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THE

A - Z

OF

ATARI 8-BIT
GAMES



KIEREN
HAWKEN

Volume
3

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The A-Z of Atari 8-bit Games

Volume 3



Kieren Hawken

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Introduction

The Atari 8-bit computer range has an outstanding legacy in the video games industry. The very first models, the 16k Atari 400 and 48k Atari 800, were released way back in 1979 and instantly became the most powerful home computers on the market. With 256 colours, four-channel sound and advanced features such as hardware scrolling and sprites they were clearly designed with playing video games in mind. Of course, this is what Atari was great at and it wasn't long before all their hit arcade games started appearing in home computer form. Upgrades of the machine followed in the XL range (600XL, 800XL and 1200XL), which stood for eXtended Line, and the popularity of Atari's home computer range grew even further. Come the takeover of Atari's consumer division by former Commodore owner Jack Tramiel in 1984 and the range was designed one again. The 64k 65XE (also released in Eastern Europe as the 800XE) and 128k 130XE was joined by the XE Games System, a 65XE computer in console form to appeal to a different market. The XE moniker stood for XL Expanded and these new computers were designed to more closely resemble the company's flagship 16-bit Atari ST computer, also released in 1985.



In this book I take you through the life of the Atari 8-bit range, affectionately known as the A8, looking at a varied cross section of the 600+ games available with a small review and screenshot of each one. This is not a list of the best games, a list of the worst or indeed a complete guide to what's available. The A-Z of Atari 8-bit Games: Volume 3 is just that, the third volume of my look at a selection of A8 games in alphabetical order. There are three games featured for each letter and these range from the earliest released in the late seventies, to modern homebrews and even unreleased prototypes. Hopefully this book gives you some inspiration to try games you've never played before or bulk up your own personal collection. You might even find it that brings back happy memories of unwrapping Christmas and birthday presents or inviting your friends round for a few games after school. Most of all though I hope you enjoy reading it and remember what makes the Atari 8-bit computer range so great.

Kieren Hawken
Author



A

Ace of Aces

Accolade – 1987



Brought to us by American software label Accolade, who were at one point famed for their simulation type games such as *Mean 18 Golf*, *Test Drive* and *Gunboat*. You take the role of an RAF fighter pilot during the Second World War over Europe. You must jump into your de Havilland DH.98 Mosquito and then compete in a series of deadly missions, which mostly involve flying around aimlessly and occasionally shooting down enemy aircraft. The controls and various functions in this game take a lot of getting used to and mastering, thankfully Accolade chose to include a practice mode too to help you get to grips with this. You can use this to not only learn the controls but to also practice shooting down bogies and get your aiming straight. To shoot one of these enemy planes down you must carefully line it up with your crosshair, and this is much harder than it sounds! The ultimate goal of the game is to complete all four standard missions and be ranked as the one and

only *Ace of Aces*. Everything in this game is very lacklustre from the incredibly drab looking graphics and simple sound effects to the boring gameplay and lack of variation in the missions. There is an original disk release of *Ace of Aces* but it was also re-released by Atari for the XE Games System on cart too, although why this game was chosen I don't know! Flight sim fans might enjoy it but others should steer clear.

5/10

Airball

Microdeal – 1988



Originally released for the long-forgotten Dragon 32 computer in 1987, *Airball* was soon converted to a host of other 8-bit computers where the isometric adventure genre had already proved to be very popular, mainly on the ZX Spectrum with the titles of *Ultimate Play The Game*. Sadly the company now known as Rare didn't choose to support the Atari 8-bit so *Airball* was met with a very positive reception. Even all these years later it's easy to see why as *Airball* is certainly a slick game. What makes Microdeal's 3D romp especially interesting, when compared to similar games anyway, is the use of air itself. If you are to complete the game you must keep the air in your ball topped up via the various inflating stations, which are located in numerous rooms. But if you use them too much your ball will burst! So it's all about keeping it balanced if you're going to complete your quest. The plot of the game revolves around you being turned into the titular Airball by an evil wizard

and the only way you can return to human form is by finding the items needed to break the spell. Of course there are lots of hazards out there for a fragile ball of air! *Airball* is a beautifully designed adventure that slipped under the radar for many sadly as it was overshadowed by more illustrious rivals. This A8 version has some impressive 3D visuals, lovely music and heaps of gameplay - so go and give it a good look!

9/10

Atlantis

Imagic – 1983



It's funny how Imagic's best two titles both started off as clones of Atari licensed games, *Demon Attack* was basically *Phoenix* and *Atlantis* owes a lot to the brilliant *Missile Command*. Just like Dave Theurer's title you are trying to protect your city from an alien attack. You also have three cannons to fire at the enemy with, just like the *Missile Command* arcade game and better than Atari's own single base port. These cannons are fixed in position though, with the two side cannons firing diagonally across the screen and the centre one firing straight up. Rather than a bunch of lines the enemy attacking in *Atlantis* are all spacecraft that fly over head and used bombs and lasers to destroy your city. As the game goes on these craft get faster and more aggressive making shooting them down much more difficult. If you lose all the buildings from your city you die and you see a little ship leave and fly off into space. This becomes the ship in *Cosmic Ark*, widely regarded as the first ever

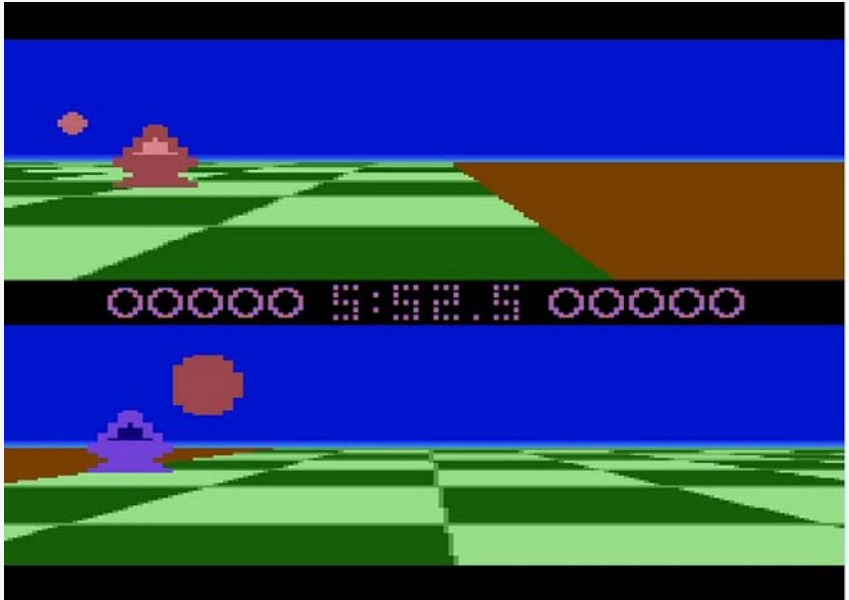
home video game sequel. Visually *Atlantis* is very similar to the original Atari 2600 version, but that's no bad thing as that looked absolutely gorgeous! The sound effects are now a little meatier though, which is always a good thing. I'm a real sucker for these old-school single-screen space shooters and have always been a massive fan of *Atlantis* in particular. So if you are too then you'll want to be getting this!

9/10

B

Ballblazer

Lucasfilm – 1985



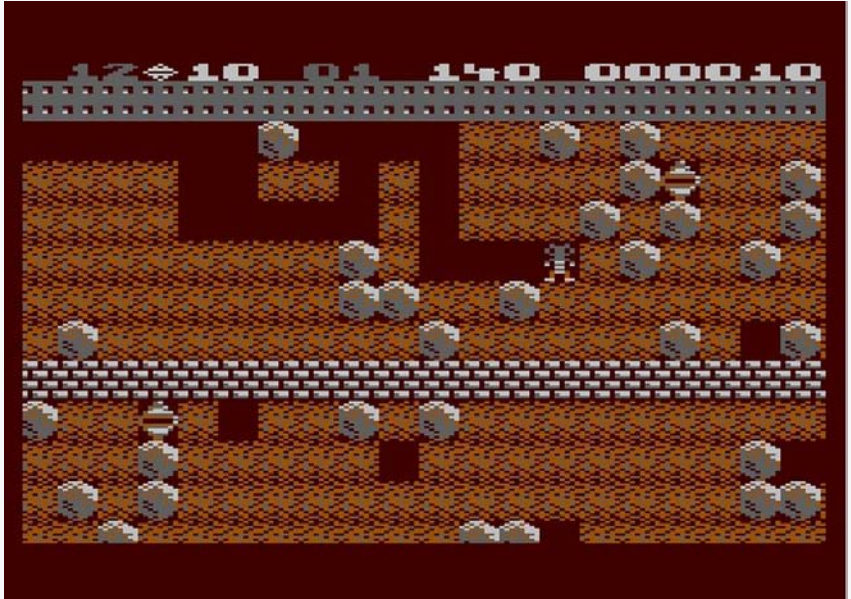
One of several titles released for the Atari 8-bit computers by the now legendary Lucasfilm Games (A.K.A LucasArts), the software company owned by Star Wars creator George Lucas, *Ballblazer* is without doubt one of the most prestigious games released for the system. Although this game was released for a large number of different formats there no doubting this version is one of the finest (alongside the even better Atari 7800 version). For those that don't know, *Ballblazer* is the sport of the future set on a 3D split-screen battlefield for one or two players. You take the controls of a super fast pod and must try to grab the ball and launch it into the opponent's goal as many times as possible. There is a goal at each end of the playfield that moves constantly and the ball flies all over the place whenever you release it, making it harder to catch. Score five goals and you win, sounds simple? Well get this game and give it a try and you might think otherwise! *Ballblazer* is a great example

of just how powerful the Atari 8-bit line is, the 3D graphics are astonishing and move faster and smoother than it seems possible to believe. There is no doubting that the Atari original absolutely murders the other 8-bit computer versions, which came later, and makes a nice comparison subject for us fanboys! If you don't already own this masterpiece then what the hell are you waiting for? Get to the grid right now!

9/10

Boulder Dash

First Star Software – 1984



Not many people seem to realise that the now legendary classic *Boulder Dash* was originally released on the Atari 8-bit computers with other ports following later. It's just another big part of the system's great legacy in gaming. In *Boulder Dash* you play the role of Rockford, a miner who's goal is to collect diamonds through a set of caves while avoiding the dangers within. Our hero must dig through the soil in the caves whilst avoid the falling rocks or becoming trapped by them. Fireflies, butterflies, slime and strange amoebas await him in these caves, each representing a different challenge. Fireflies move in a clockwise manner and are explosive, capable of killing Rockford on touch, and can be killed by throwing a stone on them causing a big explosion. Butterflies behave similar to fireflies but move counter-clockwise. When they explode they leave behind nine diamonds. Amoebas are not directly dangerous to Rockford but they can trap him or block his way. Thankfully,