

Headline: VIDEO GAMES REVIEW

Beep! Beep! Desert Bird still Evades Wile E. Coyote's Tricks
Cartoon chase of the two Warner Bros. characters offers good,
clean fun.

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Lead:
As a kid, I always wanted Wile E. Coyote to catch Road Runner. With all that cool Acme stuff at his disposal, it should have been a snap for him to fry up that crummy bird.

But he never did.

And after playing Desert Demolition 20 years later, I understand a little better why victory was so elusive for the coyote. Even armed to the hilt with the finest Acme has to offer, I could do no better.

Text:
Desert Demolition is a swift little game that stars Road Runner and Wile E. Coyote in their traditional roles of predator and prey, although it is often tough to tell which is which.

The game itself looks amazingly like the old Looney Tunes cartoon and the music is right on target. From Red Rock Rendezvous to Karl's Bad Caverns--which is as far as I made it through the game--the scenes and backgrounds of the different levels look as if they just came out of the Warner Bros. studios.

One of the coolest features of Desert Demolition is the option that allows players to choose between playing as Wile E. Coyote or as Road Runner. Of course, I chose the coyote every time but once. Regardless of which character is chosen, the goal of the game remains the same: to get through the desert to the Acme factory.

How each gets there is a little different, though. Wile E. Coyote scoots along the desert floor in search of Acme boxes that contain gadgets such as spring-loaded shoes and tightrope helmets. All the while, he tries to grab Road Runner.

For the record, I could never do it.

Road Runner, on the other hand, speeds through in search of birdseed as he tries to avoid the ubiquitous coyote. At critical moments, Road Runner can frighten the coyote out of his wits with the trademark "Beep! Beep!"

As other games become more and more violent, Desert Demolition offers a good time for kids--or parents--who are not quite ready to rip out spinal columns with their joy pads. There were kids in my neighborhood when I was growing up whose parents actually forbade them to watch Road Runner cartoons because of the violence, but compared to most of what is available for game machines, this is just good clean fun.

I suppose some might actually feel sorry for Road Runner and elect to play as him, but for my money the coyote is a much better choice for this game. Maybe I just like rooting for the underdog.

Manufacturer: Sega

Platform: Sega Genesis

Rating: Cool

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Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure

I don't want to date myself, but the Atari 2600 version of the original Pitfall was one of my favorite games. So I had high hopes when I got a copy of Activision's new remake of its famous game.

I was not disappointed.

The story picks up many years after the conclusion of Pitfall Harry's original adventures. Harry, you see, took all that time off to help raise his son, Harry Jr. But as Harry Jr. turns 18, father and son again head off to chart the unexplored wilds.

Even before the adventure begins, Harry is kidnaped, and it is up to Harry Jr. to find his old man. When the game actually begins, it becomes clear that The Mayan Adventure is not his father's video game.

From jungles to waterfalls to mines to abandoned temples, the various levels of The Mayan Adventure are visually striking, and Harry Jr. moves through them in unexpected ways. The range of action is exceptional. In addition to the de rigueur move of jumping, Harry Jr. can swing on vines, jump on bungees, spring off spider webs and ride mine cars.

The music, too, is a funky mix of throbbing drums and exotic melodies.

For die-hard Pitfall fans, the original Atari 2600 version is hidden on the fourth level. (Hint: Look for the 2600-style scorpion.) Switching between the detailed graphics of today's games and the blobby blips of yesteryear is jarring, but the fun of Pitfall remains.

My one complaint about this game is the lack of an option to save games in progress. I don't know too many people who have five or six hours to play a video game in a single sitting. Several people have told me that the lack of this feature has turned them off to the game, which is unfortunate because it really is quite fun.

Manufacturer: Activision

Platforms: Super Nintendo, Sega Genesis, Sega CD

Rating: Cool

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Return Fire

Any game with a soundtrack that includes the "Hallelujah Chorus" and the "Flight of the Valkyries" has a lot going for it right from the start. It gets even better when the rules are delightfully simple: Blow everything up. Return Fire is one of best games I have played so far on the 3DO.

Many of the 3DO games I've tried have been fairly static, depending heavily on crystal-clear, but very cheesy, movies to compensate for a lack of action. But Return Fire is the kind of action-combat game that puts the system to good use.

Basically, the game is a heavily armed version of Capture the Flag. Enemy flags are protected in bunkers behind fortified walls and guarded by a bunch of very big guns--all of which are aimed at you.

Players start out with a helicopter, a tank, an armored personnel carrier and a jeep. Each serves a unique need as missions become more difficult. As the armaments move, the on-screen perspective swoops and dives to offer a hint of what lies ahead.

I had minor problems controlling some of these machines, particularly the jeep, which had a tendency to drive off bridges into the ocean.

Despite its excellent game play, far and away the best part of Return Fire is the soundtrack. Plugging a headset into the 3DO joy pad provides a steady stereo blasting of Wagnerian oomph, the perfect accompaniment to a gleeful tank ride through the ruins.

Manufacturer: Prolific

Platform: 3DO

Rating: Cool

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