

# HISTORY OF VIDEOGAMES, ASSIGNMENT #2

## MCAD LS3222, SPRING 2009

### Overview

Your second assignment is to review two classic Atari VCS (2600) games. This assignment is due Wed Mar 08, and must be submitted to me, via email ([marc@marcjensen.com](mailto:marc@marcjensen.com)) before class, uploaded to the class website, or handed in to me at the beginning of class.

This assignment is worth 100 points.

### Requirements

You must review two Atari 2600 games - you can review any games made for the system, but a good suggestion would be to review one game from Atari (one of their own games) and a game from Imagic, a company that created some of the better Atari 2600 games.

A full list of games developed by Atari can be found here:

[http://www.atariage.com/company\\_page.html?CompanyID=1&SystemID=2600](http://www.atariage.com/company_page.html?CompanyID=1&SystemID=2600)

A full list of games developed by Imagic can be found here:

[http://www.atariage.com/company\\_page.html?CompanyID=30&SystemID=2600](http://www.atariage.com/company_page.html?CompanyID=30&SystemID=2600)

Your goal will be to review these games as they would have been received at the time they were released. That is to say, review them based on the games of the time period, not compared to the latest XBOX 360, PS3, or Wii games.

### What To Hand In

You must turn in the following to receive full credit (Each review is worth 50 points, for 100 points total).

#### *Review Text* (40 points)

Your review should be one full page of text - roughly the length of single page review in a normal magazine format. See references below for some example reviews. You should describe all of the following in your review:

- Describe the gameplay
- Describe the graphics
- Describe the sound
- Describe the target market for this game, and a recommended age group for who would be interested in this game.
- Describe the longevity of this game - is this something you would play over and over, or just a few times?
- Give this game a score, from 0 (really bad) to 10 (couldn't be better). You must back up your score with reasons why you assigned that score to it.
- Use proper spelling and good grammar.

#### *Review Layout* (10 points)

Do a full page layout for this review, in a style that matches the look of the time period. Include screenshots, box art, and anything else that you

feel is appropriate for the review. Again, see examples given for reference.

## Emulation Help

[AtariAge.com](http://www.atariage.com) has a great page that describes how to use the Atari 2600 emulator to play these classic games:

<http://www.atariage.com/2600/emulation/index.php?SystemID=2600>

I would personally recommend using Stella, the best Atari 2600 emulator - it's available for both Mac & PC:

<http://stella.sourceforge.net/>

## Magazine & Sample Review Resources

[AtariAge.com](http://www.atariage.com) is an amazing resource for all Atari 2600 related information.

AtariAge has archives of popular Atari related magazines, including Atariian. You can see the entire magazine archive here:

<http://www.atariage.com/magazines/>

You can see the various issues of Atariian Magazine here:

<http://www.atariage.com/magazines/atarian.html>

Some good examples of reviews in a retro layout form:

[http://www.atariage.com/magazines/magazine\\_page.html?MagazineID=15&CurrentPage=10](http://www.atariage.com/magazines/magazine_page.html?MagazineID=15&CurrentPage=10)

[http://www.atariage.com/magazines/magazine\\_page.html?MagazineID=14&CurrentPage=10](http://www.atariage.com/magazines/magazine_page.html?MagazineID=14&CurrentPage=10)

[http://www.atariage.com/magazines/magazine\\_page.html?MagazineID=14&CurrentPage=8](http://www.atariage.com/magazines/magazine_page.html?MagazineID=14&CurrentPage=8)

A good sample review can be found online at Game Informer Magazine. This is a good review for Assassin's Creed for the XBOX 360:

<http://www.gameinformer.com/Games/Review/200712/R07.1106.0938.00452.htm>

Another good sample review is this review of Bioshock:

<http://www.gameinformer.com/NR/exeres/41497688-5BCB-4C0A-B952-A1B1440E2139.htm>

For help with emulation so you can actually play these games, please see this page:

<http://www.atariage.com/2600/emulation/index.php?SystemID=2600>

Example Review - This is an example of a great review from a previous class:

# RABBLE RABBLE

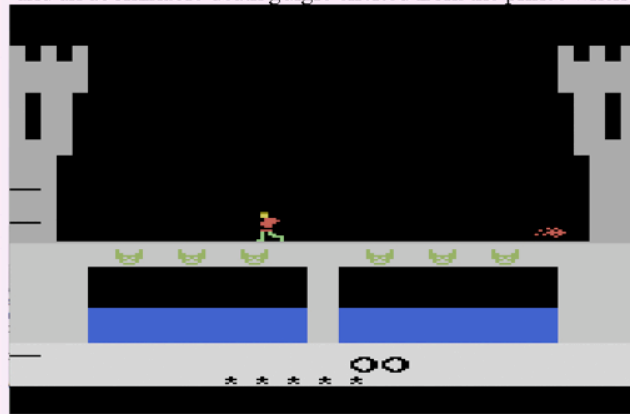
## Dragonfire

Nothing satisfies the primal yet decently noble spirit of man like donning a suit of armor and embarking on a quest to slay vicious beasts, save princesses and monger fame and glory vicariously through a video game console. Are you prepared for an epic adventure of such magnitude that Tolkien himself would turn in his grave? Too bad! because Imagic's Dragonfire features none of these things and embraces a drab and unarousing premise in its stead.

So pull up your pantaloons and make double-check that manicure, because you're about to assume the role of Generic Prince. Your absent-minded king has allowed not one but a myriad of multicolored dragons to pilfer the royal coffers and stow the king's booty away in their remarkably garish castles. Perhaps the royal army is on strike because the notion of sending the heir to the throne in to recover these artifacts without any equipment or physical aptitude beyond the capacity to jump seems like an exercise in unequivocal retardation; but enough about his highnesses invariable lack of logical proficiency, on with the review.

Dragonfire consists of two repetitive levels. The first requires Generic Prince to traverse a drawbridge and either duck or jump over side-scrolling fireballs of variable velocity. The interior of the castle boasts a nondescript room with the king's treasure splayed across its vacuous expanse. Generic Prince must simultaneously recover his king's treasure whilst avoiding the dragon's fearsome barrage of crimson fireballs. Once the last of the treasure is reclaimed, the exit reveals itself and the prince is permitted to progress to the next castle.

Dragonfire's graphics are sophisticated technically for the console but the aesthetic feels cliched. Each relic has its own distinct characteristics and they are easily discernible as crowns, goblets, et cetera. The dragons are redundant but with the amount of polygons on the screen accompanying them they seize and sputter, rendering them half-invisible anyway. There is no music to speak of, only sound effects such as the pitter-pattering of feet and an abominable death gurgle elicited from the prince when he's struck by a dragon's gob of fire.



I'd like to say this game would be perfect for the pubescent male with an insatiable and masochistic desire to run across, jump over and collect things in a fantasy setting, but I can't in all honesty because all this game did for me was inspire controller-snapping fury after one or two minutes of play. The game simply isn't extraordinarily inspired, unique, graphically or audibly immersive or, to be frank, fun.

4.5/10

Example Review - This is another example of a great review from a previous class:

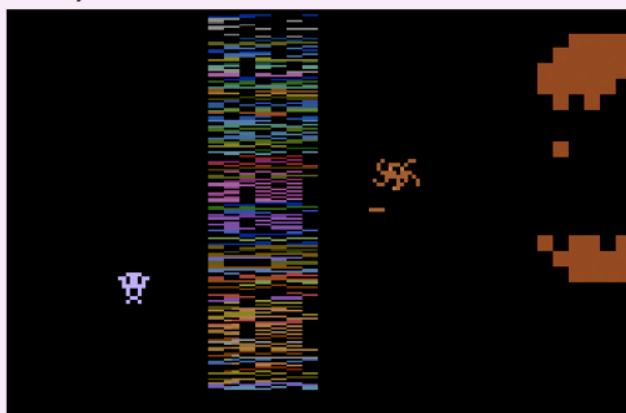
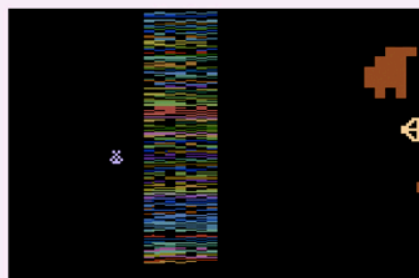
# RABBLE RABBLE

## Yar's Revenge

Ready the Yar Shooter, charge the Zorlon Cannon, evade the nefarious rectangle and prepare to exact revenge on that quarrelsome Qotile, because these is Yar's Revenge!

"Immersive" is not an adjective I would use with any great frequency when describing titles from the 'Golden Age' of gaming, but Yar's Revenge would certainly reflect that definition in my book.

I would attribute this feeling primarily to the music; a tempered mess of static-noise interspersed with the blips of Yar's laser or the cacophonous whirr of the Qotile's whirling attack. Unlike the childishly jovial melodies in so many Atari titles, I immediately found myself placed in a circumstance of urgency and consequence. After my first gameover I found myself bent over my keyboard in a manner only the most hopelessly convicted nerds are physiologically capable of, my eyeballs millimeters from the screen while rivulets of cold sweat skipped across my furrowed brow.



I appreciate the programmer's willingness to accommodate the player in this one. Perhaps my own ineptitude is to blame, but I've never had that insatiable desire to play the shit out of old Atari games many of my comrades do.

Yar's revenge is *fun* because, even as a novice, a round can easily last five to ten minutes, and doesn't include the unspeakably schizophrenic learning curve associated with the level progression. Yar's Revenge rejects that consistently infuriating element of randomness present in so many Atari games; with only two threats on the screen at any time and the benefit of being able to see either coming, I

feel much more accomplished when finally the level is beaten, and can admit my own failing when Yar is killed, rather than chalk it up to dumb luck or misfortune.

The graphics are predominately standard, except for that irregular strip of prismatic color which is unadulterated genius in my opinion. Who would have thought to simply dump the code on the gamefield, and provide it with a purposeful utility no less? Awesome.

I honestly feel this game is suitable for anyone who enjoys games, specifically minigames or 'casual' flash for phone games. If I had a lick of technical savvy I'd rip this game right off and make a million interweb bucks.



9/10