inspiration for the *Q\*bert* pyramid, believed that poor memory management caused slowdowns. Videogames operated on a 60Hz loop, meaning that the screen got refreshed 60 times a second, and whatever processing you had to do in order to paint a given screen had to be done between refresh times. If your processing went over 1/60 of a second, you’d miss the refresh and the game would appear to stutter. This was a problem.

Dave Thiel, who did the game’s sounds, recalls a focus group resulting in the trackball being changed. “Players didn’t understand what was unsatisfying about the interaction so they reached out to the familiar and insisted that a joystick would fix it.” Shooting was added. I think it was supposed to be heat vision, but as we had a sprite-based system, it looked more like projectiles. At some point you became able to kill the villains. In one version, presumably the last, the rubble was removed. Strange “energy spikes” came down from above and would zap pedestrians if they touched one.

**AFTER A WEEK OR SO, IF THE NUMBERS DROPPED, THAT WAS A CLEAR INDICATION THAT PLAYERS WEREN’T COMING BACK.**



■ Jeff Lee's designs of some pedestrians, with his notes. The guy in the lower right is Warren Davis. (courtesy of Jeff Lee)

Management so believed in the potential for this game that they refused to give up on it. Jeff Lee has a 13-page memo with notes from a meeting on March 29, 1982 attended by a number of us, myself included, which contains, as Jeff puts it, "... an excruciatingly detailed discussion of gameplay possibilities." Tom did his best to accommodate suggestions and made changes dutifully.

The first name change was from *Protector to Videoman*. Why? Not sure. Perhaps just so that when it went out on test again, players would think it was a completely new game, or even if they recognized it, the new title would imply that the game itself had changed sufficiently to give it another go. When *Videoman* didn't catch on, the next version became *Guardian*. Still no improvement. Next, in an attempt to give the main character a non-generic identity, they went with the more specific yet somewhat arbitrary and puzzling *Argus*.

After months of changes to gameplay, graphics, and titles, the game was becom-

ing something of an internal joke. I started calling it "Pro-Vid-Guard-Argus." I'm not sure exactly when the plug got pulled, but pulled it eventually was. Management was very disappointed, as I'm sure Tom was. I'm told that some version of Pro-Vid-Guard-Argus is available to play using MAME, which is actually quite amazing and awesome. Gotta love MAME.

There's another version of *Pro-Vid-Guard-Argus* I haven't mentioned yet. With all the conversations, hand wringing, and hair pulling trying to figure out how to make this concept fly (again, no pun intended), someone thought maybe the answer was to go a comical route. And to that end, Jeff Lee created a superhero, *WaxMan*, bearing an astonishing resemblance to Gottlieb's VP of engineering, Ron Waxman. The rotund hero was swapped into the game and a marquee was created, but as far as I know, this version of the game was always intended as a joke and never tested...although I'm pretty sure Howie Rubin lobbied for it. In fact, Jeff Lee says he has drawings in his

archives of "a couple of other fat guys in costume which are *not* Waxman."

Though the game never made it to production, there are a couple of things about it which are noteworthy. One is the fantastic work Jeff did on crafting the pedestrians who walked back and forth on the street. Each one of them is unique, not just in their look, but in the way they walk and carry themselves. That he could accomplish this with so few pixels and colors is amazing. (And as a tidbit of trivia, the guy with the afro and beard is me.)

The other noteworthy thing about this game is that it connected me with Jeff Lee and Dave Thiel, the two people who would become my collaborators on my next project. I often speak about *Q\*bert* as being my "first" game, and that's true in that it was the first game to which I could claim some authorship as designer and sole programmer. But *Vid-Pro-Guard-Argus* was technically my first. And it's true, you always remember your first. Even if it is a little fuzzy. 🐾

# THE 100 GREATEST CONSOLE VIDEOGAMES: 1977–1987

BY BRETT WEISS

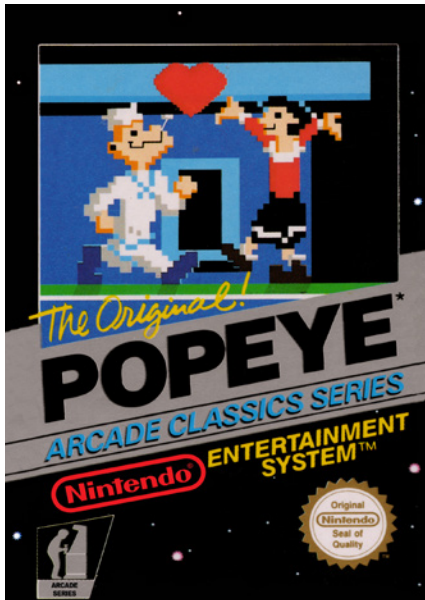
**W**ho was the first comic strip- or comic book-based superhero? Most would say Siegel and Shuster's Superman, who debuted in 1938 in *Action Comics #1*. Others would make the case for Lee Falk's 1936 creation, The Phantom, who had a mask and colorful costume, but no superpowers.

My vote goes to Popeye the Sailor Man, created by Elzie Segar for the *Thimble Theatre* newspaper strip in 1929. Before you scoff, consider the fact that he wears a costume — a sailor suit — and has superpowers. After eating a can of spinach, Popeye gets super strong (and nigh invulnerable) to the point of punching archnemesis Bluto to the moon, spinning his pipe to make him fly, destroying tanks with his bare hands, and closing the Grand Canyon by pulling it together with a rope. He has also exhibited superspeed.

While writing my newest book, *The 100 Greatest Console Video Games: 1977–1987*, I considered three superhero games for inclusion: *Superman* (1978) and *Spider-Man* (1982) for the Atari 2600 along with *Popeye* (1986) for the NES. While *Superman* was a groundbreaking title and *Spider-Man* had its *Crazy Climber*-like charms, only *Popeye* made the cut. It's a terrific, cartoon-like, nonscrolling platformer that apes its coin-op counterpart beautifully, as you'll see in this book excerpt.

Thanks for reading and enjoy!





**DEVELOPER:** Nintendo  
**PUBLISHER:** Nintendo  
**PLATFORM:** NES  
**PLAYERS:** 1–2 players (alternating)  
**RELEASE:** 1986

When Nintendo's arcade classic *Popeye* (1982), which was created by famed video-game designer Shigeru Miyamoto (with assistance from Genyo Takeda), was ported to the ColecoVision in 1983, I played the heck out of the cartridge.

Yes, I liked the character Popeye (introduced by Elzie Segar in 1929 for the *Thimble Theatre* comic strip), whose adventures I had enjoyed in the Saturday morning cartoons, but the real reason I played it so much was because I loved climbing games, and it was a nice example of the genre. Such ladder-ridden games as *Donkey Kong*, *Miner 2049er*, and *Jumpman Junior* kept me busy for hours and hours during my teenage years.

Then, when *Popeye* came to the NES in 1986 (it hit the Japanese Famicom in 1983 as one of the system's three launch titles), I played the game even more, thanks to its improved graphics, controls, and sounds over the ColecoVision port. In a review published on 8-bitcentral.com, the writer said "The NES version really stands out with vivid imagery and great sound — including Popeye's theme song when he eats spinach!"

While not quite as cartoonlike as its coin-op cousin (which *Electronic Games* magazine #14 referred to as having "visual magic" and "flat-out cartoon-quality"), *Popeye* for the NES is nevertheless a very fine port, putting you in the title role. The sailor man's job is to walk across platforms and go up and down stairs and ladders in order to grab the items Olive Oyl floats downward from the top of the playfield. Said items include hearts (the first screen), musical notes (the second screen, which features a side view of a four-story building), or letters spelling out "HELP" (the third screen, which takes place on a boat).

When a floating item reaches the bottom of the screen, the music will change, reminding the player that he or she should hurry down to pick it up before it sinks in the water below and costs a life. Once a set number of items have been grabbed (visual indicators show how many items remain), it's on to the next screen. The higher up the item is on the playfield when Popeye grabs it, the more points the player will score.

While working to complete a screen, Popeye gets harassed by such enemies as Bluto, who throws bottles and chases him, the Seahag, who throws skulls, and Bernard the vulture, who flies across the playfield in the third screen. Popeye can punch the bottles and skulls for extra points.

A can of spinach appears once per screen (unless the player dies, making another can appear), and Popeye can grab this for temporary extra power, namely the ability to defeat enemies by simply making contact with them (being energized with spinach is the only way to defeat Bluto, though he does reenter the game after a few seconds). When Popeye eats spinach, the famous theme song plays.

Other ways to score extra points include punching a tub to drop it on Bluto's head (screen one), stunning him in the process, and jumping on a springboard to grab a platform holding Swee'Pea (screen two).

Like many of the games in this book, *Popeye*, with its endearing theme music, cute graphics, and terrific climbing action, has the uncanny knack of seducing the gamer into playing it "just one more time" to try and get a better score or reach a higher round (a level counter appears onscreen).

As mentioned earlier, *Popeye* was also available for the ColecoVision. Other consoles with a *Popeye* port include the Atari 2600 (playable, but flat and blocky), Atari 5200 (cute graphics, but poor controls), and Intellivision (flickering, blocky graphics and poor controls). There was also an *Odyssey*<sup>2</sup> version (one screen, terrible graphics, includes two-player simultaneous mode where the other gamer controls Bluto), but it was only available in Europe and South America.

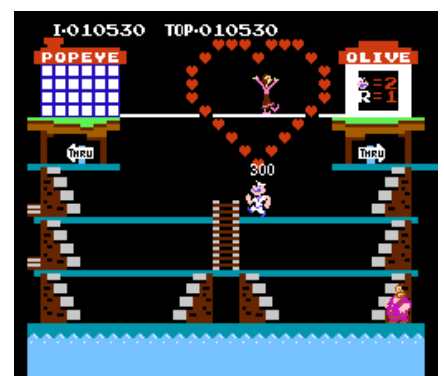
In 1993, Activision released a side-scrolling platformer for the Game Boy called *Popeye 2*. In 2005, Namco released an unrelated side-scrolling racer called *Popeye: Rush for Spinach* for the Game Boy Advance.

When people talk about the NES today, the conversation inevitably turns to such groundbreaking titles as *Super Mario Bros.*, *Metroid*, and *The Legend of Zelda*. That's all well and good (those are indeed great, highly influential games), but players shouldn't forget the system's more retro coin-op classics, such as *Bump 'n' Jump*, *Galaga*, *Joust*, *Xevious*, and, the man of the hour, *Popeye the sailor man*.

**FUN FACT:** Nintendo's legendary arcade classic, *Donkey Kong* (1980), started life as a *Popeye*-themed game, but designer Shigeru Miyamoto had to change the characters when the licensing deal fell through.

**WHY IT MADE THE LIST:** *Popeye* for the NES does much more than simply get by on a popular license; it offers cute graphics and good climbing action. 🍷

The 100 Greatest Console Video Games: 1977–1987 is available through [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com), [barnesandnoble.com](https://www.barnesandnoble.com), and at [Barnes & Noble bookstores](https://www.barnesandnoble.com). For more information, check out my blog at [brettweisswords.com](https://brettweisswords.com).







# THE REACTOR

BY DANIEL KAYSER

WE'RE GOING BATTY OVER BAD SUPERHERO GAMES.

Any time something is viewed as “disappointing” it denotes that there’s some level of expectation attached to it. With superhero games, the expectations are sky high, which leads to less-than-desirable results for fans. It’s easy to draw something in two dimensions and allow a reader’s imagination to fill in the holes, but with games the character models, animation, physics, tactile feedback, and camera work serve to fill in those holes. If it’s not perfect it’s going to stand out — particularly to fans who have already filled in those holes in their minds. And now with the deluge of big-budget films depicting these characters they have an even wider frame of reference to draw from. Of the three mediums, videogames have the biggest challenge in portraying these characters because it doesn’t just have to look good, it also has to actually work during gameplay. More variables mean there’s a greater chance of not getting everything exactly right.

—Shane Satterfield, Founder, SIFTD.net @Dinfire



**WELCOME TO THE REACTOR**, where we pose a burning question to industry insiders to see what shakes out. Obviously, this issue is focusing largely on superhero games — a genre that has been a bit of sore subject for gamers over the years. For every rare gem of a game based on a beloved superhero we suffer endless cheap attempts at movie cash-ins and otherwise lackluster games dressed up with fancy licenses.

So, with that in mind, I reached out to a few friends and former colleagues to get some insight into the following question:

**“Although the *Arkham* franchise has done an extraordinary job of putting players in Batman’s shoes, why do you feel it has been so difficult for superhero games to succeed in general?”**



The first issue most superheroes face is a lack of popularity. Batman is one of the most famous names in comic books, along with characters like the X-Men, Spider-Man, and Superman. So we’re more likely to see finely tuned games based on these properties. Not only is Batman leading the pack in popularity, but Gotham City is one of the most celebrated fictional cities in literature, so people get as excited to explore its depths as to don the cape and cowl. It’s also a challenge to make a superhero’s progression feel rewarding and not linear and boring. It makes sense for Batman to “level up” as the adventure goes on, acquiring new gadgets, but heroes like Superman or Captain America should theoretically be as powerful at the beginning of their journey as they are at the end. Finally, you need a clever angle on the franchise like the trapped, prison structure of *Arkham Asylum*. It was the perfect introduction to Batman’s world, but still required you to stick to a map much smaller than Batman is used to patrolling. If other superhero games focused on a specific aspect of their character’s city, or past, maybe they could find the same success Rocksteady has developing around the dark knight.

—Brandon Jones, Editor-in-Chief, GameTrailers.com @GameTrailersVO

Do you have an opinion on the state of superhero games? Let me know by tweeting @danielkayser and using the tag #TheReactor! 🦇

# MULTIPLAYER MADNESS: A TALE OF TWO MARVEL-OUS BRAWLERS

BY ROBERT WORKMAN

## THE YEAR? 1991, BEFORE EVERYONE LOVED SUPERHEROES.

Welcome to the debut of my new regular column for *RETRO Videogame Magazine*, Multiplayer Madness! Here, you'll find me breaking down some of the best multiplayer games ever made, whether it's fighting cooperatively alongside your allies or competing for couch-bound glory. Let's get this started with a bang!

In a time where arcade beat-em-ups were all the rage (including Konami's *X-Men* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*), two licensed Marvel titles found themselves going head-to-head — though obviously the comic-book fans won overall.

First up is *Spider-Man: The Video Game* from Sega. You play as Spider-Man, Sub-Mariner, Black Cat, or Hawkeye as you take on adversaries galore from Spidey's universe, including Venom, Kingpin, and Green Goblin.

*Spider-Man* is broken up into two types of segments. Punches, jump kicks, and other moves are generally used in the main ones, but then the action zooms out, where you'll be able to shoot webs, arrows, or other pro-



**FUN FACT:** *Spider-Man* actually uses songs from the arcade game *Quartet*. The song "FM Funk" plays in the second stage, while "Oki Rap" is featured later on in the game.

jectiles at foes. This is a nice change of pace from other brawlers, as it switches back and forth between the two.

The game is surprisingly fun, and digs deep into the Marvel comic lore, including comic-book-style cutscenes, complete with brief voiceovers. There are plenty of bad guys from the books as well, including Lizard (the original, not that *Amazing Spider-Man* one that looks like a bad goomba), Doctor Octopus, and, eventually, the big-bad Doctor Doom.

Unfortunately, the arcade game never saw a home release. Sega was already content with other Spidey games, including *Amazing Spider-Man* on Sega Genesis and Sega CD, as well as *Web of Fire* for the 32X. However, some places still have playable units, and the rom is easy to find.

Data East's *Captain America & the Avengers* is 1991's other Marvel-related brawler, and it had a common link with *Spider-Man* with one of its playable characters, Hawkeye. The rest of the cast includes Captain America, Iron Man, and Vision — three characters that fans of *Age of Ultron* will be instantly familiar with.

*Captain America* features many villains from Cap's side of the Marvel universe, including Juggernaut, Ultron (yep, that Ultron), the Mandarin, Crossbones, and the vile Red Skull, the game's final boss. Other heroes will appear with power-ups, including Wonder Man, Wasp, and Sub-Mariner — also from *Spider-Man*.

There are two segment types in *Captain America*. The first is general beat-em-up, where you can use fisticuffs and throw objects around, like rocks, benches, and Cap's shield, if you're playing as him. It's not quite as solid as *Spider-Man*, but still enjoyable.



**FUN FACT:** This wasn't Data East's last game with the franchise. It also made a fighting title called *Avengers in Galactic Storm*, featuring characters like Thor, Korath, Thunderstrike, and Giant-Man, among others. Although not as well-received as Data East was hoping, it set the stage for a bigger series to emerge — Capcom's *Marvel vs. Capcom*.

The second type of segment is side-scrolling shooting, where enemies come flying everywhere into screen range. These stages are brief but are good fun, despite the weird fact that Captain America throws what seems to be a dozen shields at a time when you button-mash. At least the appearance of a Sentinel makes up for it.

Captain America looks and sounds great for a '91 release, and is worth tracking down, especially for those who want to see what the Avengers were like so long ago, when Robert Downey Jr. was known for playing Chaplin rather than Iron Man.

As for home releases, they had mixed results. Data East produced the Genesis version, and although it had its limitations, it was very close to the genuine nature of the original game. However, Mindscape mishandled the SNES version, with terrible collision detection and unbalanced AI. Both versions only supported two players compared to the arcade version's four, but the Genesis one is clearly the winner. 🐱

# THE NOT-SO-SUPER SIDE OF SHINOBI

BY DAVID GILTINAN

“INSPIRED BY” WAS AN UNDERSTATEMENT.

**E**ver heard the saying “Life imitates art”? Well, sometimes art imitates art as well, copyrights be damned!

The *Shinobi* series has a fairly rich history, most notably as one of Sega’s marquee franchises during the late ‘80s and early ‘90s. Ninjas were very hot at the time (mainly because of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*), and the original arcade release starring a masked man named Joe Musashi who had a thing for throwing stars.

It was not until the release of the Genesis title *The Revenge of Shinobi*, however, that I got my first taste of this popular franchise. I never owned the console, so it was imperative to hang out at my friend’s house as often as possible. As a pretty big comic-book nerd even back in my childhood, a few of the game’s surprises made my adolescent head spin.

The game starts off simply enough, fighting outside a dojo with ninjas and dogs looking to tear into your hide. In fact, the first three levels end with pretty typical boss fare, including a samurai, a disco-loving ninja, and a supercomputer. Luckily, you’re well equipped with throwing daggers, a sword, and ninjitsu magic. But upon reaching the conclusion of round 4 you might want to consider combat training less and pop culture knowledge more.

After making your way through Detroit (which is nothing but a giant junkyard, apparently), you face a shades-wearing, musclebound man who loves nothing

more than to chuck cars in your general vicinity. He also looks remarkably like the actor Arnold Schwarzenegger, except for his odd penchant to turn green when you attack him. Perhaps this is an *Incredible Hulk* reference? Regardless, after you score the final hit, he’s revealed to be what’s best described as a Terminator before finally blowing up for good. I guess he won’t be back.

A couple of stages later finds Joe fighting on top of a speeding train that ends with a showdown with none other than Spider-Man and Batman. Apparently both Marvel and DC have conspired against you! This strange boss fight is explained in the first version of *Revenge of Shinobi* (1.00) as a battle with a shapeshifter simply mimicking the two heroes. Version 1.01 changed the Batman design to a more Man-Bat-like creature whom Spider-Man morphs into after defeat. The very next year, version 1.02 added a copyright notice and altered the boss to look even more like Marvel’s wall-crawler since Sega owned the license for him at the time.

What’s amazing about this boss fight is how unabashed a rip-off it is of two iconic characters from opposing companies. The shapeshifter is even called Web-Bat

in the manual for crying out loud. Spider-Man shoots web nets and zips down in his classic upside-down pose, while Batman literally grows bat wings and summons his flying rodents after you. To quote Jack Nicholson’s Joker, “Where does he get those wonderful toys?”

Speaking of shameless cribbing, the boss of the very next round is Godzilla. There’s no mistaking it, especially with its ability to breathe fire as an attack. This was eventually changed in version 1.03 of the game to a skeletal dinosaur and referred to as a “brontosaurus.” Someone may want to call *Jurassic Park*’s Dr. Grant for a quick lesson.

While *Revenge of Shinobi* clearly took liberties with copyrights, it holds up today as an excellent side-scrolling action title. The fact that it actually had a boss who started off as Spider-Man and turned into Batman just adds an interesting wrinkle to its legacy. You would never see this sort of thing in today’s gaming market (at least not from a major release), but I know I certainly wouldn’t mind more crazy crossovers like this. Besides, ninjas don’t follow the laws of man, last time I checked. 🍵



# REAR VIEW REFLECTIONS



A timely look at the evolution of racing games.

BY SHAUN HATTON

Each month, the team at Nerd Block and I carefully plan out what we're going to include in every Arcade Block. We aim high for interesting items that we feel will get people excited. If we get excited about something, there's a good chance subscribers will, too. This month the item we're most excited about is our Max Speed Watch: an LED timepiece designed to look like the dashboard gauges of a car. There's something both futuristic and retro about this watch, and its 1980s aesthetic reminds us of our fond childhood car memories, which include watching shows like *Knight Rider* and playing mind-blowing arcade games like *Spy Hunter*.

Sometimes it doesn't seem too long since the days when I'd pump tokens into my local arcade's coin-op of *Super Sprint*, thinking it was the coolest racing game around (I mean, come on, it had a pedal!). While it's always exciting to look ahead to the future and games like *Forza Motorsport 6*, it's also comforting to look back to see how far we've come.

## OUTRUN

While arcade racing games existed before *OutRun*, Sega's racer brought a lot of fresh concepts to the table. First off, it puts you in the driver's seat of what is arguably the coolest car of the 1980s, and one that many young boys had posters of — a Ferrari Testarossa. Second, you got to choose which “radio station” to listen to while you drove. These reasons were enough to woo players to its electric glow, but throw in the game's low-angle camera, varied elevations, and its end-of-stage course selection, and you've got a racer that stands the test of time. An up-



dated port called *3D OutRun* was recently released on the 3DS eShop to positive critical and fan reception.

## DAYTONA USA

The track selection and car selection of *Daytona USA* is all but nonexistent, but that didn't stop it from becoming one of the highest-grossing arcade games of all time. In 1994, its blazing-fast texture-mapped action made other racing games look pedestrian by comparison, and its big-screen sit-down cabinets added to the feeling of driving a dangerously powerful stock car.



## CRUIS'N USA

Not to be outdone by then-rival Sega, Nintendo published the Midway-manufactured *Cruis'n USA* toward the end of 1994 as a showcase for what its upcoming “Ultra 64” was capable of, even though the machine wasn't running on Ultra 64 hardware (embarrassing, I know!). The game allowed racers to choose from vastly different unlicensed clones of popular cars but the real fun here — and everyone who has played this will agree — is that you could easily select secret vehicles. Confession time — I only ever played as the school bus.



## EXCITE TRUCK

Many gamers fell in love with the Wii because of *Wii Sports*, but the true gem of the system's launch lineup was *Excite Truck*. Nintendo pulled a fast one by not having this be an *Excitebike* game, but for the people who played and



fell in love with it, that didn't matter. *Excite Truck* offered an offroad adrenaline rush thanks not to its racing, but to its emphasis on stunts. Being able to select your own music from files stored on an SD card also helped (my Wii SD card still harbors Electric Six's *Fire*). Using the Wii Remote as a steering wheel was surprisingly intuitive, especially with the later-released Wii Wheel accessory.

## BLUR

Taking many of its gameplay cues and mechanics from the *Mario Kart* series, *Blur* swapped out the karts for sports cars but kept many of the same power-ups Nintendo's cutesy title is known for, just changing their names and icons. Sadly, *Blur* felt immediately dated upon its release, and its failure to resonate with larger audiences led to the closure of its development studio, Bizarre Creations. It was a valiant attempt, but one that ultimately blurred the lines a bit too much.



## SPLIT/SECOND

Released the very same month as *Blur*, *Split/Second* offered a slightly different take on vehicular destruction. Instead of taking the battle to other cars directly, racers triggered stage-altering explosions which involved huge setpieces. The plane crash sequence during the airport stage is impressive the first few times, but its allure wears thin, as does the entire game. Here's to hoping that a second attempt could be made without causing such a split between racing and action. 🚗



SHAUN HATTON is Nerd Block's manager, brand development. He drives a fuel-efficient 2013 Honda Fit. Follow him on Twitter: @megashaun

# SUPER TRIVIAL

Fun facts about retro superhero games by Chris Baker

“Hope you survive the experience!” That’s not just a phrase common to the covers of *X-Men* comics — it’s also what I said to myself when I set out to write the book on retro superhero videogames. And I did! Better yet, I emerged with all of these amazing, uncanny, incredible, fantastic — OK, let’s face it, totally worthless — facts on the subject. Some of which I’ve collected here...

## Fantastic Firsts

Was everything listed here a “first”? Tough to say, but definitely super-close.

- The first-ever official superhero game, *Superman* (Atari 2600, 1978) includes several uncommon gaming features of its time, such as animated character sprites, multiple screens, a pause feature, and some semblance of an actual story in which you even played as Clark for a bit. Its most marketable feature, however? A December 1978 release, just like a certain movie starring Christopher Reeve — Superman was also the first game strategically released to ride the popularity of a blockbuster film.

- Ocean Software’s *Batman* (several European systems, 1986) is widely reported to have invented built-in checkpoints. It may have also invented games where removing the main character’s sprite yields an experience otherwise completely unrecognizable to its source material.

## COPIOUS COPYRIGHT INFRINGEMENT

- *The Amazing Spider-Man* (PC, 1989) pitted the wall-crawler against Misterio’s funhouse full of Artoo units.

- The Fabulous Superstars team in *Baseball Stars Professional* (Neo Geo, 1990) includes one particular superhero among its cavalcade of unlicensed iconic movie characters, such as Rambo, Rocky (i.e., Rambo with a headband) and Indiana Jones. Kind of a disappointing hitting rating for a guy named Batman, though.

## X-CRUTIATING “INNOVATIONS”

- Once you defeat Emma Frost at the end of *The Uncanny X-Men* (NES, 1988) you might be inclined to congratulate yourself for beating the worst superhero game of all time. But that’s only because nothing anywhere tells you what sites like GameFAQs can today: “Beat all levels except Practice. Then, highlight that level and hold Select + Up + B and hit Start.” Only then can you play the final level. *How could anyone know to do this?!*

- Five years later, Sega’s *X-Men* on Genesis confused the hell out of anyone with gaming skills astonishing enough to reach the penultimate level, itself preceded by Professor X informing you to “reset the computer that controls the Danger Room” once you reach its end. And he means your actual Genesis console. Yes, soon after defeating Mojo — and with no onscreen prompting — you were supposed to know to physically tap the Reset button in order to proceed to Asteroid M. Hold it for just a millisecond too long, though? Your game actually did reset. Not even Deadpool could devise something so fourth-wall-breakingly devious.

## LOST IN TRANSLATION

- *Captain America and the Avengers* (arcade, 1991) features the made-for-the-game boss known as “MECH. TACO,”



whose name seemingly derives from tako — Japanese for “octopus.” In other words, Data East misspelled the word they forgot to localize.

- *Spider-Man: The Videogame* (arcade, 1991) ends in grand fashion as the wall-crawler takes on Doctor Doom at his castle in Latveria. It’s just not spelled that way.

## MISCELLANEOUS MENTIONS

- It won’t surprise you to know that Spider-Man has appeared in more Marvel games than anyone — but that wasn’t always the case. From 1985 through 1988, that honor went to the one consistent character throughout the *QuestProbe* trilogy of PC adventure games: The Chief Examiner. (“Who?”)

- Even though *Batman: The Video Game* on Genesis (1990) is completely unique, you wouldn’t know that from the NES screenshots on the back of the box.

- There was this one time when Carnage got fully naked on my SNES and Genesis (*Spider-Man/X-Men in Arcade’s Revenge*, 1992). 🍌

With a past including years-long stints at Marvel, LucasArts, and *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine*, CHRIS BAKER self-published the stupidly long-titled *WRONG! Retro Games, You Messed Up Our Comic Book Heroes!* to the Kindle Store last December. It’s got about 50 five-star reviews worldwide, so he must have done something right. Download *WRONG!* here: [bit.ly/OldComicGames](http://bit.ly/OldComicGames). And check out its trailer: [bit.ly/WRONGbooktrailer](http://bit.ly/WRONGbooktrailer). Follow C-Bake on Twitter via @cbake76.



# Rarities Report: The Amazing Spider-Man: Web of Fire

BY JEREMY PARISH

## IS THE SEARCH FOR THIS RARE TITLE WORTH IGNITING?

Sega 32X | 1996 | Market price: \$250–350

### WHAT IS IT?

While it may sound like a bizarre crossover between Spider-Man and Johnny Cash, that's not actually what *Web of Fire* is! However, you're not far off. It does star Spider-Man, and it will cost you an awful lot of cash.

This was the web-slinger's one outing on the Sega 32X — a 2D platformer with the sort of transitional visual style you'd expect from a game of this vintage (partially hand-drawn, partially prerendered, and all kinds of an ugly mishmash). It's also by far Spider-Man's most expensive adventure, except perhaps for the Japan-exclusive Super Famicom game *Lethal Foes*.

### WHY SO EXPENSIVE?

*Web of Fire* was the very last game released for the Sega 32X and is said to have been produced in shockingly small quantities — multiple sources say as few as 1500 units total. Combine a terrifyingly low print run with a popular character like Spider-Man and you have a recipe for a seriously overpriced game. Its one saving grace is that it's for the 32X, a platform that holds little mainstream collector interest. If *Web of Fire* had been released in those quantities for a Nintendo system, it would probably sell for thousands.

### IS IT WORTH THE HYPE?

Absolutely not. *Web of Fire* isn't the worst *Spider-Man* game ever made (there's so much competition!), but it's also not particularly good. It suffers from many of the shortcomings you'd expect from a game of its vintage and heritage. It's a superhero game on an unpopular platform created by developer Blue Sky, and it plays like it; its heart is in the right place, but it never comes together the way you'd hope it would.

So here's the good — *Web of Fire* really captures the feel of Spider-Man. The hero runs at a clip to put Sonic to shame, bounding and attacking rapidly. He takes huge leaps across skyscrapers and platforms. And best of all, Spidey defies gravity: He swings, he makes impossible jumps, he sticks to walls. And his web-shooters work just like you'd want them to, in that they have a limited (but not unreasonably strict) amount of fluid with which you can swing around. Finally, you can use Daredevil as a smart bomb, calling him a few times over the course of the game to clear the screen of mooks for you.

And now, the bad — the breakneck pace at which *Web of Fire's* action unfolds usually proves to be a little too fast; Spidey has to take stuttering, halting steps in order not to blunder into mindless henchmen who stand around being largely ineffective as combatants but nevertheless remarkably deadly as speed bumps. You stick to walls at the least opportune times. The huge character sprites feel entirely too large for their environments, and most of Spider-Man's bold and heroic actions result in him leaping into unseen hazards. He fights clumsily, thanks in large part to the lopsided hit detection — your fists frequently fail to connect, but bad guys always seem able to hit you.

On top of that, the game is just an absolute aesthetic nightmare. Aside from the hideous visuals, it animates poorly, with stilted character movement and choppy scrolling. The Web of Fire in the title is a laser mesh that HYDRA has used to envelope all of New York, and this manifests as an ugly, glowing, pulsating grid in the sky. And the music, if you happen to feel generous enough to call it that, really embodies the absolute worst stereotypes of Genesis mu-

sic. That is to say, it sounds like someone vomiting painfully as they lose a fistfight with a pile of sheet metal.

Aside from the license (and rarity) of the game, there's really little reason to want it, to own it, or to play it.

### BUT I DON'T WANNA PAY \$350!

So don't? Your friends will still respect you if you don't own *Web of Fire*. In fact, they might respect you a little less if you do.

Unfortunately (in a manner of speaking), the only way you can play *Web of Fire* legally is to shell out a big pile of money for the 32X version. That's the only edition of *Web of Fire* that's ever been produced and almost certainly that will ever be produced. The licensing tangles that exist around old games based on comic and movie properties make it difficult for publishers to justify reissuing even the best of them (see also: the tale of woe surrounding *Batman* for NES on Virtual Console). A poor comic game on a platform no one has bothered to commoditize? Forget about it.

Still, it probably wouldn't be a bad investment. Sega platforms have been largely insulated from the skyrocketing prices affecting old Nintendo consoles, but that can't last forever. Eventually, the ravenous retro collector audience will turn its attention to Sega, and the 32X will be a prime target for people interested in accumulating a complete library — with a total of 40 games and the general popularity of a fart in church, 32X is another Virtual Boy just begging to happen. Might as well grab *Web of Fire* while it's incredibly expensive instead of waiting for it to become impossibly expensive... 🦋



# A DELIGHTFUL DOSE OF *DUNGEON HACKS*

BY DAVID CRADDOCK

## THE 1970S: ALPHAPHOBIA BEGINS TO SPREAD.

**T**he following book excerpt comes from *Dungeon Hacks: How NetHack, Angband, and Other Roguelikes Revolutionized Video Games and Changed the Course of Software Development*, by David L. Craddock. The extract comes from Chapter 2: *Procedural Dungeons of Doom — Building Rogue, Part 1*.

In this chapter, Michael Toy and Glenn Wichman team up at University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC) to create the first incarnation of *Rogue*, their groundbreaking *dungeon hack*.

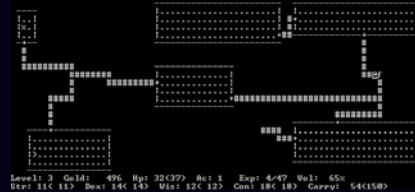
For *Rogue* to achieve Michael Toy's dream of an infinitely replayable game, every element of the game had to be procedurally generated. He and Glenn Wichman sprinkled weapons and magical items into the game's algorithms. Potions and scrolls tantalized. "We wanted to be able to be surprised by our own game. That's why, for example, when you find a scroll or potion, it's got a random flavor and name, and the correlation of the name to the flavor is hidden from the player," Wichman said.

Populating the game with monsters was easy. Lifting monsters from *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Rogue's* authors created kobolds, ogres, imps, bats, skeletons, leprechauns, and hordes of other enemies. Monsters were represented by capital letters, such as "B" for bat and "Z" for zombie. Aggressive enemies began to close the distance as soon as the player-character entered their line of sight, while others, such as monsters stationed by doors, waited for players to engage them. Players and monsters initiated combat by bumping into one another, but some foes inflicted harm through non-physical means. Leprechauns, for example, snatched gold, which impacted the player's final score.

The variety of enemies threatened to overwhelm, but was made manageable through *Rogue's* turn-based implementation, which gave players plenty of time to think encounters through.

Toy envisioned the monsters in his game as living, breathing entities that would adjust their behavior according to how the gallant "@" chose to confront them. While some monsters were infused with unique behavior, technology put down roadblocks. "I was using the biggest, fastest computer I could get my hands on, but it only had 128K of memory," he remembered. "I had a small set of items, dungeons drawn, and some monsters with a few different behaviors. The instructions base [of the computer] was full." Unable to ascribe more interesting characteristics to the majority of monsters, Toy and Wichman simply gave more health and stronger attacks to monsters higher up on the food chain.

The killer frog bit.



Once the game became playable, they invited regulars in the computer labs to try their hands at it. To their astonishment, the imaginations of their players filled in technology's blanks. "People would invent meaning," Toy remembered. "They would place themselves in this situation and their creativity would express itself. They made the world more interesting and beautiful. So even though the thing I created wasn't beautiful, people would color it with their own imagination, in the same way you do when playing a text adventure. I'd listen to someone explain how to play the game

to someone else, and they'd start talking about something that was completely ridiculous and made up. They'd say, 'Here's how this particular monster thinks.' And I'm thinking, That monster? He's one of the non-thinking monsters."

Wichman likewise observed players inventing strategies for survival. Bats, for example, moved in a zigzag pattern meant to imitate their wild fluttering. Crafty players realized they could defeat bats easily by luring them into tight corridors. With no room to weave around, bats were helpless to dodge arrows. "We didn't design the game or bat with that strategy in mind. It's just that bats flutter as bats do. People playing it came up with that strategy for beating them."

Ferocious capital letters moving around on the screen sparked the interest of players who dwelled in the UCSC computer lab, and *Rogue's* high mortality rate poured kerosene on the flames. When players died in *Rogue*, their character was irretrievably lost. The concept became known as permadeath. "All videogames, in the mind of my grumpy, curmudgeonly self, were: To win this game, just go up, up, left, right," Toy said. "[Games were] just a series of moves with timing in between them. Execute them in the right order and you win. Permadeath was an attempt to make that go away. You're in this instant, and you can't make a mistake and try again. If you're going to make a character that wins, you have to be somebody who knows when to run away, or your character is dead." ☠

*Dungeon Hacks* will be published by DM Press ([dm-press.com](http://dm-press.com)) as an eBook on Kindle and other popular e-reading platforms on June 29, 2015. A paperback version will follow later this summer.

# ESSENTIAL COMICS FOR GAMERS

BY DAVID GILTINAN

## WHEN GAMING AND COMICS COLLIDE, EVERYBODY WINS!

**O**ne great thing about being into something as “geeky” as videogames is that there’s loads of related media to dig into. Movies (*The King of Kong*), TV shows (*South Park*), books (*Ready Player One*) and more all serve as great distraction points for those of us who enjoy gaming culture beyond the latest highly anticipated release. Comics also serve as an excellent escape from a hobby built around escapism.

Being a pretty big fan of comic books growing up, and getting back into them not too long ago thanks to the digital market, I’m here to share with you a handful of series that you shouldn’t miss out on if you’re a hardcore gamer. I mean, you are reading



*RETRO Videogame Magazine*, right? Yeah, I thought so.

### THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST

Without question, this was my favorite *Zelda* game of all time. As a comic series, it captured the world of Hyrule and those who reside in it perfectly. Action scenes were epic, but it still retained a sense of goofiness so as to not take the material too seriously. Its tone was simply and purely *Zelda*, through and through.

It’s no wonder that this graphic novel retelling of the events that happened in *A Link to the Past* was so well received, as it was put together by the late manga legend Shotaro Ishinomori. This was the man responsible for other amazing works such as *Cyborg 009* and *Kamen Rider*, so to say he was capable of doing justice to the *Zelda* franchise in comic form is an understatement. His storytelling, although taking liberties with the events in the game, made for an epic adventure that almost had me wishing the SNES title was more linear and followed Ishi-san’s direction.

For example, Agahnim in the game always felt like a bit of a joke and not really someone whom I should be terrified of (probably

because you can beat him with a bug-catching net). In the graphic novel, however, his power is shown off in great detail, such as one epic panel where he obliterates Link with a lightning blast that would make Emperor Palpatine shiver in his robe.

This epic series was originally available through *Nintendo Power* magazine with each of the 12 chapters appearing throughout 1992. It was republished as a complete graphic novel the following year, but has only recently been brought back to print in a book that no *Zelda* fan should be without.

### SCOTT PILGRIM

It’s the only comic here not originally based on a game franchise, yet *Scott Pilgrim* intimately understands how to tell a fun story with gamer humor and sensibilities. If you loved the gaming references in the movie, then you’re really in for a treat with these books.

*Scott Pilgrim* is a slacker and all around immature fellow who also plays for a band called Sex Bob-Omb. Throughout six volumes, the story focuses on Scott’s tumultuous and adventurous love life, particularly his infatuation with a girl named Ramona Flowers. He’s in love and they get along great, but if she is to be his girlfriend, Scott



must defeat seven evil exes. There's a strong sense of musical influence throughout the series, mainly revolving around the Canadian indie scene since it takes place in Toronto.

Originally done in black and white, the *Scott Pilgrim* books have an over-the-top manga feel with full-bleed layouts and epic action sequences where pretty much anything goes. The videogame references make nods to gaining experience, defeated enemies dropping coins, and fighting-game style announcements such as "KO!" and "ROUND 1, FIGHT!" One of my favorite specific game references sees Scott and Ramona performing the *Chrono Trigger* attack X-Strike.

Aside from the frequent and amazing gaming callbacks, *Scott Pilgrim* tells a surprisingly touching story that sees the main character grow up by recognizing his own boneheaded mistakes. There are times that you want to smack your forehead over the way Scott treats the people in his life, but you will later nod in approval as he shows that he's learned from his past displays of "douchebaggery." If you dig videogames, humor, manga, and a touch of romance, this ought to scratch your itch.

### INJUSTICE: GODS AMONG US

I'll admit that I didn't expect much when first reading *Injustice*. I had a passing interest in the story of the fighting game it's based on, and at 99 cents per issue, it was cheap to dive in and give it a shot. That initial dalliance turned into a subscription that's now in its fourth year.

Starting out as a prequel to the events of the game's plot, *Injustice* shows a content Superman who's ready to share news of his wife Lois Lane's pregnancy with Batman. A moral dilemma quickly presents itself, however, as the Joker carries out a demented plan that results in the destruction of Metropolis and tricks Superman into killing Lois and their unborn child. After the shocking *Mortal Kombat*-like execution of Batman's longtime foe, Superman embarks on a more "proactive" mission to make the world a peaceful place, resulting in a tyrannical run by the Man of Steel with the dark knight opposing him. And that's just the beginning of Year One! Later runs in the series feature a number



of fan favorites, such as Wonder Woman, Green Lantern, and Lex Luthor. Even John Constantine joins in during Year Three as magic (one of Superman's only weaknesses) becomes a prominent theme. The year before that, though, probably had some of my favorite moments, notably the entire Green Lantern Corps opposing Supes, and witnessing how his thirst for power leads to trusting Sinestro and obtaining a yellow power ring. It's honestly one of the best DC Comics series out there, and a steal at less than a buck per issue.

### MORTAL KOMBAT X

After the runaway success that was the *Injustice* comics, it was only natural to give NetherRealm Studios' next release the same treatment with a prequel to *Mortal Kombat X*. This comic series follows multiple characters after the events of *MK9*, such as Scorpion training a young Takeda in the ways of his clan Shirai Ryu, Cassie Cage getting her first taste of deadly combat against Frost of all people, and new emperor Kotal Kahn fighting off an uprising that includes a hand-to-hand (-to-hand-to-hand) fight with the intimidating Shokan prince Goro.

Each story is told well and accompanied by visually engrossing art that pulls no punches in living up to the gaming franchise's penchant for extreme violence. Going through various origin stories and seeing them lead into surprising reveals makes for some awesome cliffhangers for the weekly series. If you're a fan of *Mortal Kombat's* lore, you're in for some real treats, especially when past characters show up.

I already mentioned Frost's cameo, but other classic characters who show up include Hsu Hao, Mavado, and Havik. Basi-

cally, the more obscure characters from *MK4* on up will likely make an appearance, and meet a gruesome end. Ultimately it's *Mortal Kombat X* in comic form, so this is a must read for any fan.

### SUPER MARIO KLEMP-WON-DO: MUSKELN SIND NICHT ALLES!

You might be wondering what the hell this is, especially if you don't speak German (don't worry, neither do I). Luckily, thanks to Internet magic, the direct translation of this quirky crossover comic is "Super Mario Plumb-Won-Do: Muscles Are Not Everything!," otherwise known as "Mario vs. *Street Fighter*."

Mario comes across a sign for a *Street Fighter II* tournament, and joins to face off against classic world warriors such as Zangief, Chun-Li, Blanka, and Dhalsim. He ends up winning each bout in unconventional ways, including throwing a banana to distract Blanka and tickling Chun-Li's feet.

Unfortunately, there is no official English translation as it was simply a four-page comic in a 1992 issue of the German *Club Nintendo* magazine. Despite the language barrier, it's still entertaining to see Nintendo's plucky plumber duke it out with Capcom's ferocious fighters. 🍌



# PROVING GROUNDS THE GOLD BOX GAMES

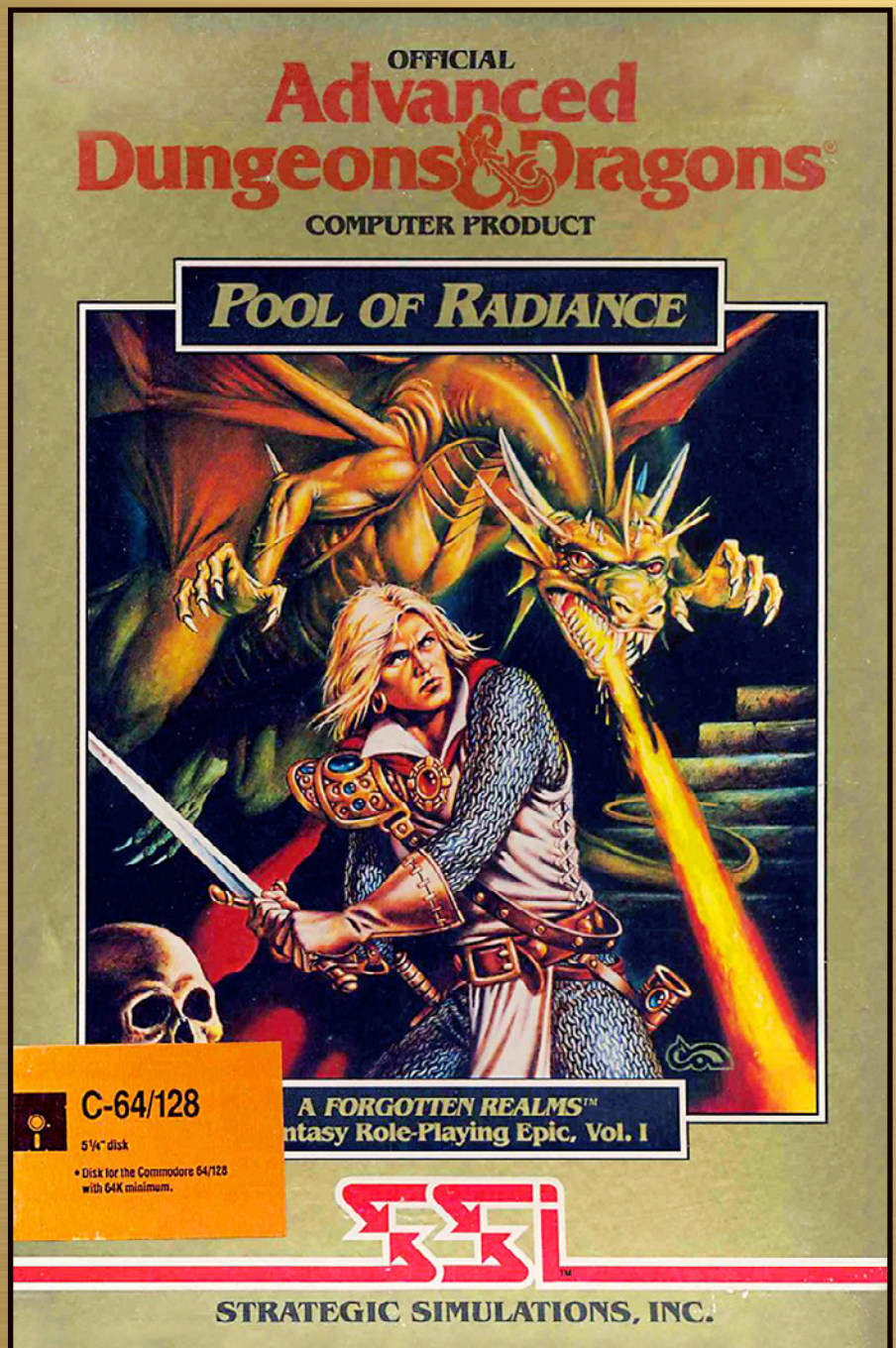
BY MATT BARTON

## WE DIVE INTO THIS CLASSIC D&D ADVENTURE!

**W**elcome back, brave adventurers! Last month, we took you into the deadly dungeon of Sir-Tech's *Wizardry: Proving Grounds of the Mad Overlord*, a 1981 title that introduced us to so many of the innovations we take for granted in modern computer role-playing games (CRPGs). Today we move on to one of my personal favorite CRPGs of all time, SSI's *Pool of Radiance*, a 1988 game that built upon the foundation established by *Wizardry*.

Unless you count the *AD&D* cartridges for the Intellivision console, *Pool of Radiance* was the first officially licensed *AD&D* CRPG. That meant that SSI's design team could leverage TSR's extensive Forgotten Realms campaign setting, with all its lore, history, bestiary, and geography, as well as its well-honed rules for combat, magic, and leveling. However, TSR granted SSI its own region of the Forgotten Realms to develop just for the game, so they wouldn't have to worry about breaking continuity with the tabletop game. It was a win-win situation for both companies.

Being handed the keys to the Forgotten Realms was a big responsibility, but SSI's team was the right choice. They'd already proven themselves with definitive war games as well as CRPGs *Wizard's Crown* (1986) and *The Eternal Dagger* (1987), which featured an awesomely complex tactical combat system. Now, with an expanded team (35, when many games were still being made by 3-5!) led by





Chuck Kroegel, a year-long development cycle, and great assets to work with, SSI was set to create the gold standard of CRPGs. The result was *Pool of Radiance*, the first in a long line of “Gold Box” games that more than did justice to the revered AD&D license.

If you’ve never played *Pool of Radiance* or any Gold Box game before, don’t worry — they aren’t nearly as hard to get into as many CRPGs from this era. If you’re a fan of the Commodore 64, you might want to play that version since it’s the original — but be prepared for some major disk swapping! If I were you, though, I’d try the Amiga, Atari ST, or DOS versions, which have nicer graphics and interfaces. In any case, be sure to get PDFs of the manual, the journal (a numbered set of log entries the game refers you to from time to time), and the code wheel (needed to get past the copy protection at the start of the game, but also occasionally to translate in-game runes).

Like *Wizardry* and Interplay’s *The Bard’s Tale*, the exploration mode of *Pool of Radiance* is rendered in first-person perspective. Once you enter combat, however, the perspective switches to a tactical top-down view adapted from *Wizard’s Crown*. Once in this mode, you’ll take turns swiping at beasts with your melee weapons, firing at them with arrows, or casting spells. Oftentimes you’ll find the fate of your entire party resting on a single lucky

strike, but it’s really all about your skill as a tactician. Some battles will easily take an hour or more — and if you’ve played the game, I bet you know which ones I’m talking about. Damn those skeletons!

After being treated to composer Dave Warhol’s Wagnerian title music, you’ll need to create your own party of adventurers. Even if you’re already familiar with AD&D rules, you’ll want to spend some time reading the helpful manuals that shipped with the game. You can also cheat by cranking your characters’ stats up to the maximum, but you’ll have more fun if you just roll a few times and settle for reasonable scores. You can also have a great time choosing a portrait for your character; there are many heads and bodies that you can mix and match to your liking.

The party arrives at a town called Phlan, which was once great, but now lies mostly in ruins. Your party is part of an effort to reclaim the town and surrounding frontier for resettlement, and rumors abound of fabulous treasures and ferocious monsters. It’ll take you weeks, if not months, to see it all — and that’s assuming you don’t get skewered by the hordes of skeletons at Sokal Keep or crushed by trolls and ogres in the city’s slums. You’ll need every ounce of strategy you can muster to survive these battles, and just wait until you see the game’s end boss, the vile Tyranthraxus!

If you manage to make it through *Pool of Radiance*, the fun doesn’t have to stop there. In fact, there are three sequels that will let you migrate your characters: *Curse of the Azure Bonds*, *Secret of the Silver Blades*, and *Pools of Darkness* (only available for DOS). SSI also developed and published other games using the same engine, including some based on TSR’s *Dragonlance* series and *Buck Rogers*. There are also two additional Forgotten Realms games developed by Stormfront Studios, *Gateway to the Savage Frontier* and *Treasures of the Savage Frontier*. In 1993, SSI published MicroMagic’s *Forgotten Realms: Unlimited Adventures*, which lets you create your own Gold Box-style games for DOS or Mac.

Sadly, when members of the original SSI crew launched a Kickstarter called *Seven Dragon Saga*, a spiritual successor to the gold box games, it failed to attract much interest and was canceled. They’ve promised to try again with a new campaign, but until then, there’s always the classics! 🐉



# Kohler's Collect-a-Thon!

## YOUR GUIDE TO BUILDING THE ULTIMATE RETRO LIBRARY.

# BITS & PIECES

BY CHRIS KOHLER



**THE MARKET FOR ORIGINAL CLASSIC GAMES** has never been hotter. Whether you're obsessed with collecting or just want to play your old favorites in their original format, you're paying more for old games than ever before. Each issue of Kohler's Collect-a-Thon! breaks down the current collecting scene for a particular platform. However, we're going to do something a little different this month!

While we usually expend our column inches on a single console with a library full of hundreds of games, this month we're looking at a variety of more obscure game machines that didn't get more than a handful of releases during their short lifetimes. If collecting over 700 NES games seems daunting, putting together a full set of games for one of these consoles is well within your reach. Every one of you is only five games away from a complete SuperGrafx collection! ♪

### VIRTUAL BOY

**THE PLATFORM:** Nintendo made a run at virtual reality, of a sort, back in 1995 with this cool piece of technology that had no chance at success in the marketplace. The display may have been in 3D, but it was also only in the color red. It didn't last a year before Nintendo pulled the plug and canceled all games in development.

**NUMBER OF U.S. GAMES:** 14

**COLLECTING IT:** Virtual Boy prices have been going up, but there seems to be a ceiling. The only truly rare game in the U.S. was *Jack Bros.*, which was actually the first game in Atlus' *Shin Megami Tensei* series to be released in America. That'll cost you about \$350 complete. *Waterworld*, *3D Tetris*, and *Nester's Funky Bowling* are the next tier down, although any can be had complete for under \$100. Wild card: Blockbuster Video had "For Display Only" boxes for the pack-in game *Mario's Tennis*, which can cost up to \$100 if they're in good shape. If you want to go for a complete worldwide set, there are 19 Japanese games, the most expensive of which is *Virtual Bowling* at well over \$1000. Ouch.

- 3D Tetris
- Galactic Pinball
- Golf
- Jack Bros.
- Mario Clash
- Mario's Tennis
- Nester's Funky Bowling
- Panic Bomber
- Red Alarm
- Teleroboxer
- Vertical Force
- Virtual League Baseball
- Wario Land
- Waterworld



### SUPERGRAFX

**THE PLATFORM:** NEC's first attempt at a follow-up to the TurboGrafx was only released in Japan. It played all games from the PC Engine platform, and had its own library of games with amped-up graphics. It was kind of like the New Nintendo 3DS of its day, come to think of it. Unfortunately for SuperGrafx, the market didn't react well to this half-step measure, and it only had five game releases during its three years on shelves.

**NUMBER OF U.S. GAMES:** Well, zero, but five in Japan.

**COLLECTING IT:** Finding these in the wild here in the U.S. is basically impossible, so you'll have to hit up eBay. On the low end of pricing there's the very common *Battle Ace* and the sorta common *Madou King Granzort*. *Dai Makaimura (Ghouls 'n Ghosts)* is a bit harder to find, and so is the shooter *Aldynes*. The most expensive release is *1941: Counter Attack*, from Capcom's WWII shooter series. If you want to gild the lily on this, you can buy the PC Engine game *Darius Plus*, which features upgraded graphics if you put it in a SuperGrafx. If you have \$1000 to burn, you can buy *Darius Alpha*, a PC Engine game given away as a contest prize that has similarly upgraded visuals. And that's everything that has a unique function in a SuperGrafx. Poor little fella.

- 1941: Counter Attack
- Aldynes
- Battle Ace
- Dai Makaimura
- Madou King Granzort



### NUON

**THE PLATFORM:** Like the 3DO, Nuon was not a console but a technology platform that various hardware makers could license and integrate into their own hardware. Samsung, Toshiba, and others released DVD players in the early 2000s with Nuon capability, which meant they could play Nuon DVD games and use Nuon gamepads.

**NUMBER OF U.S. GAMES:** 7

**COLLECTING IT:** Nuon was the spiritual successor to the Atari Jaguar, featuring sequels to some of that platform's more popular (relatively) games. The four games you'll see all the time are *Ballistic* (known as *Puzz Loop* or *Magnetica* in other incarnations), *Freefall 3050 A.D.*, *Merlin Racing*, and *Jeff Minter's Tempest 3000*. Significantly harder to find is *Space Invaders XL*. And the unicorns are *The Next Tetris* (only packed in with a Toshiba version of the machine) and *Iron Soldier 3* (pulled from shelves after it was found to be buggy). Worldwide, the only other game is based on the comic *Crayon Shin-Chan*, and it was only packed in with a Korean version of Nuon.

- Ballistic
- Freefall 3050 A.D.
- Iron Soldier 3
- Merlin Racing
- The Next Tetris
- Space Invaders XL
- Tempest 3000



## NINTENDO DSI

**THE PLATFORM:** For all its strengths, the original Nintendo DS was a mostly offline system in an increasingly online world. The Nintendo DSI upgrade added front- and rear-facing cameras, support for SD card storage, and the ability to connect to a downloadable games store. Many DS games had DSI upgrades, but Nintendo never made cartridge games that only worked on DSI. But a few third parties did, and these came in white cases with a different box treatment to differentiate them.

**NUMBER OF U.S. GAMES:** 3

### COLLECTING IT:

You'll never have an easier time completing a Nintendo platform's game set. In the U.S., there are just three: *Foto Showdown*, *System Flaw*, and *Picture Perfect Hair Salon*. The first two can be had brand new for under \$20. The third is a little more rare, but if you're patient you can get it fairly cheaply in complete condition. And that's it. If you want to have a complete worldwide set, you can buy the Japanese version of *Foto Showdown*, called *Monster Finder*, and the European game *Face Training*.

- Foto Shodown
- Picture Perfect Hair Salon
- System Flaw



## TELSTAR ARCADE

**THE PLATFORM:** Straddling the line between the early *Pong*-style "dedicated" hardware and cartridge-based systems, the Telstar Arcade was a bizarre triangle-shaped console that had paddle controls on one side, a light gun on the second side, and a steering wheel on the third side. In other words, it could play the three major game genres of 1977. The cartridges were triangular, too, and slotted into the middle of the system. Also they were colored metallic silver. The '70s were great.

**NUMBER OF U.S. GAMES:** 4

**COLLECTING IT:** Telstar's cartridges each contained multiple games, and each was known by a number. Carts number 1, 2, and 3 are fairly easy to find, but number 4 is the unicorn. It pops up now and then, but expect to pay quite a bit if you want it (or any of these cartridges, actually) in the original box.

- #1: Road Race, Tennis, Quick Draw
- #2: Hockey, Tennis, Handball, Target
- #3: Bonus Pinball, Shooting Gallery, Shoot the Bear, Deluxe Pinball
- #4: Naval Battle, Speed Ball, Blast-Away



## ENTEX SELECT-A-GAME

**THE PLATFORM:** There weren't very many portable game machines with interchangeable cartridges prior to Game Boy, but there were a few. Entex's Select-A-Game had a 7x16 screen that could display dots in either red or blue. A wide-body design with buttons on either side let two players get in on the action, a rarity in early portable games.

**NUMBER OF U.S. GAMES:** 6

**COLLECTING IT:** The funniest thing about Entex is that it didn't seem to care a bit about ideas like "copyright" or "intellectual property." The pack-in game for the system is called *Space Invader 2*, and you can bet it didn't bother asking Taito about that. Seemingly emboldened, Entex created a maze game for the console, which it creatively titled *PacMan2*. This one did get it in hot water, and it had to take the game out of stores, making it the last game everyone needs on the platform. Four other games with significantly more generic titles round out the list.

- Baseball 4
- Basketball 3
- Football 4
- PacMan2
- Pinball
- S
- Invader 2



## MICROVISION

**THE PLATFORM:** Handheld game consoles came into their own with the 1989 release of the original Game Boy, but it was a full 10 years prior, in the waning 1970s, that Milton Bradley released Microvision, the first portable game console that used programmable cartridges. For all the kids who complain today about their games being "low resolution," try this on for size: Microvision's screen had a resolution of 16x16. You could make any kind of game you wanted, as long as it could be played in 16 pixels across and 16 pixels down.

**NUMBER OF U.S. GAMES:** 11

**COLLECTING IT:** While Microvision games were released between 1979 and 1982, there were only 12 of them worldwide, 11 of which came out in the U.S. Launch titles *Connect Four*, *Pinball*, *Block Buster*, and *Bowling* should be easiest to track down. You might end up having to pay as much as \$50 for complete copies of later releases *Alien Raiders* and *Cosmic Hunter*. Everything else is somewhere in the middle.

- Alien Raiders
- Baseball
- Block Buster
- Bowling
- Connect Four
- Cosmic Hunter
- Mindbuster
- Pinball
- Sea Duel
- Star Trek: Phaser Strike
- Vegas Slots



## RCA STUDIO II

**THE PLATFORM:** RCA's attempt to make a programmable game system in 1977 produced what is often cited as the absolute worst game console ever. It only had black-and-white graphics, and in lieu of joysticks or paddles just had a telephone-like number pad with ten buttons for each player. These features combined to ensure that it would be impossible to create a game for it that didn't both look and play like ass.

**NUMBER OF U.S. GAMES:** 10

**COLLECTING IT:** Buying the decrepit RCA Studio II and its execrable games will be the hardest money you ever spend on your videogame collection. I would recommend simply pretending it doesn't exist, especially because as you get into the rarer games in the collection like *Gunfighter/Moonship Battle* or *TV School House II*, you actually may find yourself spending in the high double digits for each game. There's also a controversial Studio II release called *Bingo*, which some collectors swear they once saw in person, but there are no photos of it, and it may have just been a one-off prototype.

- Baseball
- Biorhythm
- Blackjack
- Fun with Numbers
- Gunfighter/Moonship Battle
- Space War
- Speedway/Tag
- Tennis/Squash
- TV School House I
- TV School House II: Math Fun



## GIZMONDO

**THE PLATFORM:** Possibly the strangest, most disastrous backfire of a game console launch ever, Gizmondo was released to great fanfare and much celebration in 2005 by the short-lived Swedish company Tiger Telematics. It was billed as a "next-generation gaming handheld" but was actually a "total mess," with games that weren't much better than 2005's cell phone games, which were themselves pretty bad. It released in October 2005 and the company was in liquidation by January 2006.

**NUMBER OF U.S. GAMES:** 8

**COLLECTING IT:** Gizmondo games don't come up that often — usually what you'll see are the European versions. Not enough people are actually interested in buying Gizmondo games to get a handle on which ones are actually rarer than others, although it seems like people have the most trouble finding the European exclusive *Interstellar Flames 2*. Gizmondo may become more collectible in the future, so maybe you should get yours now. I don't know.

- Classic Compendium
- Classic Compendium 2
- Gizmondo Motocross 2005
- Point of Destruction
- Richard Burns Rally
- Sticky Balls
- Toy Golf
- Trailblazer



## ORIGIN STORIES

## EARLY SUPERHERO GAMES



## LET'S BREAK DOWN THE EARLY DAYS OF CAPED CRUSADERS AND THEIR FANTASTIC FRIENDS.

Compared to all other forms of entertainment, videogames and comic books are really quite a lot alike. That isn't always a good thing — witness the gaming industry's unfortunate trend in recent years of making many of the same mistakes comics did during the '90s — but they share a common kindred spirit. The experience of playing a game has more in common with reading a comic than with watching a movie, listening to music, or poring over a novel. Both games and comics combine words and images, absorbed at the player or reader's own pace. Both synthesize elements of other mediums to create a unique experience. And, yeah, the most popular videogames (as with the best-known comics) tend to be outlandish power fantasies, morality tales played out through exaggerated means.

Little wonder, then, that the history of comics-based videogames stretches back nearly as far as games themselves. Since the very beginning, game designers have endeavored to convert comic properties into videogame form, with varying results. Sometimes it's worked

out very well, though more often it hasn't. Still, the hard lessons learned through years of lousy comics games have helped shape today's very best comics-to-games conversions.

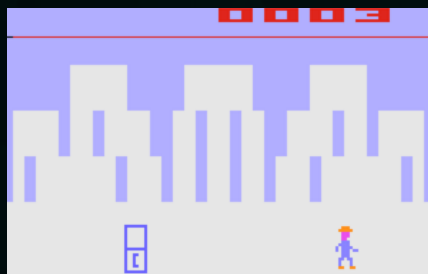
The very earliest comics games appeared on the Atari 2600, so perhaps it shouldn't be too surprising to learn that they focused on pure, simple action. Well, "simple" might not be the most correct term here. The very first superhero game — 1978's *Superman* — tried to do a lot all at once in an effort to reproduce the holistic Superman experience. It saw the Man of Steel donning his identity change into Clark Kent, fighting, flying, dealing with Kryptonite and Lex Luthor, kissing Lois Lane, and traveling through an "open" Metropolis that presented numerous challenges to complete (such as repairing a damaged bridge). In a way, its structure and design resembled that of *Choplifter*, but even more complex. Needless to say, working with 1970s-level technology and a single-button controller, *Superman* designer John Dunn bit off more than the poor Atari 2600 could reasonably handle. It was a game with Superman-level ambitions hindered by Aquaman-level technology.

Happily, when Parker Brothers produced the 2600's next big superhero game, *Spider-Man*, it took *Superman*'s failings to heart. Spidey's first electronic outing was a much simpler affair, modeled loosely after *Donkey Kong* and Nichibutsu's *Crazy*

*Climber*. Spider-Man used his webs to grapple his way up skyscrapers and other structures, avoiding thugs who popped out of windows (like a more hostile take on movie-star cameos during the wall-climbing bits of *Batman '66*) on a mission to prevent the Green Goblin's pumpkin bombs from destroying valuable NYC property. While admittedly primitive by current standards, its simple arcade-style action proved an excellent fit for the platform and the property.

Even non-superhero comic properties found their way into pure action games in the early days, such as *Smurf: Rescue in Gargamel's Castle*, based on Peyo's comics. That ColecoVision adventure saw a generic Smurf venturing across pre-*Super Mario* flip-screen landscapes, completing various platforming challenges in order to save Smurfette. Perhaps because of the title character's inherent limitations as a hero (he could only walk and jump), the Smurf's adventure had a far more straightforward playstyle than *Superman*. Not only did it make a good fit for the character, it made for a better game overall.

These three works represent a sort of trinity of design philosophies for early comic game adaptations. *Superman* tried to capture the sum total of the property, which can prove challenging even with machines more capable than the Atari 2600. It also demonstrated the difficulty inherent in making an effective video-



■ 1978's *Superman*





BY JEREMY PARISH



game out of a character who by definition is practically indestructible. *Smurfs*, on the other hand, stripped its license down to the bare minimum, which worked as a game but really had nothing to do with the Smurfs aside from its superficial visual elements. This would prove to be the basis of most comic games through the years, especially during the 16-bit era when everyone from the Avengers to the X-Men starred in super-generic brawlers inspired by *Final Fight*. Over the years, the *Spider-Man* approach would prove most effective: taking a single trait or power of a comic character and building a series of challenges around that.

Of course, comic books are not just about action. On the contrary, great comics (like all great stories) generally treat action as punctuation, a culmination of story threads and a chance to raise the dramatic stakes. The rest of the time, comics are books. Stories. Full of words.



And, fittingly, some of the most popular and influential early comic games consisted entirely of words.

As with early attempts to translate tabletop RPGs into videogame format, different designers focused on different traits. The action games focused on comics' BIFF-SOK thrills, while Scott Adams' *QuestProbe* series attempted to build on the narrative nature of the comics medium. Playing somewhat like a cross between a Choose Your Own Adventure book and early *Zorks*, *QuestProbe* told tales of several Marvel heroes (The In-

credible Hulk, Spider-Man, and the Fantastic Four) through terse text and static color illustrations. Barely games by the most traditional definition of the word, the *QuestProbe* titles feel most closely related to the Japanese visual novel genre — though it predates even the earliest of those works by some time.

Comics licensees tended to shy away from adventure games through the years, probably because superhero comics do eventually fall back on action that doesn't play well in the adventure-game format. The genre proved a much better fit for indie comics like Steve Purcell's *Sam & Max*; that series' emphasis on detective work, punchy dialogue, and surreal settings translated beautifully into LucasArts' SCUMM engine.

Nevertheless, it's hard to imagine that *QuestProbe* was completely forgotten. At the very least, Telltale's *Walking Dead* games certainly seem to have a little of the creative DNA Scott Adams bestowed upon the medium more than three decades ago.

And then there were the old games that tried to reconcile both components of comics in videogame format: the twitchy intensity of action, and the tricky complexity of adventures. As computers became more powerful, eclipsing the 2600's capabilities, the bold ambitions that the original *Superman* possessed but couldn't achieve became more realistic goals.

By far the most ambitious of these early hybrid games was *Captain America in: The Doom Tube of Dr. Megalomann* (released

for a variety of platforms). Combining action in a *Zelda*-like three-quarters perspective with a sprawling dungeon and a complicated control console that took up the lower half of the screen, *Doom Tube* proved to be an unwieldy and cumbersome attempt to add a more adventure-some component to superheroic action. In terms of oblique design and unreasonable difficulty, it more than slightly resembles such well-intended but ultimately misguided NES games as *Deadly Towers*.

Captain America's awkward first videogame adventure nevertheless had some underlying merit. Its design, at its most basic level, feels like a template for more successful modern takes on superheroic adventure, like Batman's *Arkham* saga. Decades of technology, as well as decades of design evolution, eventually wrestled these primal messes of videogame intention into something great. Games like *Superman* for Atari 2600 and *The Doom Tube of Dr. Megalomann* are the furthest thing from fun to play these days, but where would we be without them? As a wise and wealthy philanthropist once said, "Why do we fall? So we can learn to pick ourselves up." 🦸



■ *The Doom Tube of Dr. Megalomann*

# TROY BAKER

SHOWS BOTH SIDES OF THE COIN AS BATMAN AND TWO-FACE.

BY JOHN GAUDIOSI

**T**roy Baker has played Marvel and DC Comics characters on both the superhero and supervillain sides of the coin. After playing Bruce Wayne/Batman in *LEGO Batman 3: Beyond Gotham* last year, he's back in the DC Universe as Harvey Dent/Two-Face in *Batman: Arkham Knight*.

"Coming in and doing Two-Face, I wanted to do what Richard Moll did in *Batman: The Animated Series*, that was really the template," says Baker. "I got to be the Joker in *Arkham Origins*, which was such a huge feather in my cap and my own fan-boy moment, and for Rocksteady to ask me to come back and do Two-Face I was over the moon."

The actor has been immersed in the DC Universe over the years, playing characters in games and animated features. He enjoyed diving into the dark world of Arkham again after the tongue-in-cheek antics of the *LEGO Batman* franchise.

"What we do with the *LEGO* games is make fun and exploit all of the different things that Tim Burton, Christian Bale, and Adam West did over the years," says Baker. "The *LEGO* games are timeless and ageless because I know five-year-olds that play them and 50-year-olds who play them. They're fun. They're accessible. So I'm glad that I get to play Batman in that kind of iteration."

Baker compares today's infatuation with superheroes to the Greek and Roman gods of long ago. They're modern-day legends that originated in comic books and graphic novels.

"They're bigger than life, but still relatable," says Baker. "That's why we created these gods, because we had to find a way to connect us and ground us to things that we didn't understand, or to find ways that were bigger than us to overcome adversity."

These days, it's hard to turn on the TV or go to the multiplex and not be bombarded by some superhero from DC or Marvel. And Baker couldn't be happier.

"I know that *Gotham*, *Arrow*, and *The Flash* have been really, really successful, but like I'd put anything against *Daredevil*," says Baker. "It's my favorite show right now. I'm going to enjoy that show more than *Game of Thrones* because *Daredevil* was my first love. *Batman* was the first comic book that I ever got. *Daredevil* was the only serialized comic I ever got into. I remember going into the comic-book store and paying 50 cents for my first *Daredevil* comic and being immediately hooked into this person who triumphed over tragedy. The single most horrible thing that happened to him ended up becoming the finest moment for who he was going to be. It's just an incredible story." In addition to reading comic books, Baker

grew up playing all of the games, including the arcade stand-up machines like *Marvel vs. Capcom* and *X-Men*. Baker found that side-scroller fun because you could go back and forth playing different characters.

"I remember the first *Batman* game, which came out right around the first Tim Burton movie and that was fun," says Baker. "It had a *Castlevania* feel to it, but there really haven't been great comic-book videogames up until *Arkham Asylum*."

Baker goes back and plays every single game he works on — and that's a lot of games. He doesn't get any special treatment when it comes to early versions of the games, so he ends up waiting in anticipation like the rest of the gamers out there — especially when a game gets delayed.

"As soon as I saw the Batmobile in *Arkham Knight* I was going, 'You got to be kidding me,'" says Baker. "They're basically creating *GTA* meets *Arkham* and I don't understand how it's going to work. There is no one that's more anxious to play that game than I am."

Baker, who's been busy playing Hawkeye in the Disney XD animated TV series *Marvel's Avengers Assemble*, traditionally preorders all of his games and plays through them the day they come out. Now that's a super fan. ☘



# why SUPER RAD RAYGUN

is more than a super rad game BY DAVID GILTINAN

It's become commonplace to see new games that are clearly inspired by the ones that came before them. This seems especially so for the *Mega Man*-style action-platformer with recent releases like *Shovel Knight* and Keiji Inafune's own spiritual successor, *Mighty No. 9*. Now we can add *Super Rad Raygun*, a spitting example of the genre complete with Game Boy aesthetics and pop-culture references galore. Despite these similarities, though, there's plenty in this jam-packed indie title by TRU FUN Entertainment to set it apart from the rest, including a game mechanic that has roots near and dear to one of the developers' hearts.

When asked about the intriguing title, lead programmer Chris Bryant described *Super Rad Raygun* as a "retro-inspired 2D platformer, with elements of action, resource-management, and discovery" as well as being "a nod to the original Game Boy and retro gaming as a whole." Having played a recent build, I can say that this accurately summarizes what's been put together so far.

Your character, Rad Raygun, moves like Capcom's blue bomber, but in the body of a Game Boy. Even the sprite animations are classic *Mega Man*, right down to the arm cannon and spread-eagle jump pose. One key difference with Rad, though, is his energy meter, which depletes from performing certain



actions. Anything from firing your weapons to double-jumping will require a certain amount of energy (which can be lowered after purchasing upgrades).

Chris again chimes in. "Since *Rad Raygun* is inspired by the original Game Boy, we gave him limited battery life. When his energy is drained, Rad can no longer perform his abilities. He must pause for a few seconds and wait for his energy to recharge."

The reason for including this gameplay element actually came from Chris' own struggles dealing with multiple sclerosis (MS), an affliction that disrupts the nervous system and can cause an array of physical and mental problems. Chris goes on to explain the event that made him and fellow developer Chris Hernandez want to include *Super Rad Raygun's* battery mechanic.

"The idea came about while in Seattle for PAX Prime. When Chris (Hernandez) and I weren't promoting the game, we were seeing the sights of Seattle, which required a ton of walking. For three days, we explored the city, and MS continued to take a toll on my body. I could walk for 10 to 15 minutes, then I'd have to sit and rest to regain my energy. We thought it might be interesting to incorporate my struggles with MS into *SRR's* gameplay."

"Having the battery to watch over forced me to have to consider which upgrades I should and shouldn't have on me at a given

time. For example, if I knew that my next level was a dark cave, then I'd be sure to include an improved backlight for extra visibility. It's a nice change of pace adding in strategic use of upgrades instead of blindly improving every aspect of your character with barely a thought."

Going further into his condition and how it affects him in daily life (including game development), Chris went on to explain that, "Having MS, my two biggest enemies are stress and heat. Stress can trigger new attacks, while heat can cause prior attacks to flare up temporarily. As my body temperature rises through everyday activity, my leg gets weaker and weaker. At times, it feels like I have a 40-pound weight around my ankle."

"Another not-so-fun aspect of MS is cognitive changes. To stay sharp, I strive to learn and grow every day. In the case of *Super Rad Raygun*, we are constantly improving systems and adding new features. This helps me to maintain focus, while continuing to learn and problem solve."

Speaking with Chris further about raising awareness of MS through his work on *Super Rad Raygun* makes what some may see as "just another *Mega Man* clone" into a statement that all is not lost when faced with life's hardships. We all face them in one form or another, but Chris plans to continue working toward his dream of making a retro gaming experience that no one will soon forget. 🎮

# EXPERIENCE POINTS

BY SCOTT JOHNSON



BY SCOTT JOHNSON, MEXTRALIFE.COM • ©2015 ALL RIGHTS RESERVED



Illustration by Thor Thorvaldson

CLASSIC

# GAME FEST

WEEKEND  
WRISTBANDS  
\$15 In Advance  
\$20 At The Door  
\$10 Sunday Only

Kids  
under 12  
get in FREE

### SPECIAL GUESTS:



**HOWARD SCOTT WARSHAW**  
E.T. For The Atari VCS



**RICHARD GARRIOTT**  
Ultima Online Post Mortem:  
A Lord British & Lord Blackthorn  
Perspective



**STARR LONG**  
Shroud Of The Avatar



**ERNIE CLINE**  
Ready Player One

### FEATURING:



**CLASSIC GAME TOURNAMENTS**  
Retro Racers, Fighters & More!



**FREE RETRO ARCADES**  
Classic Cabinets, Computer Games,  
& Systems, Free For Play!



**LIVE VIDEO GAME MUSIC**  
Over 12 artists & Performers!



**COSTUME CONTENTS**  
Wear A Costume & Join The Fun!

**CLASSIC  
GAME FEST**  
PALMER EVENTS CENTER  
AUSTIN, TX  
JULY 25th - 26th 2015

RETRO SERIES

THE BIGGEST  
RETRO  
VIDEO GAME  
CONVENTION  
IN TEXAS

#ClassicGameFest

[CLASSICGAMEFEST.COM](http://CLASSICGAMEFEST.COM)

**PLUS**  
Tons of Classic & Vintage Games For Sale  
Game Buyback Station  
Video Game Museum  
Video Game Artists & Vendors

# LOVE ARCADE BLOCK? NOW TRY THESE OTHER BLOCKS!



SAVE 10% USE CODE: **RETRO**

[nerdblock.com](http://nerdblock.com) @nerdblock