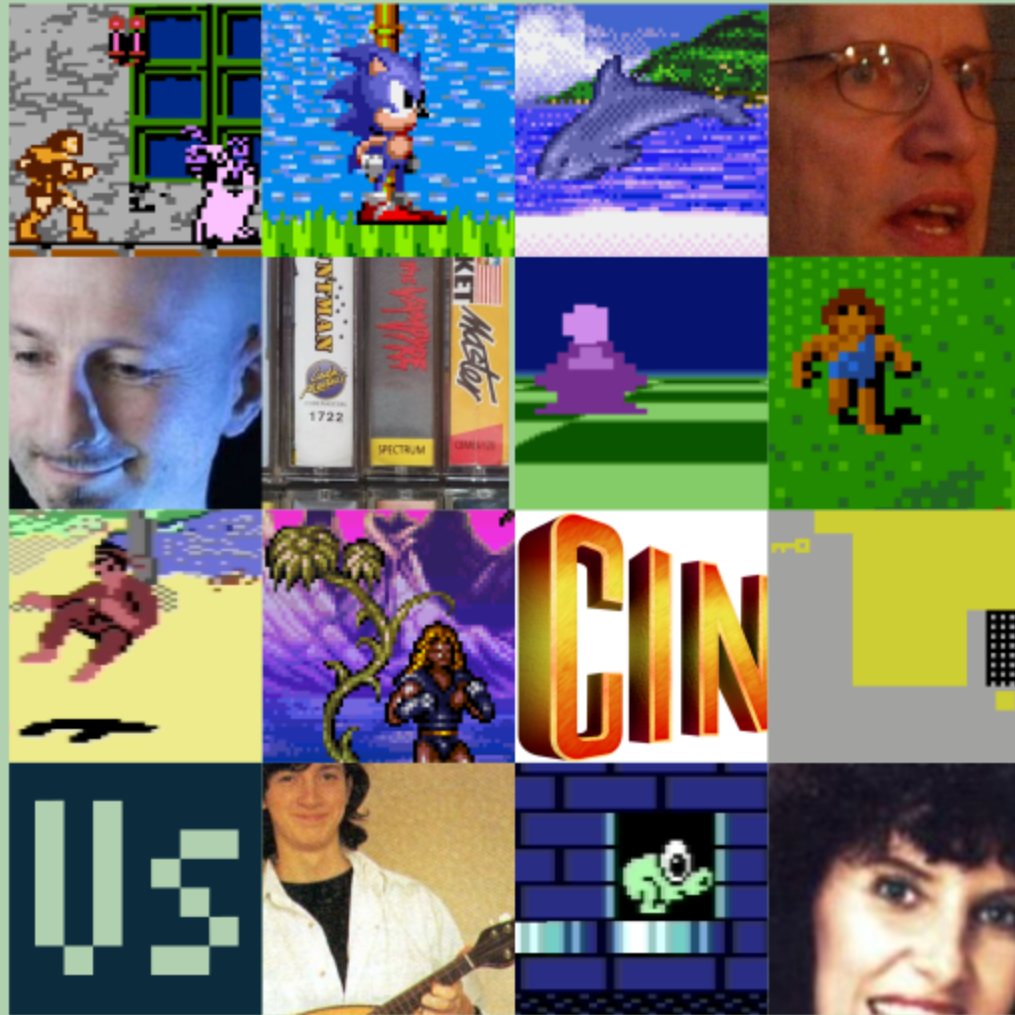


Miron Schmidt

In vintrospect



A year of retro gaming

Miron Schmidt:

In vintrospect

A year of retrogaming

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For Nadine, who supported me at every step of my Vintrospektiv
adventure with infinite patience.

Preface



From December 2020 to October 2021, my life revolved around Vintrospektiv, then a multi-media project centred around videos and articles about old computer and video games. I stopped this project because I needed to earn money again and it took up too much time, especially creating the videos.

This coffee table book contains all the articles I wrote during that time, plus the texts of the short videos. I've slightly rewritten most of the texts to fit this format, for instance rephrasing originally linked parts and updating some historical notes. Everything contained here can also be found on my homepage, though sometimes in other forms, and the presentation here is much more sumptuous.

Because books should be nice to look at.

Miron Schmidt, December 2024

The articles

A look at Cinemaware



Vintrospektiv's first ever video focused on *Defender of the Crown*, a game by Cinemaware. In the second half of the 80s, after the release of *Defender of the Crown*, there was no avoiding Cinemaware, but from the 90s on the company was plagued by an aimless (or altogether non-existent) vision: after it had made a name for itself with action-infused cinematic strategy games (*Sinbad and the Throne of the Falcon*, *S.D.I.*, *King of Chicago* and others), it first refined that concept in the form of games that were more clearly strategically (*Lords of the Rising Sun*) or cinematically (*Rocket Ranger*) oriented, and then expanded its programme to other genres with the action flight simulator *Wings* and the *TV Sports* game series.

At that point, however, there seemed to be a sudden lack of ideas. After a total of four *TV Sports* games, 1991 saw the end of any publications, and a gap of around 10 years began. Only in 2003, after the original rights had been bought by the newly formed successor company Cinemaware Inc.,

some games were reissued or redesigned: *Defender of the Crown* became *Robin Hood: Defender of the Crown* and, four years later, *Defender of the Crown: Heroes Live Forever*. In addition, some games by other creators were repacked and rereleased as a “Cinemaware Inc.” or, after the label was transferred another time in 2005, a “Cinemaware Marquee” production.

The legal situation was similarly convoluted: first, licenses of the old Cinemaware games were given to retrogaming websites and commercial compilations of old (Amiga) games, then for several years the games could be freely downloaded at the Cinemaware website for different systems (Amiga, C64, NES, among others). Eventually, those downloads were removed again and replaced by announcements of new reissues of the games that mostly never saw the light of day.

The current situation: the website at cinemaware.com is non-existent; the reissue website “Cinemaware Retro” at retro.cinemaware.com, has expired and hadn’t been updated since 2015, when it still offered the “Extended Collector’s Cut” (or “Extended Collector’s Edition”, as it was called on the packaging) of *Defender of the Crown* and the “Remastered Edition” (or “Remastered AMIGA Edition”) of *Wings* for preorder at a price of \$45 U.S. each. Both the shop and the contacts page resulted in a 404 error even in 2021 when the domain still existed.

Thus the story of one of the most cherished and for a short time one of

the most important publishers of Amiga games ends pathetically, or at least undergoes a long-term break.

The official YouTube channel, which also hasn't been maintained for several years, can however still be accessed. Additionally, some Cinema-ware games are available commercially (for instance at Steam and GOG).

This was the first real article I wrote on 16 December 2020, right after my first published video. Vintrospektiv used to be in German in the beginning, but I translated the article in August 2021 for my account at Medium. The version printed here follows the archived version on my homepage, which was updated a little to reflect the current state of affairs in 2024.



Infocom: The end of a genre

The history of Infocom has been fully explored: from the founding in 1979 for the distribution of *Dungeon*, which became the most successful text adventure game of all time under the name *Zork Trilogy*, to a leadership that really wanted to publish office software and ran down the company through a series of bad decisions and a lack of understanding of the market, to the end that began with the publication of the last four classic games in 1988/89 and manifested itself in the closure of the company in the same year, after a growing number of employees had already left it.

But what happened afterwards? In most essays, the further proceedings of the name and legacy of Infocom take up a minor addendum at most, even though there were several games, including some successful ones, and even a text adventure, before the Infocom brand disappeared for good in the beginning of the 2000s.

The final days saw the publication of a number of games that had already

shed the genre of text adventure: the *Mars Saga* remake *Mines of Titan*, the role-playing game *BattleTech: The Crescent Hawk's Inception*, the Macintosh-exclusive adventure-RPG hybrid *Quarterstaff: The Tomb of Setmoth* and the similarly constructed *Circuit's Edge*.

In 1991, Activision (the owner of the brand, who had bought Infocom as early as 1986 and caused a large part of the bad blood within the company) realised the continuing popularity of the text adventures – that had already been removed from the market, however. The high-grade, but slipshod collection *The Lost Treasures of Infocom* came out, containing 20 of the 35 classic games, followed shortly afterwards by a second part with most of the remaining games. *Leather Goddesses of Phobos* was not included as some stock still remained, which was now additionally available for purchase via a coupon. Other titles couldn't be licensed.

At the same time, a strategy began to build up on the good name and publish sequels of former games. *BattleTech: The Crescent Hawk's Revenge* came out, as well as *Leather Goddesses of Phobos 2: Gas Pump Girls Meet the Pulsating Inconvenience from Planet X*, which had a witty enough title, but was universally slammed, even though it came from the author of the first part, Steve Meretzky. In addition, games from other developers were branded with the Infocom label without good reason, for instance *Simon the Sorcerer* by Adventuresoft for the U.S. market, and bizarrely the

American NES version of the Japanese RPG *Tombs & Treasure*.

The opportunity to follow up on the company's greatest success was seized as well: the *Zork* trilogy, which had already had two direct sequels, *Beyond Zork* and *Zork Zero*, and a spinoff in the *Enchanter* trilogy located in the same world. First concepts were developed for *Return to Zork*, which eventually came out in 1993 as a point & click adventure with filmed sequences. Similarly, around 1994 work began on a *Planetfall* sequel that was however never finished.

Return to Zork was a great success, and so after a few years (during which the new collection *Classic Text Adventure Masterpieces of Infocom* came out, much better curated than the *Lost Treasures*) two further *Zork* games followed: *Nemesis* and *Grand Inquisitor*. In 1997, Laird Malamed, the development lead of *Zork: Grand Inquisitor* and later Vice President of Activision, realised in the development phase of the game that the flourishing text adventure fan scene on the internet could be a catalyst for a larger marketing campaign. Mike Berlyn and Marc Blank, two former Infocom authors, were persuaded to write a short text adventure as a promotion for *Grand Inquisitor*. Indeed, in August 1997, *Zork: The Undiscovered Underground* came out as the first text adventure by a commercial vendor since 1993, programmed by G. Kevin Wilson, a fan who learned the programming language especially for the game.

Even though *Zork: Grand Inquisitor* was critically acclaimed and a box-office success, interest in the brand at Activision soon waned. Malamed, who had enjoyed a good reputation particularly with the fans of the old games, went to different tasks and there was no successor who cared about Infocom. The two planned sequels to *Grand Inquisitor* silently disappeared, and the name Infocom wasn't used for so long that it changed hands as a brand several times beginning in 2007. Today, it appears that a small game developer named "Infocom, LLC" is the current brand owner.

However, no further games or reissues of old games came out, and after 13 years it can probably be assumed with some certainty that the era of Infocom is finally history.

For more information on Infocom, see Paul David Doherty's excellent *Infocom Fact Sheet*.

This article first appeared on 19 February 2021 in German. I translated it to English for Medium in October 2021.

Concerning "Infocom, LLC", Andrew Plotkin has done a lot of research on the Infocom trademark and uncovered that piece of information, among many other interesting facts.



The British scene

The home computer and gaming scene of the 1980s in Great Britain was strikingly different from other countries. It had its own models, companies and trends that were partly virtually unknown in the rest of the world. This article sets out to explain the differences and explore the reasons.

Even though many of the early milestones of arcade gaming originated in Japan, English was established early on as the language of video games. And while three American companies – Apple, Commodore and Radio Shack – produced the best-selling early home computers all over the world, the English companies Sinclair and Acorn followed a different strategy. As early as 1980, they produced two computers that sold for around £100 or \$240 as a kit, and were immensely popular in Great Britain: the Sinclair ZX-80 from £80 and the Acorn Atom from £120.

In fact, the British home computer scene remained focused on low-cost

models throughout most of the 1980s, which meant that more modern models by Sinclair (the Spectrum) and Acorn (the BBC Micro) with cassette tape rather than floppy disk drives dominated the British market. Even game consoles were much less prevalent in Britain than in other countries.

The tape sector, which was practically abandoned in most other countries by the mid-eighties in favour of floppy disks, therefore continued to play an important role in Britain, and while computer games generally cost as much there as in other countries, a thriving budget segment developed. For instance, Mastertronic started out with cheaply produced (and mostly not too complex) titles at £1.99 each, while Firebird had the “Silver” label at £2.50. Later, labels like “Ricochet” by Mastertronic and the “199 range” by Alternative Software re-released popular titles at similar prices.

Overall, a large part of the British game business was ignored in other countries, especially the U.S., and while games like *Elite* by Firebird were international triumphs, other British hits were issued under different names in the U.S., e. g. *The Sentinel* as *The Sentry*, or remained largely unknown like *Manic Miner* or *Skool Daze*.

Throughout the 1980s, the Sinclair Spectrum was the linchpin of the British gaming business, and while other markets quickly lost interest in the 8-bit machines after the mid-eighties, almost all British games up to 1990 received a tape port to the Spectrum, if it was technically at all feasible.

The British scene produced its own major companies and creators. Names of composers and, to a lesser extent, graphic artists were well-known among computer gamers throughout the world, but in the UK, designers like the Pickford Brothers (*Glider Rider*), the Oliver Twins (*Dizzy*) or Mike Singleton (*Lords of Midnight*) were real stars, and companies were all too happy to finance their games. Even in the very beginning of the home computer explosion, names like Jeff Minter (whose llama-themed games are still famous even today) were widely recognised.

An important development that set the British market apart from those in other countries was the rise of independent game creators. The focus on self-assembly kits and tape media made it possible for everyone to produce and sell games, which led to magazines reserving sections to mail-order offers from independent game designers who often started out as a one-person company and grew with their success.

One such company was Level 9, widely recognised as the English answer to the text game champions Infocom, who started as three brothers creating a clone of the first adventure game called *Colossal Adventure*, and soon grew big enough to employ their parents for the business aspects and mail duty. For long years, the company solely comprised the Austin family, until they struck deals for publication and distribution of their games. (See the *Level 9 Fact Sheet* by Manuel Schulz and myself for much

more information about this remarkable company.)

Most set out to become a big player from the beginning, though many of the biggest firms don't exist anymore: Bug-Byte (dissolved, name sold to Argus), Imagine (bankrupt), Mastertronic (merged with Virgin and later dissolved), Ocean (became a sub-label of Infogrames, then Atari, then Bandai Namco), Palace (sold to Titus, who later went bankrupt) were all hugely successful companies in their time, even though some of them were hardly known beyond the channel.

In addition to the already mentioned *Manic Miner*, Bug-Byte published close to a hundred other games, among them clones of popular arcade titles and UK releases of international hits. Imagine was responsible for games like *Ah Diddums* and *Zzoom*, both of which were quite well-received. Mastertronic had many hit releases, like the titles of the Darling Brothers (*The Last V8*, *BMX Racers*), who later formed Codemasters – the only English company founded in the 1980s that still exists. Ocean is probably the least obscure name, well-known all over the world for film franchise games like *Batman: The Movie* or *RoboCop*. Finally, Palace was mostly known for the games designed by Steve Brown (*Cauldron*, *Barbarian: The Ultimate Warrior*), who had no background in games and therefore stood out creatively because he didn't know the rules.

But there were dozens of other companies who published thousands of

games between them, names like Argonaut Games, Gremlin Graphics, Quicksilver or U.S. Gold., who are all now long gone.

On the other hand, the companies who mostly concentrated on the 16-bit computers, and therefore disk media, were often famous internationally for titles like *Xenon*, *The Chaos Engine* (The Bitmap Brothers), *Populous* (Bullfrog), *Lemmings*, *Shadow of the Beast* (Psygnosis), *Alien Breed* and *Worms* (Team17), many of which became long-lived franchises. Interestingly, though, England's own 16-bit (or rather 32-bit) system, the Acorn Archimedes, was once again commercially only successful in the UK, Australia and New Zealand.

In the nineties, the scene began to change: 8-bit computers had reached the end of their shelf life, the PC was on the rise, and the emerging internet was transcending country borders. Only those companies survived that were able to accommodate the new market realities: either by expanding to other countries and computers, or at least by modernising their offerings and starting to sell them internationally. The others were invariably confronted with a new breed of customers who wanted increasingly larger-scale games that made use of new hardware features. The time of tape-based games that fit into memory had come and gone.

For a while, though, innovation and creativity had flourished in Great

Britain in a segment of the gaming world that was tightly defined by inexpensive hardware and the games to go with it.

I wrote this article specifically for Medium.com, a short-lived attempt to branch out with more serious articles under the Vintrospektiv label. I deleted that account in the meantime and posted all articles from it on the Vintrospektiv homepage.

The picture shows a very small part of my tape game collection.



Why dates in retrogaming are problematic

Fans of retrogames, especially series of games, often celebrate specific dates relating to a game or franchise. But where do these dates come from, and how reliable are they really?

When I launched Vintrospektiv, I needed material to generate an initial interest. While the main focus was put on videos, I decided to start with a few short articles in order to provide additional information not to be found in the videos, and at the same time fulfil my central cause of showing disparate data in some kind of context.

My main area of interest was the computer-gaming scene of the 80s, before the advent of the internet, and also before games were regarded as a cultural asset to be preserved and examined, but then rather as a consumer product that lost its value when superseded in terms of technology or design. Finding reliable information was not a trivial task,

especially when it came to specific dates when games were published, as that was what I was looking for to use in my series of articles about the months in the history of retrogaming.

For basic-level research like that, Wikipedia is often a good source to start out: it offers concise facts, mostly supported by references to further information. I discovered lots of dates pertaining to games, people and companies, and when I quickly cross-referenced a few of them with other sources I found them to mostly match. I began using those dates in my articles. However, there were some cases when a given date didn't match other databases like MobyGames – or even a different page on Wikipedia. For a while, it was a matter of choosing the one that seemed the least dubious, but at some point around April, I decided to delve deeper into those differences and try to find out where they came from. What I found was concerning, to say the least.

While many dates were accompanied by a source, at least the same number were given without any background at all, sometimes different unsourced dates on the overview page for a game franchise than on the pages of the individual games. In those cases where a source was provided, it would need to be followed to find out how accurate the information presented was. There were reviews in magazines with an estimated shipping date (“Will be released on October 30th”) and even quotes from

informal interviews where the interviewed person reminisced about a date in passing ("We shipped the game on Dec. 31"). Pointers to respectable sources like the U.S. Copyright Office were the exception rather than the rule, and every documented mention of a date seemed to be regarded as sufficient proof for its validity.

Of course, while Wikipedia is a useful starting point for more serious research, it remains a questionable source of information without further checking, due to its very nature as an open project with sometimes heavy editing. Thankfully, there were more reputable sources as well, but looking a bit deeper into those, many of them turned out to be equally untrustworthy. This only became apparent after I had collected several hundreds of dates, and inevitably, different ways to validate them: apart from the mentioned U.S. Copyright Office (which can be hard to navigate and may contain contradictory dates with no immediately apparent means to differentiate them), there are magazine archives and, obviously, the internet presences of the companies themselves.

A main problem with online sources, even highly-regarded ones, seemed to be the propagation of demonstrably incorrect data by different independent channels. For instance, someone might have taken a doubtful date from a source not readily available on the internet, and other people used that date, citing the place at which they found it, or not giving any

reference at all. After a while, since every new research might pick out any one of those previous citations, it would look like there were several different references, while they would all really track back to the same original source. That source might have been wrong, or been misquoted to begin with, but for a casual researcher – or even a moderately diligent one, such as I was – it would look like the date had been confirmed independently many times.

To give you one example, at the time of writing, the game *Salamander* is listed on Wikipedia as having been released on 4 July 1986. If you look for other sources for that date, you will find the Gradius Wiki, DBpedia, Academic and a number of other websites, all of which seem to confirm that date at a quick glance. But a slightly closer look will reveal that none of the sites give any kind of source for that date, and DBpedia and Academic have clearly taken their information directly from Wikipedia. It might very well be the correct date, but after an hour of searching, I was unable to confirm it with any authority.

In fact, there are different ways in which a given date might turn out to be wrong. One of the more famous examples is *Super Mario Bros.*, which shows very well how problematic this kind of research can be. In 2012 the author of an article on gamedeveloper.com, Frank Cifaldi, tried to find out the precise date *Super Mario Bros.* was published in the U.S., surprised

that it was still disputed, and even adding, “talk to enough people and you’ll come to find out that we can’t even agree on the year the game came out”. After thoroughly researching the history of both that game and the system it ran on, the Nintendo Entertainment System, he tracked down a number of sources and encountered a mix of all the problems I listed above: incorrect reputable sources, misleading personal memories, an ambiguous date given by the company itself. He consulted several sources, including books, people and internal documents, but was ultimately unable to find any clear and unchallenged date (though he did eventually find a date that he was satisfied to use). He concludes, “If this is the state of video game preservation in 2012, 50 years after *Spacewar!*, we’re in trouble.” I wholeheartedly recommend reading the article to see how many obstacles there were in researching what initially appeared to be a straight-forward fact.

Armed with this new-found knowledge, I decided to continue my article series at Vintrospektiv using the dates I uncovered – but I also formed the plan to add this article as a final instalment in order to explain how I was most certainly wrong many times. In the end, it seems like the time for concepts like “This day in retrogaming” has not quite yet arrived, since it might be necessary to research a given date, especially concerning games from the 80s and earlier, for weeks to approach any kind of certainty of its correctness.

This was the final article in the context of my original vision for Vintrospektiv. It was published on Medium after I had already ended the commercial phase of Vintrospektiv, as a sort of post-scriptum.

The “We shipped the game on Dec. 31” quote comes from an article on Rock Paper Shotgun at <https://www.rockpapershotgun.com/the-flare-path-slye-and-the-familiar-stone>

The gamedeveloper.com article can be found at <https://www.gamedeveloper.com/business/sad-but-true-we-can-t-prove-when-super-mario-bros-came-out>



A look at Danielle Berry

One of my short videos focused on *M.U.L.E.* by Ozark Softscape on the Atari 8-bit family. The mind behind that game was Danielle Bunten Berry, an outstandingly innovative game designer who pioneered a minimal design with well-constructed game mechanics.

Berry, who is often credited as Dani Bunten or Dan Bunten, started her career in 1978 with the auction game *Wheeler Dealers* for the Apple II. It was published in Canada by Speakeasy Software, and only sold about 50 copies due to a custom controller bundled with the game, which raised the selling price. Afterwards she wrote three games for SSI: *Computer Quarterback* (1979), *Cartels and Cutthroats* (1981) and *Cytron Masters* (1982). *Cartels and Cutthroats* caught the attention of Trip Hawkins, the founder of Electronic Arts, who tried to license the game, but was turned away. Berry managed to convince him that she (with her new company, Ozark Softscape) could design an even better game exclusively for EA. After

incorporating elements of *Wheeler Dealers* and *Cytron Masters*, as well as board games such as *Monopoly*, the resulting game, *M.U.L.E.*, became one of the first five games to be published by Electronic Arts in 1983 (together with *Archon: The Light and the Dark*, *Axis Assassin*, *Hard Hat Mack* and *Worms?*). With 30,000 sold copies (believed by Berry to be the result of piracy), the game was only moderately successful, but received many favourable reviews, so another game followed: *The Seven Cities of Gold*, which became an instant hit, and prompted Ozark to write a sequel, *Heart of Africa*.

The next game was originally an attempt to isolate the fun elements from *M.U.L.E.* and remove everything that looked complicated. When *Robot Rascals* was published in 1986, it had become more of a scavenger hunt, and was Berry's first game not to include a solo-player option. This, combined with the card decks that introduced random elements, contributed to the game's lack of success. The next game, *Modem Wars*, was more popular, but due to some disagreements with Trip Hawkins, Berry decided to leave Electronic Arts and move to Microprose instead. After two games, *Command HQ* (1990) and *Global Conquest* (1992), Berry withdrew from game development altogether. In 1997, her last game *Warsport* came out.

Of those games, *M.U.L.E.* and *The Seven Cities of Gold* are nowadays considered master classes of game design, and *Modem Wars* and

Command HQ championed many features that are taken for granted today: real-time strategy elements, modem play (a predecessor of network play), and instant replay.

Born in 1949, Berry grew up playing board games, and remembered those times as quality time spent with a family she otherwise felt was dysfunctional, as she said in an interview with James Hague. She was a fan of *Monopoly* and Avalon Hill's *Civilization*, and both games can be traced as major influences for her early games.

She was born as Daniel Paul Buntten and identified as male for most of her life, though she later stated she had felt to be female from the age of four. After three divorces she underwent a gender reassignment procedure in 1992, and added her mother's maiden name, Berry. While she never questioned the decision to live as a woman, she regretted the surgery. She wrote personal and candid replies to people asking her about it, and eventually compiled many of them into a note to people considering a sex change. In it, she explained, "And what did it all cost? Over \$30,000 and the loss of most of my relationships to family and friends. And the costs don't end. Every relationship I make now and in the future has to come to terms with the sex-change. And I'm not the only one who suffers. I hate the impact this will have on my kids and their future."

Her children, Melanie, Daniel Jr. and Nick, maintain the Ozark Softscape

website as a tribute to Berry and her fans, and refer to her there as “our dad, Dan Bunten”, though there is no hint of any disagreement with her life decisions.

Danielle Berry died in July 1998 at the age of 49, after being diagnosed with lung cancer. Of the many honours she received, the award for lifetime achievement from the Computer Game Developers Association, presented by famed adventure author Brian Moriarty, was given to her shortly before her death.

This article was written as a companion piece to my short video about *M.U.L.E.* It appeared on 6 April 2021.

Both the interview with James Hague and Dani’s note to sex change prospects can easily be found on the internet.



A look at Tim Follin

A late entrant into the world of computer game music (first Spectrum game *Subterranean Stryker* in 1985, first C64 game *Agent X II* in 1987), Tim Follin experimented a lot with the possibilities of the sound chips he was working with, and introduced jazz and rock elements into a scene that was otherwise shaped by classical and early electronic music.

His music for *Agent X II* on the Spectrum is still regarded with awe as it was only possible with the help of a number of programming tricks. He continued creating unique sound effects and instruments, for instance in his music for *Ghouls 'n Ghosts* on the C64 (which he considers his best work on that machine).

His soundtrack for *Plok* on the Super NES is based on samples of contemporary synthesizers (M1 and Wavestation by Korg) and real guitars. The beach/sea level is a good example for the idiosyncratic mixture of New Age, Easy Listening and rock music.

After composing the music for more than 50 games on a dozen systems, he withdrew from computer game music in 2006, disappointed after realising that his work was increasibly based on speculation and often paid extremely late or not at all when delays occurred (sometimes over several years) or development was cancelled early.

In 2015 he returned with his self-produced game *Contradiction: Spot the Liar!*, financed through a Kickstarter campaign, that received generally positive reviews.

GST Channel has a fantastic video on YouTube that can be wholeheartedly recommended to anyone interested in Tim's musical development and his methods.

The German version of this short article was posted on 19 December 2020, Tim Follin's 50th birthday. This translated version appeared on my homepage in September 2024.

The article originally featured links for every mentioned game and the GST video, but you can look these up on YouTube yourself if you're interested. (You should be!)



A look at Bob Bates

Long before his name was associated with “Legend”, Bob Bates was legendary: for Infocom, using the name “Challenge, Inc.”, he first wrote the last text adventure without graphics (but with sound on some systems) in 1987, *Sherlock: The Riddle of the Crown Jewels*, and then the very last Infocom text adventure in 1989, *Arthur: The Quest for Excalibur*.

Directly afterwards, he founded Legend Entertainment with Mike Verdu and also wrote the two text adventures *TimeQuest* and *Eric the Unready*, before the company said good-bye to text games and switched to graphical adventures. Even then, he was still getting involved as a writer and producer for games like *Companions of Xanth*, *Shannara* and *Unreal II*.

Following the end of Legend, after he had worked on his career as a novelist for some years Bob returned to his gaming roots in 2017, publishing *Thaumisty: In Charm's Way*, a classic text adventure with a modern user interface.

You can find everything about his current activities (both as a writer and a game developer) on his homepage.

This article appeared in German on 11 December 2020, Bob Bates' 63rd birthday, roughly a week before the one about Tim Follin. Again, it was originally in German and translated in August 2024.
Bob Bates' homepage: <https://www.bobbates.com>



A look at Mark Sheeky

The author, artist and composer of the game *Rage* that was featured in my second short video has had a more versatile career than most creators.

As a youth in central England he programmed his first games in BASIC on the Dragon 32 and the C64. Eventually, he began programming games in assembler on the Amiga. To that end, he founded the company Scorpius, where as the only employee he was responsible for the design, code, graphics and music. In this role he finished a total of 22 games between 1991 and 1997 which he published first as public domain or freeware, and then as shareware. Only a single one came out commercially: *Burnout* by Vulcan Software.

In 1998 he created the new label Cornutopia and began programming games for Windows. The last one of those games that were published over various channels, *Gunstorm II*, came out in 2008 as his 24th game for Windows.

In addition to the Amiga soundtracks, he composed his first album, *Genesis*, as early as in 1996. About two dozen further albums followed, many based on his game compositions, but also more serious concept albums, which were all published on his own label, again called Cornutopia. It goes without saying that the recording software for all these releases was also created by himself.

Around 2008 he began to work mostly in painting, first with oil, then watercolour. From 2011 he added short stories and novellas, which he published under the name Pentangel Books, founded a year later.

In 2018, give or take a year, he also returned to games, offering new and modernised versions of older Windows games via Steam.

All of these feats can be witnessed on his homepage, where you will also find download links for his old games.

This was published on my homepage on 12 January 2021 in German. The translated version appeared in March 2024.

I contacted Mark about the article in order to get permission to use his art (not included here). He was incredibly nice about it and even told me he speaks a little German through his girlfriend's family and would try to read the article.

The videos

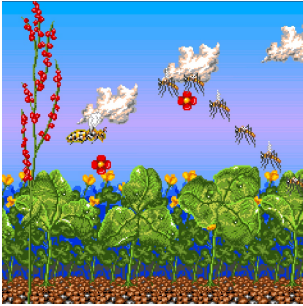
Adventure (Atari 2600)



- *Adventure* came out in 1980 after 2 years of development.
- One of the most successful 2600 games, with over 1 million sold units
- Today widely regarded the best Atari 2600 game, and one of the best games of its period
- Introduced many “firsts”, notably including being the first action adventure game
- Designed and programmed by Warren Robinett
- Conceived as a graphical version of the original “Colossal Cave” Adventure
- Uses up a full 4 KB cartridge with just 15 bytes left free
- 3 dragons have to be defeated: Yorgle, Grundle and Rhindle.
- 30 rooms
- 3 difficulty settings, with the hardest randomising the items in the game

This is the format of all the short videos I produced for Vintro-spektiv: 8 to 11 condensed info bits about the game, presented over a period of 59 seconds.

The videos are presented here in alphabetical order. The texts are largely unchanged, but some formatting has been added.



Apidya (Amiga)

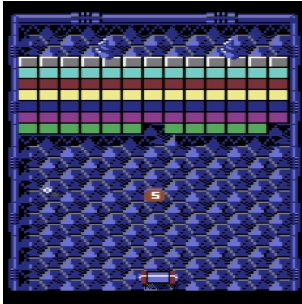
- *Apidya* was published in 1992 by Kaiko: a classic side-scroller in an unusual setting.
- Design and programming: Peter Thierolf
- Kaiko were also the creators of the game: Thierolf, Frank Matzke and Chris Hülbeck.
- The title is an allusion to the scientific name of bees, "apidae".
- In addition to the graphics, the mature and sophisticated controls were also well received.
- 5 levels, each with 3 stages and several bosses
- The weapons progression by collecting bonuses is a central aspect of the game.

Archon

(Atari 8-bit family)



- *Archon* came out in 1983 for the Atari 800, and later for many other systems.
- It was inspired by the holographic chess game in *Star Wars*.
- One of the first five games published by Electronic Arts
- Jon Freeman of Free Fall Associates had previously co-founded Epyx Software.
- Composer Tommy Dunbar originally recorded the theme as a rock song.
- Strategic elements must be mastered as well as action sequences.
- 16 different pieces with distinct abilities (range, speed, toughness, attack)
- 7 spells for the Sorceress and Wizard



Arkanoid (C64)

- *Arkanoid* came out in 1986 and single-handedly revived the *Breakout* genre. • (See my video on *Breakout* for more information.) • Originally an arcade game, it was ported to dozens of systems and had several sequels.
- The much-revered C64 version is the only one to feature a title song.
- Martin Galway's music was the first to make use of a virtual fourth channel ... though other composers had worked on similar concepts at the same time. • The drums on the fourth channel were not sampled, but generated. • 10 block types • 7 extras to collect (with only one active at a time) • 32 levels (35 on the U.S. NES version) plus a final boss fight

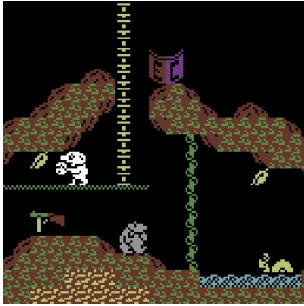
Developer/publisher: Taito (Imagine for the C64 version)

Armalyte (C64)



- *Armalyte* was released in 1988 exclusively for the C64.
- It was marketed as a sequel to *Delta*, though the design was completely independent of it.
- The game is usually numbered among the best horizontally-scrolling shoot 'em up games on the C64.
- One of the reasons is that it gets progressively harder with a fairly easy beginning.
- Weapon upgrades and power-ups are kept for the duration of a level, and retained when losing a life.
- In 2010, a Windows port came out done by Psytronik, but officially approved by the original creators.
- 7 power-ups, 3 super weapons
- Up to 4 super weapon batteries with 6 charges each

Developer/publisher: Thalamus Ltd



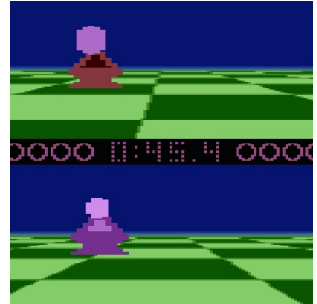
Auf Wiedersehen Monty (C64)

- The 1987 successor of *Monty on the Run* • The name is a play on the British show *Auf Wiedersehen, Pet*.
- Story: after the escape in the last episode, Monty must flee through Europe for the Greek island of Montos.
- Again there are several items to pick up and use.
- For purchasing the island you collect "EC", as the Euro was meant to be called at the time.
- Game design: Peter Harrap and Shaun Hollingworth • The music was created collaboratively by Rob Hubbard and Ben Daglish.
- 80 screens in 14 countries • 1 mini game in the plane

Developer/publisher: Gremlin Graphics

Ballblazer

(Atari 8-bit family)



• *Ballblazer* came out in 1985 for the Atari 8-bit family, and later for several other platforms. • It was the first game (concurrently with *Rescue on Fractalus*) by Lucasfilm Games ... who had been funded by Atari, but were published by Epyx after the original deal was canceled. • However, both games were designed with the Atari computers in mind. • The 3D representation of the playing field was well-received, as was the fast gameplay. • The physics simulation is simple but effective and contributes to the overall polished feeling. • The famous title track, *Song of the Grid*, was composed by lead programmer Peter Langston ... using a self-designed algorithm to produce random sections and a generated melody. • The game is hard to follow, so a spectator needs to know the rules and game mechanics quite well.



Barbarian (C64)

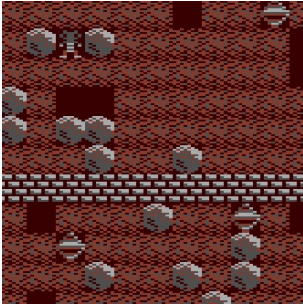
- *Barbarian* (or *Death Sword* in the U. S.) was published by Palace Software in 1987 for the C64.
- Though the game was most famous for its beheading move, a controversy started about the sexist cover ... which (unusually) featured a photo of bodybuilder Michael Van Wijk and page 3 model Maria Whittaker.
- The one-player mode story has the player rescue an abducted princess by defeating a wizard and his cronies.
- Designer Steve Brown had started at Palace with no experience, and stirred up the market with some innovative ideas that resulted in games like *Cauldron*.
- Brown claimed that the German version was removed from the ban list after the blood was re-coloured green ... but that is a myth, as the game was really removed automatically after 25 years in 2012.
- 4 sceneries, 2 for the one-player and 2 for the two-player game

Bombo (C64)



- *Bombo* came out in 1986 exclusively for the C64.
- It was an obvious ripoff of *Bomb Jack* from 1984, which came out for the C64 shortly before.
- The music ranks among composer Ben Daglish's most famous works.
- 20 bombs on each screen
- Collecting the flashing bombs in order unlocks an invincibility mode.
- 3 distinct screens
- The levels get progressively harder with more complicated patterns and more opponents.

Developer/publisher: Rino



Boulder Dash (Atari 8-bit family)

- *Boulder Dash* came out in 1984 for the Atari 8-bit range.
- It was wildly successful, with more than 20 sequels and spin-offs to date.
- It even became one of the few games to be ported from home systems to the arcades.
- There were also countless copies, some with their own additional features.
- The main character, Rockford, was named in the manual, and got his own series later on.
- 16 levels, plus 4 intermissions
- 5 difficulty levels, which affect the number of jewels to be collected and the time limit
- 9 different “game elements”, including monsters

Developer/publisher: First Star Software

Bubba 'n' Stix (Amiga)



• *Bubba 'n' Stix* came out in 1994 for the Amiga and Sega Mega Drive/Genesis. • The second main character, Stix, is a sentient stick ... that can be used as a weapon, climbing help or a number of tools. • Back story: Bubba has been abducted by an alien, and subsequently befriended Stix. • The original idea to create a dark & moody game centred around a stick was scrapped ... when it became clear that a stick as a tool is more of a comedy element. • Character designer Billy Allison was also responsible for the box art. • The game was well-received, but commercially it was just moderately successful. • 5 levels with multiple checkpoints

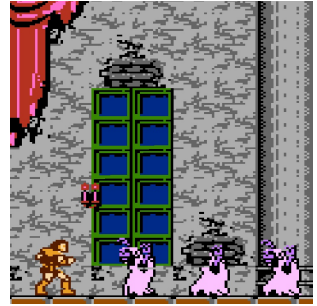
Developer/publisher: Core Design



California Games (C64)

- *California Games* was released in 1987 for the C64 and Apple II. • It was the successful attempt to branch off the popular “Games” series of Olympic events ... by the same company, Epyx, after *World Games* had already left the Olympics. • There was a sequel in 1990 with 5 new disciplines, which was substantially less well-received. • Players compete for sponsors – real companies that had actually co-financed this game.
- Several ports to other systems omitted some of the events or the sponsors. • Chris Grigg’s title tune is a licensed cover of Richard Berry’s *Louie Louie*. • 6 disciplines • 9 sponsor companies

Castlevania (NES)



• *Castlevania* (Jap.: *Akumajō Dracula*) came out in 1986 for the Famicom and in 1987 for the NES. • It has spawned close to 30 sequels and numerous spin-offs, including comics and TV shows. • The game draws inspiration from classic horror films, especially the Hammer productions. • Story: Vampire hunter Simon Belmont has to defeat Dracula, who returns every 100 years. • The primary weapon is a whip named “Vampire Killer”, but other weapons can be collected as well. • The game was shipped on a 128 KB cartridge, an average size for the NES. • Its popularity was mainly due to the polished gameplay and the atmosphere. • 6 “blocks”, each with 3 stages and a final boss



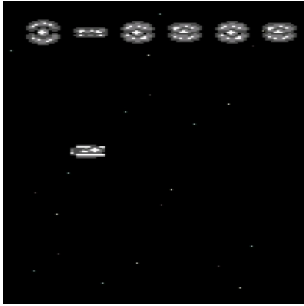
Code Name: Viper (NES)

- *Code Name: Viper* (Jap.: *Ningen Heiki: Dead Fox*) came out in 1990 for the NES.
- It was originally finished in 1989, but came out the next year.
- The gameplay has often been compared to Namco's earlier *Rolling Thunder* (1986) ... and even called a sequel of sorts, as the developer Arc System Works was the same for both games.
- Health can be upgraded from 2 points to 4.
- The "second quest" mentioned on some websites is just a retread of the normal quest.
- 8 levels
- 2 weapons
- 22 enemy types (10 listed in manual)

Cybernoid (C64)



- *Cybernoid* is a shooter without scrolling from 1988.
- The Spectrum version came first, then the game was ported to other systems: Amiga, Atari ST, C64, CPC, NES, and later iPhone/iPad and Wii as well.
- The C64 version was highly regarded not least because of Jeroen Tel's music.
- Directly before, Hewson had published *Exolon* (by Raffaele Cecco, like *Cybernoid*), *Nebulus* and *Zynaps* and landed three action hits.
- Background story: you take the "Cybernoid" to fight against pirates ... who have hidden stolen goods on their planet.
- 3 levels made up of several screens each
- 5 types of extra weapons
- After a fixed time the game ends – and there is also a time limit for each screen.



Delta (C64)

- *Delta* (U.S.: *Delta Patrol*) was published in 1987 by Thalamus Ltd ... a label by magazine publisher, Newsfield Publications.
- After the hit *Sanxion*, *Delta* continued the success story with the same programmer, Stavros Fasoulas.
- The tunes by Rob Hubbard are based on Pink Floyd and *Koyaanisqatsi* by Philip Glass.
- The game is rather generic in its features, but was noted for the playability.
- The colourful level names refer to the overly complex backstory.
- For several levels, speedups are advisable or even required.
- 32 levels, 7 extras.
- A full play-through takes 45 minutes.
- During the loading time, the title tune can be remixed in a little tool.

Dizzy – The Ultimate Cartoon Adventure (Spectrum)



• *Dizzy – The Ultimate Cartoon Adventure* came out in 1987 for the Spectrum. • 19 sequels followed, the last one in 2020. • Though very hard, the game is often counted among the best for the Spectrum. • Its creators, the Oliver Twins, were responsible for dozens of games ... including several number 1 hits and a substantial part of all games sales in the UK. • The character design was supposed to be a face, but it was replaced by an egg ... when it turned out that most people interpreted it as such. • Many puzzles require an object that is placed far away, so a lot of travel is involved. • The goal of the game is to find the ingredients of the “Awawiffovee Potion” and then use it. • 53 screens • 28 items

Developer/publisher: Codemasters

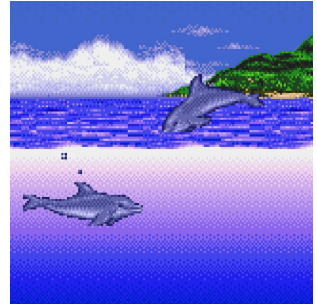


Doriath (C64)

• *Doriath* came out in 1985 for the C64 only. • The music adapts *In the Hall of the Mountain King* from Edvard Grieg's *Peer Gynt*. • The "Riddlescroll of Wurrselea" that you have to find was named after author John Worsley. • In the complex quest, you have to find 8 pieces of the scroll and then the "Coronet of Arien". • The game is considered to be unbeatable as one vital item cannot be found ... and after killing the ice dragon the game ends unresolved. • 256 rooms on 16 rows (or levels) • 8 amulets (plus 1 unavailable), 6 other item types • The right half of the map is very difficult to reach, but also not required in the game.

Developer/publisher: Rabbit Software

Ecco the Dolphin (Mega Drive/Genesis)



• *Ecco the Dolphin* was released in 1992 for the Mega Drive/Genesis, and later for other consoles. • It has spawned 4 sequels so far, plus one canceled title, *Sentinels of the Universe*. • Developer Ed Annunziata had to fight for greenlighting as well as creative control of the game. • The game is generally perceived as very hard. Annunziata has stated that the reason was ... trying to prevent kids from renting and beating the game over the weekend. • The Japanese version came out half a year after the international release ... and contains several small enhancements, such as additional “glyphs” and an extra level. • The soundtrack (as well as some of the level names) was inspired by Pink Floyd. • 24 levels (25 in Japan)



Eco (Amiga)

• *Eco* was developed in 1987 by the Liverpool-based Denton Designs. • It came out for the Amiga and Atari ST, published by Ocean. • Many of the features in the later game *Spore* were already anticipated here. • The game has no “win” state but runs indefinitely. • The sequence in each life cycle is always the same: eat, mate, evolve. • Possible causes of death are: starvation, old age, being eaten. • Often, a game lasts only a few seconds before falling prey to a predator. • Genes affect size, number of legs, ability to fly and others.

Ghostbusters (C64)



• *Ghostbusters* came out in 1984 for the C64 (mainly) and other home computers. • It consists of several mini-games: the overview, a ghost catching stage, and the end game. • The program had to be finished in 6 weeks due to contractual obligations as a film tie-in ... which was only possible by using parts from other unfinished games and demos. • Still, it is widely regarded as a prime example of a game based on a movie. • The speech samples were created by ESS, who also provided the samples for other C64 games ... notably *Impossible Mission*, *Kennedy Approach* and *Beach Head II*. • The title song is a cover of Ray Parker Jr.'s famous film theme song. • After completing the game, the leftover money can be re-used in subsequent playthroughs.

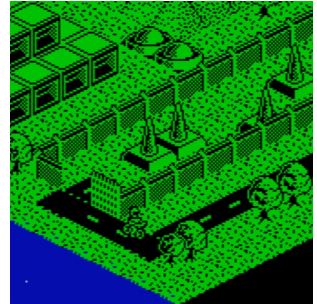
Developer/publisher: Activision



Ghosts 'n Goblins (C64)

- *Ghosts 'n Goblins* by Capcom was published in 1985 for the arcades.
- However, the C64 version by Elite was very successful ... owing partially to the music by Mark Cooksey.
- The game series had a dozen successors and spin-offs, most recently, *Ghosts 'n Goblins Resurrection*, which came out in February 2021.
- The hero, Sir Arthur, must save a princess in a scary journey.
- 4 levels (originally 7) with 2 parts each; 5 weapons
- There is little to explore, but the gameplay is smooth and sophisticated.
- The game is infamous for its difficulty.

Glider Rider (Spectrum)



- *Glider Rider* was released in 1986 for the Spectrum, CPC and C64.
- The music by David Whittaker is often listed among the very best for the Spectrum ... though it is only featured on the 128's AY chip, not the 48's "beeper".
- The game offers an explanation for every object (including trees) being indestructible: Everything is made of plastic by the evil corporation you fight.
- Goal: Destroy 10 reactors and escape the island, all within 30 minutes
- An optimised complete playthrough takes about 12 minutes.
- 100 screens of 8x8 tiles each

Developer/publisher: Quicksilver



Globulus (Amiga)

- *Globulus* came out in 1990 for the Amiga, to mixed reviews.
- Creator Jørgen Bech claims he never received any royalties for the game.
- It was meant as a more polished version of Bech's earlier *Globular Troubles*.
- The only task is to find a path to walk down to the goal ... but the special tiles and enemies make that difficult.
- Explosives can be bought between levels or gained as a bonus ... to eliminate enemies and certain obstacles.
- 25 levels
- (There was an earlier 20-level version that was deemed too short.)
- 8 special tiles, 4 enemies, 3 obstacles

Developer/publisher: Innerprise Software

Golden Axe II (Mega Drive/Genesis)



- *Golden Axe II* came out in 1991 exclusively for the Sega Mega Drive/Genesis.
- A modified version was later issued to be used in the Mega Play arcade system.
- It is the sequel to the hugely successful *Golden Axe*, and very similar in all aspects.
- Spells can be replenished by collecting spell books ... either normally or during the campfire attacks between levels.
- The new "Duel" mode eliminates movement and takes place in one fixed arena.
- 3 characters with different abilities
- 7 stages, each with a boss (1 or more enemies)
- 3 mount types



Goldrunner (Atari ST)

- *Goldrunner* came out in 1987 in identical versions for the Atari ST and the Amiga.
- While rather conventional, it was one of the first shooters to be developed for the new 16-bit computers.
- The technical realisation on the Atari ST, especially the scrolling, is regarded as flawless ... and it is often claimed it has never been equaled even years later.
- The rumoured C64 conversion was really only a spoof demo, according to one of its creators.
- The popular music track by Rob Hubbard covers his C64 tune for level 4 of *The Human Race*.
- Programmer Steve Bak has candidly described the unhealthy lifestyle of a programmer in the 1980s.
- Free back-and-forth movement within a level
- Sequel: *Goldrunner II* (1988)

Developer/publisher: Microdeal

The Great Giana Sisters (C64)



• *The Great Giana Sisters* came out in 1987 for the C64 (then Amiga and Atari ST). • It was an unabashed *Super Mario Bros.* ripoff, starting with the very title. • Nintendo intervened, and so the retail boxes were soon recalled ... making at least the 16-bit versions a rare find ... and stopping conversions to Spectrum and CPC. • A planned sequel was re-designed and released as *Hard 'n' Heavy*. • Chris Hülsbeck's music was so popular he came back for the official sequel *Twisted Dreams*. • 33 levels • 8 bonus items • 8 "warps" to higher levels • Boss monsters usually don't have to be defeated but can simply be jumped past.

Developer/publisher: Rainbow Arts



Hawkeye (C64)

- *Hawkeye* came out in 1988 for the C64 and was ported the next year to the Atari ST and Amiga.
- The mission is to find 4 puzzle pieces in each of the 12 levels.
- The reception was mixed: while the presentation was lauded, the repetitive gameplay was often dismissed.
- As a marketing ploy, 9 special tapes (3 gold and 6 yellow) were produced to win prizes.
- A sequel was planned, and largely finished, but ultimately wasn't produced – a demo emerged in 2010, though.
- The music by Jeroen Tel is among the most popular on the C64, and has been covered numerous times.
- 12 levels (+1 hidden bonus level)
- 4 different weapons

Developer/publisher: Thalamus Ltd

International Karate + (C64)



• *International Karate +* (or *IK+*) came out in 1987 for the C64, Spectrum and CPC. • In the U.S. it was called *Chop N' Drop*. • Designer, programmer and artist Archer MacLean came back from the first game. • He was also responsible for the Atari ST port (on which the Amiga port was based). • Rob Hubbard's music is a remix of his tune from the first game, based on Ryuichi Sakamoto's theme from *Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence*. • The game was the first to feature more than two opponents at the same time. • 16 moves (joystick directions plus fire button), 12 kicks/punches • 1 mini game (2 on some systems) • The shouts and screams were partly samples of Bruce Lee in *Enter the Dragon*. • Some of the animations were traced on a tv from the movies *Grease* and *Cannonball Run*.

Developer/publisher: System 3



King's Quest (MS-DOS)

• *King's Quest* came out in 1984 for the IBM PCjr, and then for other PC/DOS variants. • IBM had requested (and produced) it as a demonstration of the PCjr's gaming capabilities. • The version played here is a later DOS version, though with few differences. • The game started a hugely influential series of 8 games, all designed by Roberta Williams. • It is commonly referred to as the first animated 3D adventure game ... but even without the 3D aspect, it was innovative in many ways. • It was received exceptionally well, apart from some individual puzzles. • The AGI (Adventure Game Interpreter) engine was specifically developed around it ... and used for all of Sierra's adventure games until 1988's new SCI (Sierra's Creative Interpreter). • Indeed, an expanded and slightly different SCI remake of *King's Quest* was released in 1990. • 48 "map" locations, 33 "detail" (mostly inside) locations

Kirby's Dream Land (Game Boy)



• *Kirby's Dream Land* was released in 1992 exclusively for the Game Boy. • It was the first title in the popular *Kirby* series, with more than 30 sequels to date. • In this first game, Kirby can swallow enemies and release them as a weapon. • In addition, he can breathe in air and use it to fly or as a weapon. • There are also special items that bestow abilities for a limited time. • The game was designed to be easy and readily playable by everyone. • 5 levels, each with several rooms that are connected by doors. • After winning the game, a harder mode is unlocked. • Winning the extra game awards a third mode with adjustable game features.



The Last Ninja (C64)

- *The Last Ninja* was published in 1987 by System 3 of *International Karate* fame.
- It was an instant hit due to the spectacular graphics by Hugh Riley and the music.
- Composed by Ben Daglish and Anthony Lees, who split the tunes among them.
- The isometric perspective was not new ... but combined with the colourful backgrounds, it defined the game.
- Developer Mark Cale intended the game to be a modern version of *Adventure* (Atari 2600).
- The gameplay is a mixture of puzzle-solving and fighting action.
- 6 levels, 15 weapons and tools.
- Every weapon and item has its own controls.

Lionheart (Amiga)



• *Lionheart* was published in 1993 for the Amiga. • It was widely praised for its technical execution and precise gameplay. • The graphics use only 32 colours of the standard 4096-colour set ... but enhanced with the help of the Copper co-processor. • Power-ups: additional life points, mightier swords • 14 levels in 7 worlds, plus 1 secret world • Two endings, depending on whether you finish the secret world • Higher difficulty levels have different enemies and a different level design.

Developer/publisher: Thalion



Loopz (Atari ST)

- *Loopz* came out in 1990 for the Atari ST, and then for many other systems.
- It was originally programmed in 1989 by Ian Upton before being licensed to Audiogenic.
- Versions for the Atari 8-bit family and the arcades remain unreleased ... while Atari Lynx and Jaguar versions came out in 2004 and 2018, respectively.
- The game received slightly above-average ratings, but is nowadays usually regarded positively.
- David Whittaker created the music using *Quartet*, a music notation software ... that could play samples on four channels as opposed to the ST's native 3 synth channels.
- 3 game modes (2 for up to 2 players)
- Tile shapes of varying size and complexity

The Lost Vikings (Super NES)



• *The Lost Vikings* was developed by Blizzard, and published in 1993 by Interplay. • The three vikings are controlled simultaneously, each with their own abilities: • Eric the Swift • Olaf the Stout • Baleog the Fierce • This control scheme was completely new at the time. • Design: Ron Millar. Music: Charles Deenen. • Story: the vikings have been kidnapped by an alien and must escape back to earth. • 37 levels (42 in the Mega Drive/Genesis version) in 6 worlds • Precise timing is key to the puzzles ... and later stages also add platforming elements.

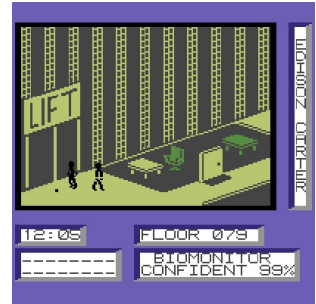


The Master of Magic (C64)

- *The Master of Magic* came out in 1985 for the C64 and Spectrum.
- It is an early action-RPG with tactical elements.
- The music by Rob Hubbard is largely based on *Shibolet* by Larry Fast.
- Developer Richard Darling also founded Codemasters with his brother David.
- 17 commands
- 4 spells
- 9 monsters
- 12 items, including several special-purpose weapons

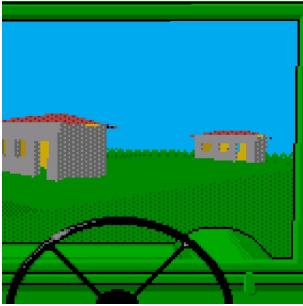
Developer/publisher: Mastertronic

Max Headroom (C64)



- *Max Headroom* came out in 1986 for the C64, Spectrum and CPC.
- The game was based on the TV movie of the same name, which in turn was based on a high-concept music video show.
- Story: Max has been abducted by the Network and needs to be rescued.
- Action sequences alternate with two distinct code-breaking scenes.
- The goal is to find four codes spread over the 10 top floors of the building.
- Critics mostly panned the game for not capitalising on the movie's background and ideas.
- For the end animation, Max' lengthy recorded speech is loaded from tape.
- 10 floors (200-209) – plus random floors on failed code entry

Developer/publisher: Quicksilver



Midwinter II: Flames of Freedom (Amiga)

- *Midwinter II: Flames of Freedom* came out in 1991 for the Amiga, Atari ST and DOS.
- It is a much more complex sequel with more freedom in all game aspects.
- The open-world movement in real-time is often regarded as years ahead of its time ... but designer Mike Singleton was always known as a visionary in game mechanics.
- 3 modes with increasing complexity: Training, Raids, Campaign
- 22 transport types
- 32 building types
- 17 weapon types
- 41 islands, each with a mission

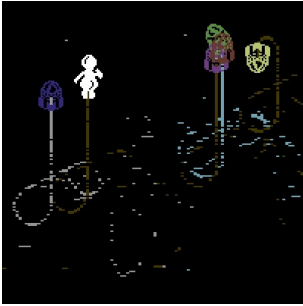
Developer/publisher: Rainbird

Monty on the Run (Spectrum)



- *Monty on the Run* is already the third entry into the series following *Wanted: Monty Mole* and *Monty is Innocent*.
- The Spectrum version is shown here, since it came first, but the music in my video is from the C64.
- Platformer with puzzle elements
- Story: after breaking free from prison in the last game, Monty must now leave the country.
- Many adversaries have to be jumped over or walked under with pixel precision.
- 9 areas in a total of 48 screens
- At the start you have to choose the correct 5 out of 21 objects: others render the game unwinnable.

Developer/publisher: Gremlin Graphics



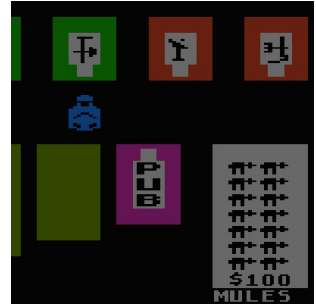
Moondust (C64)

- *Moondust* came out in 1983 exclusively for the C64. Exploring similar concepts as creator Jaron Lanier's earlier *Alien Garden*, it is nowadays considered to be one of the first "art" games ... as well as the first publication with interactive music.
- Playing the game creates procedural music while the "seed" is sowed to be spread by the ships.
- Main character Jose Scriabin is named after Russian composer Alexander Scriabin ... who pioneered atonal music and was synaesthetic.
- The manual encourages the player to experiment with the colour of their tv set.
- 4 game modes: Beginner, Evasive, Freestyle, Spinsanity

Developer/publisher: Creative Software

M.U.L.E.

(Atari 8-bit family)



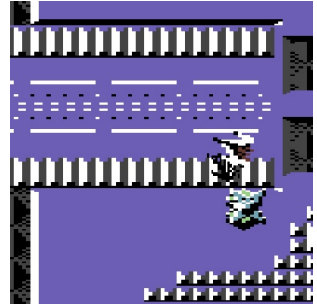
- *M.U.L.E.* came out in 1983, first for the Atari 8-bit range, then the C64.
- It was in the first group of games published by Electronic Arts.
- The game was devised as an amalgamation of Dani Bunten's earlier games.
- While it can be played alone, several elements aim at a multi-player experience.
- On the Atari 400 and 800, each of the 4 players can use their own joystick.
- "MULE" is an acronym of "Multiple Use Labor Element".
- Working title: Planet Pioneers
- EA wanted the title *Moguls from Mars*, but *M.U.L.E.* was visually more pleasing.
- 3 levels of difficulty
- The game ends after 6 or 12 rounds, depending on the difficulty.



Nebulus (C64)

- *Nebulus* was designed by John M. Phillips and published in 1987 by Hewson.
- For the rotation effect, the main character Pogo is kept in the center.
- Pogo's abilities: walking, jumping, shooting
- 8 towers, 1 fish-catching mini-game
- Bonus life every 5000 points (cannot be achieved within one tower)
- The U.S. version was named *Tower Toppler* and published by U.S. Gold.
- Other titles: *Castelian/Kyoro-chan Land* (for the Game Boy and NES), *Subline* (in Italy)
- Phillips wrote the C64, Atari ST and Amiga versions himself.
- The graphics and music/sound were also originally created by him.
- Phillips' next game, *Eliminator*, used a similar faux 3D technique.

Parallax (C64)



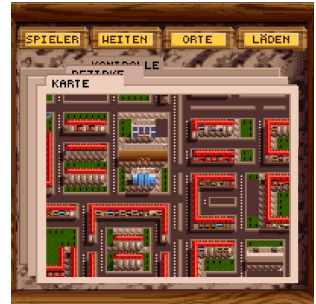
• *Parallax* was released in 1986 on the C64. • The game's title refers to the parallax scrolling, i. e. movement in multiple layers/depths. • It's a mixture of shoot 'em up and action adventure, with the ability to exit the ship. • The ship can also fly below ground level, but without any benefits for the game. • Martin Galway's Jean-Michel Jarre-inspired music was quite unusual, but a selling point. • According to Galway, an Atari ST version was planned, but never released. • Sensible Software's Chris Yates and Jon Hare were 19 and 20 when they created the game. • It was sold to the publisher, Ocean Software, für 6000 British pounds. • From the manual: "Scientist will not cooperate in accessing main computer unless drugged." • One by one, levels 2 to 5 need to be unlocked. At unlocking the fifth, the game ends.



Pitfall II: Lost Caverns (Atari 2600)

• *Pitfall II: Lost Caverns* came out in 1984 for the Atari 2600, and then for other systems. • It is usually counted among the 2600's technically most advanced games. • The cartridge contained a custom chip designed by the game's creator David Crane. • It was called "Display Processor Chip" and enables the 4-channel music and enhanced graphics. • The number of lives is not limited, and death only sets the player back to the last checkpoint ... but also leads to a score deduction based on the distance to the checkpoint. • Goal: find a diamond ring, the character's niece Rhonda and the mountain lion Quickclaw. • Size: 8 screens x 27 levels • Maximum score: 199,000

Pizza Connection (Amiga)



- *Pizza Connection* came out in Europe in 1994 for the Amiga, PC and Macintosh.
- The U.S. version, *Pizza Tycoon*, was published by MicroProse with different graphics and locations.
- An important part of the game is sabotaging the competition and getting involved with the underworld.
- It was widely lauded for the range of activities included ... such as creating your own pizzas, participating in competitions and black market trading.
- The included "city guide" was used as a copy protection through the contained phone numbers.
- 10 cities
- 65 ingredients that can be chopped and arranged
- 14 example recipes

Developer/publisher: Software 2000

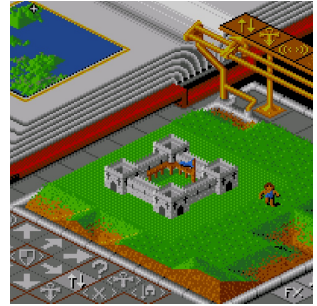


Plok (Super NES)

- *Plok* came out in 1993 exclusively for the Super NES.
- It was written and designed by the Pickford Brothers, famous game designers from England.
- While most reviews were positive, sales – though good – fell back behind expectations ... possibly because of the generic “mascot” character, as the Pickfords suspected.
- The lack of a saving or password mechanism has also been called out as a severe problem.
- While it is a rather standard platformer, the character throwing his limbs was an innovative twist.
- There has never been a re-release or sequel, but a web comic that ran from 2013–2020.
- 37 levels in 5 areas
- Working title: *Flea Pit*

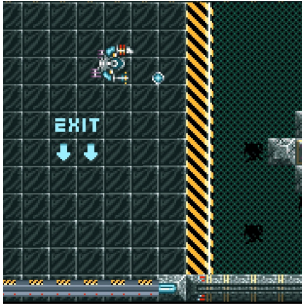
Developer/publisher: Software Creations

Populous (Amiga)



• *Populous* came out in 1989, and was the first “god game”. • It spawned two sequels and a total of 4 expansions. • The player character is a god who fights another god through their followers. • Additionally, the followers create mana, the power to personally intervene. • There are 494 worlds to conquer, plus the secret world 999. • Depending on the score, worlds are skipped in the progression to the last one. • The worlds are procedurally generated with their name as the random seed. • Higher worlds have different terrains and harder AI. • There might also be several different constraints. • World 384, *SHIINGORD*, was widely regarded to be one of the hardest.

Developer/publisher: Bullfrog



Rage (Amiga)

- *Rage* by Mark Sheeky was published in 1994 for the Amiga.
- Mark Sheeky also wrote 21 additional Amiga games, including the hit *Burnout* for Vulcan Software in 1996.
- He is still actively developing games, and is a painter and composer.
- Puzzle shooter for 1 player with enemies to shoot and puzzles to solve
- Precursors: *Quedex*, *Alien Breed*, *Universal Warrior*
- 20 levels called "decks"
- Primary and secondary weapon with upgrades
- At the start you can enter a code at a terminal in order to travel to a later deck.

The Seven Cities of Gold (Atari 8-bit family)



• *The Seven Cities of Gold* came out in 1984 for the Atari 8-bit range. • It was written by Danielle Berry whose earlier *M.U.L.E.* I examined in a previous short video. • At the time, many of the game's features were considered revolutionary ... such as the map generator, the open-world environment and the trade/combat mechanisms. • Indeed, it is still regarded as one of the most innovative games of all time. • In a generated map, it's possible to encounter higher technology levels than the Europeans'. • There is no scoring or goal, and how the players go about the game is solely their own decision. • While a reckless approach to the natives is possible, Berry made sure a more timid strategy would be rewarded. • Only the Atari version has all the designed elements, the ports are all truncated in some way.

Publisher: Electronic Arts



Shadowfire (C64)

- *Shadowfire* came out in 1985 for the C64 and Spectrum, and later for the CPC.
- It used an innovative window/icon system that was inspired by the Apple Lisa.
- Analog joysticks and lightpens were also supported.
- Reviews were generally very positive, and sales figures were higher than usual partly because the C64 and Spectrum versions were sold together so sales counted for both systems.
- The sequel, *Enigma Force*, has the same characters continue the story after the end of this game.
- The current action/status of each character can be inferred by the colour of their icon.
- 10 item types • 100-minute time limit • Incidentally, the antagonist's name, "Zoff", in German (derived from Yiddish) means "trouble".

Developer/publisher: Beyond

Die Siedler (Amiga)



• *The Settlers* came out in 1993 for the Amiga under the German Title *Die Siedler*. • In the U.S. it was known as *Serf City: Life is Feudal*. • Several games followed, most recently *The Settlers Online* and a new (reboot) game in 2023. • It was a solid, though not incredibly inventive city building game ... with a cooperative and split-screen mode that were new to the genre. • In the critical reception the fine-tuning and the complex economy were also praised. • 30 missions (with 6 tutorials) and a free-building mode • 8 world sizes with up to 64,000 individual settlers

Developer/publisher: Blue Byte



Sonic the Hedgehog (Mega Drive/Genesis)

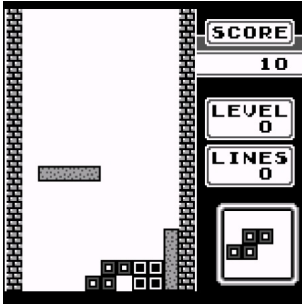
• *Sonic the Hedgehog* was published in 1991 for the Sega Mega Drive/Genesis. • To date, there were over 50 further games and numerous excursions to other media. • The character was meant to be a response to Nintendo's Mario and became similarly famous. • 6 „Zones“ with 3 stages each one final zone and a bonus level • Sonic's skills are controlled through the collected items ... and through his current speed. • Frantic action alternates with precise navigation • Occasionally, minor puzzles need to be solved.

Spy vs Spy (C64)



- *Spy vs Spy* was released in 1984 for the C64 and the Atari 8-bit family.
- Like the two sequels, it is based on the Antonio Prohías strip from Mad Magazine.
- While the reviews were mixed when it came out, it gained cult status over time.
- The split screen and pseudo-3D graphics were not new at the time ... but uncommon enough to warrant a mention in the advertisements.
- 5 traps, 4 “remedies”, i. e. countermeasures
- 6 to 36 rooms, depending on the level of difficulty
- Combat is a distinct mode that activates when both spies enter the same room.
- Goal: find four items and get out faster than the other spy
- The ending leads in to the next game, which begins with a parachute jump from the plane.

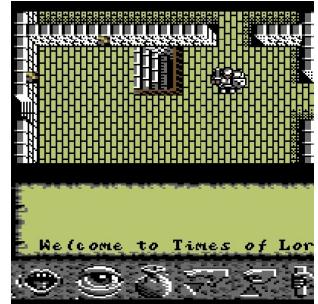
Developer/publisher: First Star Software



Tetris (Game Boy)

• *Tetris* for the Game Boy came out in 1989 and was bundled with the Game Boy itself. • The original 1984 game by Alexey Pajitnov had come out in the Western world in 1987. • For the Game Boy, a two-player mode using the link cable was included and very popular. • The famous music (arranged here by Hirokazu Tanaka) adapts the Russian folk song *Korobeiniki*. • 2 single-player modes • 20 speed levels • When the maximum score of 999,999 is reached, it simply doesn't increase any further ... instead of flipping back to 0 as in other games. • The “Tetris effect” of seeing the shapes in common objects is also known as “Game Transfer Phenomena”.

Times of Lore (C64)



- *Times of Lore* came out in 1988 for several systems ... but was especially popular on the C64 for the music and the comparatively complex gameplay.
- For instance, it features a day/night cycle and a hunger/food system.
- The interface and gameplay are similar to the *Ultima* games on the C64 (also by Origin) ... though much simpler, and there have been comparisons to console RPGs like *Legend of Zelda*.
- It's also generally pointed out that it is smaller with a playing time of less than 10 hours.
- 3 main characters to choose from • 7 commands • 3 potions, 2 scrolls



Trantor: The Last Stormtrooper (CPC)

• *Trantor: The Last Stormtrooper* came out in 1987 for the Amstrad CPC and Spectrum. • Even though a sequel is teased at the end, there were never any real plans for one. • The goal is finding all letters for a code and then activating a transporter. • A timer is counting down and resets whenever Trantor finds a code letter. • Also, Trantor's iconic flamethrower has to be refueled regularly. • The original tape included a rock song, *The Fight* by Resister, that was unrelated to David Whittaker's music for the game. • The CPC's mode 0 was used, which could use 16 out of its 27 colours with a lower resolution. • The title and main character inspired a comic strip in the German magazine *Power Play*.

Developer/publisher: U.S. Gold

Turrican II: The Final Fight (Amiga)



• *Turrican II: The Final Fight* came out in 1991 for the Amiga, and then for other systems ... though the C64 design by programmer Manfred Trenz came first. • There are several changes compared to the first part concerning weapons and abilities. • As in the first game, the soundtrack was composed by Chris Hülsbeck to much acclaim ... due in part to his impressive 7-voice routine that was adapted from Jochen Hippel's Atari ST work. • The graphics only use 4 bit planes (16 colours) because of memory and frame rate concerns ... but with the help of the Copper co-processor, up to 120 colours can be seen in the background. • 5 stages with 2 areas each • 10 types of extras • 3 standard weapons, 4 special weapons/abilities

Developer/publisher: Factor 5



The Way of the Exploding Fist (C64)

- *The Way of the Exploding Fist* came out in 1985 for the C64.
- Subsequently it was ported to other systems like the Spectrum, CPC and BBC Micro.
- It sold close to 200,000 copies and gathered numerous awards.
- Data East's *Karate Champ* came out the year before ... but designer Gregg Barnett claims *Fist* was developed independently.
- Its main competitor, *International Karate* by System 3, came out 5 months later.
- Neil Brennan based his music on Liu Tieshan's *Dance of the Yao People*.
- 16 moves (joystick directions plus fire button), 11 kicks/punches
- The one-player version gets progressively more difficult.
- In the two-player version, the winner is declared after four matches.

Developer/publisher: Melbourne House

Wizball (C64)



• *Wizball* came out in 1987 for the C64, later ported to other systems. • Its complicated background story was made into a unique game that was popular with players and critics alike. • The controls were praised for their simplicity and precision. • Similarly, the graphics were often singled out as the game's most interesting aspect. • This was Sensible Software's second game where Chris Yates and Jon Hare worked with Martin Galway. • The music was created by Yates, Hare and Galway jamming and then Galway translating the results. • The game features three and four player modes, with up to two players playing at the same time. • According to Hare, this was started before *Parallax* ... but then they wanted to try out their new parallax scrolling routine first. • Working title: *Wizzball* • Sequel: *Wizkid* (1992)

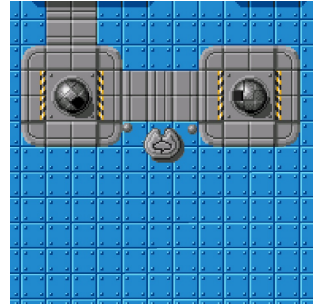
Developer/publisher: Ocean



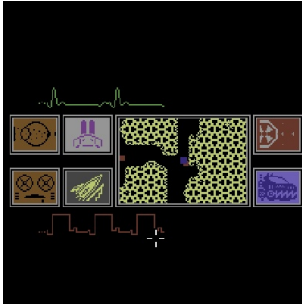
Worms (Amiga)

• *Worms*, by British-Swedish developer Team17, came out in 1995. • It was the first of a highly successful series that still continues today. • Spin-offs include puzzle, pinball and golf games, and a 3D variant. • Conceived as a cross between *Artillery* (1972) and *Lemmings* (1991) • Mastery of the game requires knowledge of the weapons and tools ... but the wind speed and direction are also a major consideration. • 4 worms per team • 10 types of terrain • 19 weapons and tools • *Worms* competitions often have challenges such as rope-only movement or weapon restrictions.

Xenon (Atari ST)



• *Xenon* was published in 1988 by Melbourne House for the Atari ST. • It was the first game developed by the Bitmap Brothers, who quickly became stars. • The digitised bust that announces the sectors is Eric Matthews, one of the Bitmap Brothers' founders. • The controlled vehicle can switch between a spaceship and a tank, both with different movement modes. • In stages 2 and 4, however, the tank is not available. • Working title: *Kelly X* • Later stages have sequences that can be regarded as early examples of the "Bullet Hell" genre. • 4 sectors, each with 2 identical bosses • 11 power-ups • The game disk contains a secret message for (or rather against) pirates.



Zoids: The Battle Begins (C64)

• *Zoids: The Battle Begins* was released in 1986 for the C64, CPC, Spectrum and MSX. • The game is based on the European releases of the *Zoids* toy line by TOMY. • It takes place on the planet of the Zoids, but revolves around a human stranded there. • Rob Hubbard's music for the C64 is a cover of *Ancestors* by Larry Fast ... whose *Shibolet* from the same album was the basis for Hubbard's *Master of Magic* music. • As the main goal, the Blue Zoid leader Zoidzilla has to be reconstructed from 6 pieces. • For every piece, a city dome must be destroyed first. • 10 city networks • 12 Zoids (including Zoidzilla)

Developer/publisher: Martech

A Boy and His Blob: Trouble on Blobolonia (NES)



- *A Boy and His Blob: Trouble on Blobolonia* came out in 1989 for the NES.
- Originally a moderate success, it has since become a cult hit.
- Creator David Crane also developed *Outlaw*, *Pitfall!*, *Ghostbusters* and *Little Computer People*, among many others.
- Several sequels were announced and subsequently abandoned.
- 2 worlds
- 14 jelly bean flavours
- (The grape flavour was exchanged for the ketchup flavour shortly before release.)
- Other special items: treasures and diamonds, vitamins, peppermints

Particularly sharp-eyed readers may have noticed that this game doesn't follow the alphabetical order of the rest of the videos.

That's correct, and the reason is that the video was never produced: I only finished the research stage before abandoning it.

So this is really a bonus: the only never-before published content in this book!

Acknowledge- ments

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