

RASTER

In-depth Reviews for Genesis•TurboGrafx-16•Lynx



Genesis-

Zany Golf, Shadow Blasters,
Populous, Moonwalker,
Insector-X

Lynx-

Blue Lightning

TurboGrafx-16

Splatterhouse, KLAX,
Bonk's Adventure

The Game Guru Tackles:

Moonwalker, Populous &
Phantasy Star II

P R E M I E R E

\$3.50

I S S U E

VOLUME 1 NUMBER 1

From the Editor...

Welcome to the premier issue of RASTER!

We're launching *RASTER* in response to the growing need for in-depth, honest reviews of the new "16-bit" games and systems that will be vying for your hard earned dollars. Are you tired of reviews which — well-intentioned or not — hide a lack of product knowledge or advertiser bias with cute remarks and glitzy graphics? If so, *RASTER* is just what you've been looking for.

You won't find superficial "Everything's awesome!" reviews and "walk throughs" in *RASTER*. What you *will* find are insightful, unbiased reviews by people who actually play the games.

Our goal is to help you make informed purchase choices and increase your understanding and enjoyment of video games. Just one bad "buy it and try it" game purchase can cost you more than subscribing to *RASTER* — in wasted money, time and frustration.

Future editions of *RASTER* will feature letters to the editor. We earnestly solicit your remarks (pro and con) about game selections, style, approach, depth of coverage, features — in short, anything.

If you have game-related questions, ask our *Game Guru* for help. If you send a self-addressed, stamped envelope, *Game Guru* will reply personally as soon as he can. Questions of general interest will appear in the next *Game Guru* column.

A "Test Center" column is planned. It'll feature the latest peripherals for new generation NEC, Sega and Atari Lynx systems. Finally, starting with the next issue, we're expanding to 32 pages — that's 30% more reviews.

WELCOME ABOARD!

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Review Criteria

Which Systems ...

Our focus is on "leading edge" systems which are currently available. For the most part, this means systems which incorporate "16" in their name, product descriptions or advertising. At present, we're covering Sega *Genesis*, NEC *TurboGrafx-16* and Atari *Lynx*.

Game marketers use "16" more as a description of the product's generation than its technology. As they use it, "16" doesn't mean a 16-bit processor is used, or that games will perform better than one from the prior generation.

Although the new systems may be capable of higher performance, a game may not use the new capabilities. You can expect to see some titles "ported over" to the new systems with only minor program changes. In some cases, these "new" games may be little better than their current-generation counterparts. But, they will surely be higher priced.

Which Games ...

We are striving to provide a balanced mix of vendors, genre and pre-release vs. released games.

Pre-release games present problems. There are very few "beta" copies to go around for all of the magazines that want them. Beyond that, when problems are discovered, game makers often say, "We're aware of that and we'll have a fix." Maybe so, but the reviewer can't really comment on what you'll actually be playing.

All of this helps to explain why there are so many reviews based mostly (or only) on vendor's "press kits" and why many reviewers obviously haven't even played the games they're writing about.

We don't see the point of reviewing games that are substantially different from the released game. There are already plenty of magazines that do that—months before the games are available.

What Characteristics ...

Each review attempts to give you a feel for the game. We describe the scenario, major features, play, characters, graphics (background and characters), control characteristics, sound effects and music. In short, "how the game plays."

What we are *not* attempting to do is tell you how to play the game. We think our readers like challenges. Again, lots of magazines have detailed "walk throughs" and "crib sheets." Our job is to help you figure out which games you'll like — before you spend your money.

Review Format ...

At the head of each review is a list of: game version/system, genre, game name, manufacturer, designer, retail price (sometimes projected price), number of players, scores (graphics, sound, and control), special features and a brief overall recommendation.

The scores are hybrids. (e.g., *Sound* is music + sound effects). The ranking is 1–10, represented by a graphic "meter" of solid and hollow circles (1 is left, 10 is right). For example, a score of 3 is:

●●●○○○○○○○

A score of 5 means "just average for a game of this genre." Anything less than a 5 indicates a problem.

High scores in all three score categories don't mean that we recommend the game! Many trade-offs are involved which are dealt with in the text.

Game Guru

Send me your toughest gaming problems. Answering them is the only way I can justify my outrageous salary!

I'll send you a personal reply if you also enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope. Be sure to include game title, system type, and a full description of the problem. I prefer questions which use snappy, hip and irreverent language. Boring questions may never get answered — and definitely won't make it into my column!

Sometimes *RASTER* reviewers come crawling to me, begging for help. The publisher says I gotta answer their (usually stupid) questions or I'll lose my job. So, to keep my column interesting, I cleverly "plant" these questions — as if one of you asked it. That's show biz!

This month I answer questions about *Moonwalker*, *Populous*, *Mario Brothers 3*, and *Phantasy Star II*. Later!

Game Guru

P.S.

One of the things that other magazines do that JUST DRIVES ME NUTS is when they chop an article up and scatter it hither and yon around the magazine. I promise I'll never let that happen to my readers. You deserve better.

ED — *Guru's ex-girlfriends all tell me that he promises more than he can deliver! In this case, they're right.*

(Continued on page 20)

Splatterhouse

by NEC

Designer: Namco

\$62.00

Players: 1**Graphics:** ● ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○**Sound:** ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○**Control:** ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○**Features:** 2 Difficulty Levels, Limited Continue.

A major disappointment! Grossly overpriced.

Overview

Splatterhouse takes Rick (the hero) and Jennifer (his friend) to a haunted house to research a school project. They are parapsychology majors at the university and decide to find out for themselves if the house is haunted. They find out that it is — the hard way.

The lights go out as they enter and a battle with an unseen enemy ensues. Jennifer is kidnapped by the enemy and Rick is knocked unconscious. The game begins as he wakes and discovers Jennifer is missing and that the dreaded "Terror Mask" is on his head. The mask has transformed Rick into a huge, misshapen man. (Quite convenient for someone who must soon battle hoards of monsters.) Rick is not amused. To rid himself of the Terror Mask, break the curse and free Jennifer, he must seek out and destroy the source of the evil.

In his quest to kill the evil being, Rick must destroy slimy corpses, avoid flame creatures, punch out carnivorous worms, kick flesh-eating dogs and even fight possessed home furnishings. If our hero fails in his quest, the evil will remain alive — free to possess other people who

foolishly go on thrill trips to old, deserted houses.

To some extent, *Splatterhouse* has captured the look of a horror film. Rick walking about in surgical garb and a red hockey mask is a dead ringer for Jason of "Friday The 13th" fame.

Surviving The Splatterhouse

The game is divided into seven stages, each of which has the usual Boss at the end. Each succeeding stage provides new ground to cover, new monsters to defeat and tougher Bosses.

Rick can fight every creature and obstacle in the game by punching or kicking them, but that wouldn't be gross or fun would it? Scattered throughout the house are various items that Rick may use to destroy the monsters.

These include a wrench, shotgun, chainsaw, spears and a trusty two-by-four. Most monsters require two punches or kicks to dispose of, but one good whack with the two-by-four and those monsters are singing the blues.

Rick begins the game with three lives, each with five hearts. If Rick is struck by

a monster, touches a trap or steps in a puddle of acidic ooze, he loses one heart. When Rick loses all his hearts, he dies.

He can regain lost hearts only by defeating the Boss at the end of each stage. Then Rick starts the new stage with three, four or five hearts — depending on how efficiently he disposed of the Boss. Rick gains an extra life at 30,000 and 70,000 points. There are no hidden "1-Up"s which games so often employ.

Graphics

Some of the colorful creatures include: moss-covered corpses, puddles of green ooze, blue flying ghosts, and red worms with fangs. There's even one green garbed ghost that flashes the player! (A weird and sick sense of humor is required for that one.) Most monsters die in gruesome fashion — some split open and their remains drip onto the ground, while others explode as they're smashed against walls. The stage Bosses are also colorful and well-drawn (except in Stage 2), but not spectacular.

Splatterhouse must have started out as an 8-bit release in Japan. The creature, character and background graphics were probably enhanced a little, so that it could be passed off as a "16-bit Turbo Chip" in the USA.

Performance and graphics deteriorate badly in Stage 6. When more than eight alien sprites are on the screen (excluding the Boss) extreme sprite flicker occurs. Parts of Rick's body vanish and game speed drops dramatically.

Also, after destroying the Boss at the end of Stage 4, Rick walks toward the front of the room and music plays as he stares into empty space. Seconds later, the music changes, taking on an ominous overtone. Then the screen simply fades to black. My theory for this segment is that there was once an animated sequence (possibly with Jennifer and the evil being) that Namco left out.

Sound

The sound effects in *Splatterhouse* are so-so, but the background music was very good. There was a big difference between the quality of the sound effects and music throughout the game. A majority of the sounds could be found in any action game, on any system, including the SMS and NES. To be fair, I liked the "Help Me!" that Jennifer cries out to Rick and I also liked the buzzing chain saws that the third Boss used. But on the whole, the sound effects just weren't up to TG-16 standards.

The background "stage" music was good and I never got sick of it. It should have been good — some of it was written by Chopin. I also rather enjoyed the funky music in Stage 6.

Manual

NEC manuals always leave something to be desired. They offer only the bare essentials to explain game play, and are often somewhat misleading. *Splatterhouse* is no exception.

It claims that each of the seven game stages has multiple areas. Now I don't know how they determined what constitutes an area, but anyone who plays Stages 6 and 7 will notice that the screen never changes appearance. The graphics change slightly when the Boss is reached. That hardly constitutes a second area, though, because Bosses are basically part of the scenery.

The manual also claims that the object of the game is "...to find Jennifer and make your escape." This is the part of *Splatterhouse* that really annoyed and disappointed me the most. I thought that finding an escape route was a part of the game. Not true. In fact, not only do you not have to escape after defeating the evil entity, but you NEVER see Jennifer (except briefly at Stage 5). There wasn't even a message saying something like, "And they lived happily ever after."

Comments

In short, *Splatterhouse* is long on promise and short on delivery. The levels

are supposed to increase in difficulty and complexity as the game wears on. In *Splatterhouse*, that's the exception, not the rule. The game claims you can choose paths, some which might bring you to a section you've never seen before. Of the seven stages, only Level 5 truly supports this. Even then it's a little misleading. There are only a few different routes you can take on your way to the Boss's room.

There is, technically, one other "choose your path" option in the game. It comes in the middle of Level 3, when Rick must cross a bridge with three circles that move back and forth. If Rick steps on one, he'll fall through the bridge into a sort of dungeon area, which he must battle through to get to the surface at the other end of the bridge.

I was thrilled early on with the neat visual effects — monsters splatting against walls, rippling water around Rick when he walked through the sewers, his reflection in the mirrors, etc. They quickly become boring, though, because they NEVER change. If you've seen one monster hit a wall... I expected to see stuff like severed heads or creatures squirting blood (or their equivalent liquid) as Rick slashed, whacked, speared or pounded them. Having Rick's surgical gear getting bloodier as the game progressed would have been a great touch. No such luck. No nice touches.

Conquering *Splatterhouse* is simply an exercise in memorization. The monsters always appear in the same places and they always attack the same way. There is a way to make the game "harder," but it just increases the number of hits those predictable monsters can withstand.

If the game had more variety of weapons, random monster appearances, less sprite flicker (Stage 6 especially), different attacks by monsters, more length for Stages 2, 3, 6 and 7, and the *slightest* glimpse of Jennifer at the end, it would have been much more enjoyable.

Recommendation

I cannot recommend *Splatterhouse* to any game player. It was just too easy to master in too short a time. To defeat five of the seven Bosses, you merely need to learn where to stand in order to destroy them without sustaining even one hit in the process!

Splatterhouse left me feeling bored and shortchanged. I suppose game players who are only looking for nice character graphics and a "gross" game might enjoy *Splatterhouse*, but for \$60 you deserve better.

RASTER

Shadow Blasters (Continued)

Recommendation

It's a good game graphically and sound wise, but I don't think it's going to be a blockbuster. I was never on the edge of my seat fighting a Boss and I never got "gamer's thumb" from playing.

At first I didn't enjoy the game, but after a few tries, I began to get into it. My playing skills were never pushed, but it's a pretty decent game. Character switching increased my enjoyment, but it wasn't enough to win me over completely. Action game junkies should enjoy *Shadow Blasters*, but the rest of you might consider others instead.

RASTER

Moonwalker (Continued)

As I said, I don't particularly like Michael Jackson's music, but I really loved this game. It has a unique and refreshingly less-violent story line. The sound quality will make you tap your toes and the incredible graphic touches will have you laughing in amazement at the different dance moves.

I asked quite a few people to play *Moonwalker*. Everyone loved it, without exception.

RASTER

Bonk's Adventure

by NEC

Designer: Hudson Soft

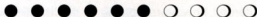
\$49.95

Players: 1

Graphics:



Sound :



Control:



Features: Unlimited Continue.

Enjoyable, but almost no replay value for older gamers.

A Bonking We Will Go...

Bonk the Caveman is on a quest to save Princess Za from the clutches of the Evil King Drool. Drool has hidden the Princess somewhere at the end of the five different worlds of 10,000 B.C. and he's stocked the place chock full of enemies and traps to stop our hero from rescuing the Princess. As Bonk travels through his adventure, he will encounter many nasty enemies, helpful flowers, bonus rooms and huge Boss characters.

After Bonk has completed each of the five worlds and defeated all five Bosses, he then travels to the planet "Moonland," where Princess Za once lived in peace. It is on Moonland that our fat-headed hero must face off against King Drool in a battle to the death. If he defeats the King, then the crown that Drool stole from Princess Za will be returned to her, thus restoring her to power and enabling her to bring peace to Moonland once again.

Life In 10,000 B.C.

Each of the five worlds which Bonk walks, jumps, spins and swims through may consist of from one to seven different areas. For example, World 1 consists of three different areas, numbered 1-1, 1-2 and 1-3. He must get to the end

of area 1-1 before he can continue on to 1-2, and so on.

At the end of each world, Bonk finds an elevator that takes him down into the lair of that world's particular Boss. Bonk must defeat each Boss before he is allowed to continue on to the next world. The Bosses — Huey, Punchy Pedro, Gladdis, Konga Zilla and T. Ractorhead — have been hypnotized by King Drool into believing that Bonk is their enemy. Bonk breaks the King's spell (which frees his friends from Drool's control) by repeatedly "bonking" them on the noggin.

Each new world Bonk reaches is a bit tougher than the one he previously completed. In World 1, Bonk will fight axe-wielding Henry Hatchets (a little creature that covers its head with half an eggshell) and land gators, as he travels over relatively flat land.

The little guy battles birds, small attack pigs and stationary cacti as he romps through the flatlands, trees and tombs in World 2.

The five areas of World 3 force Bonk to walk and swim as he deals with two new enemies, spear-shooting turtles and ex-

ploding rocks, in addition to others he has already encountered.

In the lone area of World 4, a gauntlet of quicksand and rock-spewing volcanos must be run. Only a few rock platforms are sprinkled along the way to provide safe rest areas.

World 5 is a combination of the previous levels, but it has tougher enemies. Some of the enemies are skeletal robots and a creature that has an annoying habit of appearing in front of Bonk, hurling a rock at him and then disappearing.

Many worlds have creatures that are unique to that particular world, but they also have creatures that are universal throughout most of the game.

Play Parameters

Bonk starts out his adventure with three lives. Each life has three hearts. He can get more lives by accumulating points or discovering hidden Bonks. In later stages of the game, he may find two special flowers that each give him one extra heart. Bonk can sustain five hits from an enemy before he loses one heart. When he loses all of his hearts, he loses the game.

Bonk Uses His Head

Bonk doesn't have big, strong arms. In fact, he hardly has arms at all. Bonk compensates for his lack of strong appendages by attacking enemies with his head. He can't use his arms to climb cliff walls or trees either, so he must use — you guessed it — his head. The little guy jumps up onto a tree or rock wall and sinks his teeth into its side. He chews and chews some more, until he finally reaches the top of whatever he's climbing. (How he manages to pull his body up the obstacle with just his teeth is a mystery, but it works.)

Bonk is strictly a one-method-of-attack kind of caveman. He only uses a head-butt. He has two types of head-butts that he may use at any time: a forehead head-butt and a flying head-butt. In the first type, Bonk violently snaps his huge head

forward and smacks the enemy. The more powerful flying head-butt is performed by making Bonk jump into the air, spin once (so his feet point to the sky) and then land on the top of his head. Hopefully, Bonk will have landed on top of an enemy. If he misses and hits the ground instead, he becomes stunned for a moment and he cannot protect himself from enemy attacks.

The Food Chain

In 10,000 B.C. there aren't any McDonalds, so Bonk must eat fruit, vegetables and chunks of raw meat. Fruits and vegetables fill up his hearts (one hit point each) and provide him with much needed points. Points are important because you get extra lives at certain point levels. It's crucial that Bonk collect as many fruits and vegetables as he can, because he wouldn't live very long without them. Points may also be earned by collecting many of the "smiley faces" that some defeated enemies may leave behind. After Bonk defeats a Boss, the smiley faces are displayed and he receives 100 bonus points for each one he collected in that world.

Meat chunks give Bonk an energy boost that lasts a limited time. He can briefly "freeze" all moving objects after eating a chunk of meat. To do this, he head-butts the ground while he's stronger. Frozen opponents are easier to kill (they can't fight back), but Bonk better be quick, because enemies only stay frozen for a short while.

The meat chunks come in two sizes: large and small. If he eats two small chunks of meat in a short period of time, or a single large chunk at any time, he will become "invincible." Invincible Bonk can kill almost any monster by simply walking into them. He may still choose to use the head-butt (which becomes more powerful as he eats meat), but walking into enemies does the job much quicker.

Bonk's appearance will change as the effects of the meat wear off. As invincible Bonk, he's dark-skinned and has a hairy head, but as he loses power, his skin

becomes progressively lighter and he loses more hair until, ultimately, he again becomes the light-skinned, bald-headed Bonk who started the adventure.

Flower Power

Flowers are found everywhere in *Bonk's Adventure* and they're essential to the swelled-headed-one's success. Some flowers cough up fruit, vegetables and meat. Other flowers help by blasting him into the air so he can get high enough to reach those hard-to-get-to cliffs, trees, fruits and vegetables.

Bonk must be careful, however, because the flowers that provide him with fruits and vegetables can also unleash a monster called "Venus Bonktrap," that will attack Bonk by bouncing after him.

Bonus Rooms

If Bonk is observant, lucky or both, he'll find different bonus rooms hidden throughout the game's levels. Bonus rooms do two things they provide Bonk with a safe resting place, and they give him valuable points and items (like food, extra lives, meat and special hearts that completely restore his health). What you find in a bonus room depends on what type you've entered.

There are four main types of bonus rooms: the Volcano room (where extra points are earned by bonking rocks spewed from a volcano), the Spin room (where points are gathered by making Bonk repeatedly spin as he falls down the side of a cliff), a Fruit and Vegetable room (where our hero springs from ledge to ledge while collecting as much food as possible), and finally, a Cliff room (in which bonus points are accumulated by reaching the top of a cliff before a timer runs out).

The remaining type of bonus room is just a small area, like a storage closet, that houses various special items.

Graphics

The graphics are simple, but good. The action scrolls very smoothly, no matter what direction Bonk is traveling, and

most of the creatures encountered are quite colorful. Dragonfly wings constantly flap, the cacti wave their arms wildly and the waterfalls all ripple with life. There's no noticeable slowdown in the game speed, even when many creatures are present on the screen at the same time.

The background graphics are good in some spots and bad in others. On the good side, flat outdoor areas usually have colorful volcanos in the background, with streams of lava pulsating down their sides, and the underground areas were usually very well-done. On the more disappointing side, the tree areas had boring blank backgrounds, except for a narrow band of tree tops or clouds at the top of the screen.

The game does have some cute little visual effects that make it more enjoyable to play. For example, one of the better ones occurs when Bonk eats a chunk of meat and hits the ground with his head (to freeze enemies). The entire screen shakes as if an earthquake were hitting the area. Another cute effect was how startled the flowers look after Bonk head-butts them from the side.

Overall, the designers have done a good, but not great, job with the graphics.

Sound

This music score is cartoonish and it reminds me of days gone past when I used to soak up hour after hour of the "Flintstones." This is not to say that the music score is poor. It's lively and catchy. It's never obnoxious or boring, so it's easy to listen to in subsequent games. In fact, one of the best features is that the music changes often; you don't quickly become tired of hearing the same old stuff over and over again.

The sound effects are sub-standard as action games go. There were far too few sound effects and none of them were mindblowing. Some standard sounds include a "Smack!" (like hitting the side of a tree with a stick) when Bonk hits a bad guy, a chomping sound while Bonk climbs trees and rock walls, and a simple

twirling sound that accompanies each flip Bonk performs. Other than those, there really aren't any other noticeable sound effects. In fact, the creatures don't make any noise at all. Birds attack silently (no swooping or squawking) and dragonflies don't make a buzzing sound when they flap their wings.

Recommendation

"Sounds like the same old 'Save the princess from the bad guy' game to me," you say? Well, you're right. But *Bonk's Adventure* wasn't created to be a departure from the old action/adventure game mold. It was created to amuse younger game players and hopefully build up a following like the one Nintendo has with its *Super Mario Brothers* series.

It's the younger kids who enjoy getting stickers (It comes with four stickers of Bonk.) with the game, or corny character names like, the Oompaloompas (Willie Wonka rip-off), B. Ike Link, T. Ractorhead, Crocket Dile, Tommy Tic, Terry Tac and Timmy Toe. The dialogue that each Boss delivers (after Bonk defeats them) is also geared toward the younger crowd. For example, when Konga Zilla has been defeated, he says, "You really made a monkey out of me. Come to think of it, I am a monkey!" Clearly, most of the people who'll find this amusing will be young gamers.

Bonk's Adventure is enjoyable, but the game as a whole is too easy for older players (14 and up), so it has little replay value for them after they've finished it.

If you're looking for more of a challenge, pass this one by. If you're just out for a few hours of light-hearted fun, *Bonk's Adventure* may be for you after all.

RASTER

NEC TurboGrafx-16

Strategy

KLAX

by Tengen

Designer: Atari Games

\$49.95

Players: 1-2

Graphics:



Sound :



Control:



Features: *Limited Continue, Game Customizing (see "Head-to-Head," page 19).*

If you like Tetris, you'll Love KLAX.

Game Setup

KLAX is one of the latest games hoping to ride on the coat tails of *Tetris*. The concept is fairly simple: form patterns (diagonal, horizontal or vertical) that contain three, four or five tiles of the same color. These patterns are called a "Klax."

Play begins, in this one-player version, as different colored tiles begin marching toward you on a five lane wide conveyor belt.

You control only a paddle during the entire game. The paddle catches the tiles as they tumble off the end of the conveyor. If you fail to catch a tile, it plummets to its death and your "drop meter" will increase by one. When the drop meter is full, you lose the game. Three to five drops are allowed, depending on how big a jump in "waves" you attempt.

After catching a tile, you either drop it into the bin (scoring area), toss it back up onto the belt or simply allow it to sit on the paddle. If you toss a tile back onto the belt, it pauses for a few seconds and then begins its march toward you again. If you decide to let the tile sit on the paddle, that's fine too. You must be careful though, because the paddle will hold only

five tiles at a time, so you won't be able to catch any more tiles until one or more is dropped into the bin.

The bin is an area five tiles high by five tiles wide. When all twenty-five slots are filled, the game ends. This means that you must constantly form Klax patterns (to clear bin space) as you move side-to-side along the belt, catching tiles before they fall to their death.

Dropping tiles into the bin is how you score points and complete the different "wave" requirements by creating Klaxs.

Waves Make The Difference

If you merely had to create any type of Klax you wanted to all day, the game would quickly become boring. So why is this game fun? Waves. That's right, waves. KLAX is made up of 100 different waves. Each of the waves has a requirement that must be fulfilled before you can advance to the next one. The wave types are: point, diagonal, horizontal (at the start) a Klax wave.

To complete a point wave, you must accumulate a certain number of points before moving to the next wave. In a diagonal wave, you must complete a pre-

determined number of diagonal Klaxs. Only a diagonal Klax counts toward fulfilling the wave requirement; any other type of Klax will only increase your score. The same is true of horizontal waves; only horizontal Klaxs count toward completing the wave requirement.

Wave requirements range from simply completing three Klaxs of any type, to completing thirteen diagonal Klaxs, to building a point total of 250,000 in a single wave!

How Many Colors?

Tile colors are to *KLAX* as shapes are to *Tetris*. In *Tetris*, different shapes are used to form long horizontal lines. In *KLAX*, all the tiles are the same shape (square), so tile color is what makes the game different and interesting.

There are ten different tile colors, but how many colors you see depends on how far along in the game you have gotten. Actually, there are eleven colors. The eleventh, an amalgam of the ten others, is called the "wild tile." This is a flashing tile that can be used as a substitute for ANY color to complete a Klax. For example, say there are two orange tiles stacked on top of each other in the bin. To complete the vertical Klax, a third orange tile must be placed on top of the other two. Well, time passes, tiles tumble along, but there's no sign of another orange tile anywhere. What is a player to do to clear the orange tiles? Well, if a wild tile appears, you can drop it on top of the two orange tiles to complete the Klax. Wild tiles are extremely important in accumulating a high score and passing some of the really difficult waves late in the game.

Scoring

The more elaborate the Klax (length and pattern difficulty), the more points you score. As the length of the pattern increases, so do the bonus points. A three-tile pattern is worth 50, 1000 or 5000 points, depending on the pattern (vertical, horizontal and diagonal, respectively). Three tiles count as one Klax. A four-tile pattern is worth 5000, 10,000 or

10,000 (again, depending on which type of pattern was formed). Four tiles count as completing TWO Klaxs at once. Five tiles are worth 15,000, 10,000 and 20,000 and credit is given for completing three Klaxs.

Chain Reactions

Where *KLAX* really gets interesting (and INTENSE) is in the building of "chain reaction" Klaxs. These can send your score soaring by the thousands. Each succeeding chain reaction Klax multiplies your score. (1st reaction = 2x. 2nd reaction = 3x, and so on, with a maximum of 6x).

For example, let's say you're building a small pyramid to get a small diagonal Klax. On one side of the pyramid, you have two blue tiles. On the other side, you've placed two red tiles. To get a small Klax, all you have to do is drop either a blue tile or a red tile at the top of the pyramid, thus completing one of the sides for a diagonal Klax and 5000 points. If you wait for a wild tile to complete both sides at once, your score will be 20,000!

How? Instead of just completing one three-tile diagonal Klax, you've completed two three-tile Klaxs AND you received a 2x score multiplier bonus. Here's why: The wild tile completed both the red diagonal as well as the blue because it became both colors (both are legally completed Klaxs). So, you receive 5000 for the red Klax, 5000 for the blue Klax and 2x (two times) the score of 10,000 because you completed two Klaxs at the same time.

Graphics

There's not much to say about the graphics in *Klax*. The tiles are different colors, but always the same shape, so there's not much in the way of play area graphics. That's just fine. The colors are all bright and the tiles look, well, like tiles. The conveyor belt does a great job of providing background movement as the tiles tumble head over heels toward your paddle.

The game background graphics shine. These include Outer Space, a Shopping Mall and Parking Lot, Jungle, rows of Shrinking Circles (to give the illusion of depth) and a River (which was great because it was constantly rippling).

One of the more amusing aspects of the backgrounds was the different ways in which the game board was supported, or in one case, held up. In the river scene, the play area is part of a river boat. In a later wave, the play area is held by a giant hand to give you the idea that you are holding the game board in one hand and playing with the other. Nice touch.

Music And Sound Effects

Music? What music? There is no music in this version at all. After listening to the Genesis version's music, I know why they left it out.

The sound effects are almost as important in making *KLAX* enjoyable as the game play. As a tile marches along the conveyor belt, the tumbling sound gets louder with each succeeding step. Unseen fans cheer, clap and whoop it up after you complete a wave. A female voice keeps things lively by saying, "Yeah!" or "Oooh!" when complicated Klaxs are built. But the best sound effect is the "Aaaaaaaah!" scream a tile makes as it falls off the screen into oblivion.

Recommendation

I'm a serious *Tetris* addict. Or should I say I WAS a serious *Tetris* addict? Since receiving *KLAX* versions for the NEC and Genesis, I have played only a couple of games of *Tetris*. It takes a pretty great game to tear me away from *Tetris*. *KLAX* is a great game.

There's only one complaint that I can make against *KLAX*. The digitized voice effects could have been a little crisper, which would have made them easier to understand. The voices are adequate though, so my complaint is a minor one.

(Continued on page 18)

seem to be the wrong color or the wrong size.

There were a couple of minor flaws — explosions of ships burning and resting on the water as they do on land, and distant land forms suddenly appearing on the horizon. Nothing serious.

There was no noticeable deterioration in performance as the land forms (hills, rock towers, trees, etc.) all scrolled smoothly from the background to the foreground. Every enemy missile continued to zip toward *Blue Lightning* even when many occupied the screen at one time. The enemy sprites (jets, missiles, etc.) were also very well done; no jerky enlargements or “flicker” to distract you.

Most jet combat games have missiles that only shoot straight at their targets. Not this one. In *Blue Lightning*, most missiles “snake” their way through the air, twisting and turning, as they attempt to lock on to your jet.

The resolution of close-up graphics is not exceptional, but they more than adequately deliver the “feel” of what a jet action game should be like — fast, furious and intense.

A great game doesn't necessarily come from a system with the best abilities. It comes from designers who know how to utilize a system's abilities to the fullest. The designers of *Blue Lightning* have done this exceptionally well.

Sound

You won't hear any elaborate theme or background music as you fly through the different missions. You won't hear any digitized voices of enemy pilots screaming in agony as they're blown out of the clouds. You will hear simple, but realistic, sound effects that never seem out of place and only enhance the play experience. For instance, the wind rushes by as *Blue Lightning* cruises through the sky, and each enemy destroyed is accompanied by a nice explosion. Headphone use is recommended, as the sound effects are obviously more im-

pressive through stereo headphones than a single speaker. Just don't get carried away and blow out an eardrum.

Manual

Blue Lightning's manual is satisfactory and explains the game pretty well. Unfortunately, the writers failed to notice two typos involving the weapons systems and their related buttons. On page 4, the manual incorrectly states that the 'A' button controls the missiles and the 'B' button controls the plane's cannons. This is actually reversed. Also, on page 5 the manual erroneously claims, “As soon as the computer locks on to a target, press A.” It should read, “... press B.” Overall, the manual for *Blue Lightning* is heaven compared to a couple of other manuals I've seen for Lynx games.

A Permanent Cartridge

The Atari engineers were asleep at the control stick when they designed this game card. It has no raised edge to help pull the dang thing out! I hope that later models have corrected this.

Recommendation

This game really showcases what the Lynx does so well — control and animate many sprites on the screen at one time without compromising speed or graphics quality. If Atari had packaged Lynx with *Blue Lightning*, instead of the lackluster *California Games*, many more would probably have been sold by now.

Some of the reasons *Pac-Man* and *Tetris* were so successful is that they were both easy to play and simple to learn. They also required the player to focus his concentration and quicken his reflexes as the game progressed. *Blue Lightning* also has these elements.

Although it's simple, don't let that fact fool you. This game is intense! On more than one occasion, I found myself swaying my body left or right, along with the on-screen actions of the jet. A great game should make you feel like you are actually a part of the action. *Blue Lightning* delivers that “feel.”

I highly recommend *Blue Lightning*. I've never been a particular fan of this kind of game before, but *Blue Lightning* changed my mind.

RASTER

Zany Golf (Continued)

Recommendation

Nine holes are probably not enough to satisfy anyone paying \$50 for this game. It does feature wonderful graphics, but the fun of mini golf is in the playing, not in staring at cool graphics. There's just not enough variety. I know the IBM PC version had more than nine holes, without which I doubt it would have sold as well as it did. That's the difference between disk-based and ROM-based games; you can put as many disks as you want into a game — but you can't keep cramming chips into a cartridge.

The main enjoyment in *Zany Golf* comes from playing against a couple of friends. Competing and giving each other a hard time is all part of the game, but the poor aim and putting control make the game more frustrating than fun.

RASTER

KLAX (Continued)

Why was *Tetris* so successful? Because it's easy to learn and easy to play. Who cares if it only has four basic shapes and a few different colors? Not I. The same basic ingredients that made *Tetris* so successful are also found in *KLAX*. Anyone who loves (or just likes) *Tetris* should love *KLAX*. Highly recommended. You must excuse me now, I have thirteen diagonals to complete!

RASTER

KLAX

NEC

vs

Sega

Version:	TurboGrafx-16	Genesis
Players:	1	2
Graphics:	✓	
Music:	None	Bad
Sound Effects:	✓ ✓	
Control:	✓	
Special Features:	✓	✓ ✓
Manual:	Tie	Tie

NEC is clearly the best single-player version.

TurboGrafx-16 vs Genesis

In this issue we compare two versions of a great game — both by Tengen. Some of the differences were surprising.

GRAPHICS:

Playfield **TIE**

The NEC version had crisper graphics (even in wide mode) that looked much better than Sega. The tiles in the Sega version didn't seem to be walking down the belt in the correct position. This was especially noticeable when the tiles were coming down the outside lanes. The NEC version was also much easier on my eyes. The tie was given because the Sega tile colors looked better. Sega also allows you to choose between three different tile color palettes.

Background **NEC**

Background graphics aren't as important as the playfield graphics, because you don't focus on them while you play. Sega only has three different backgrounds; the Circles, Shopping Mall Parking Lot and Outer Space. NEC includes those plus a couple more: a River with rippling water and a Forest scene. NEC wins because of its variety.

SOUND EFFECTS:

Voice **NEC**

This category was a toss-up that came down to one factor: which version best used the "voice" in the game. The voice was crisper and easier to understand (in some instances) on the Sega, but a few of the voices were more enjoyable to listen to on the NEC. For example, when the people clap (after a wave's completion) on the NEC, they whoop it up and holler. The Sega end-of-the-wave voice is just polite clapping; no cheering. NEC wins by a whisper-thin margin.

Play **NEC**

NEC by a nose. On the one hand, in the Sega version EACH tile made a marching sound as it walked down the belt. On NEC, only the closest tile made a marching sound. The score tallying sound was cooler on the Sega, but the spring sound (as you toss a tile back on to the belt) was better on NEC. NEC also made a loud "crunch" sound whenever the paddle or a slot in the bin was full. The crunch sound was extremely helpful in the fast-paced later rounds. Sega made only a polite little sound that reminded me of someone muffling a sneeze or cough.

CONTROL

A paddle that responds immediately to your commands is crucial in later rounds. NEC wins, because I was able to dump three or more tiles off of the paddle very quickly. I couldn't always do that with Sega because there was more delay between drops. Also, I was usually able to catch two tiles that were nearly side by side on the NEC. I couldn't do this on Sega (with any consistency). NEC also allows paddle speed customizing; Sega doesn't.

MUSIC

Genesis wins for one simple reason. Sega has background music and NEC doesn't! I almost took the point away from Sega after hearing the music though. No wonder the default for music is off! It's as repetitive and boring as the music you'd hear if you were put on hold by your dentist office receptionist!

SPECIAL FEATURES

Continue **SEGA**

Both versions allow the player to continue through the use of "credits" after the game ends. Sega allows up to 21 continue credits; NEC has only 9. The Sega version even goes a step further by letting you continue where you left off — even after all the credits are used up. Your score is set to 0 again, but that's fair.

Game Customizing **NEC**

Both versions allow you to set the difficulty to Easy, Medium or Hard. Both have the ability to display a larger play area. Turning Ramping on or off is also supported by both versions. Sega allows changing the tile color palette, which is nice. NEC can display wave data in Japanese. (Great feature, if you read Japanese!) The reason I gave this category to NEC is that it allows you to adjust the wave requirements. You can set it between 50% and 150%, so you can match the game to the skill level of any player. e.g., At 50% you need 5000 points to pass a simple point-wave. At 100% you need 10,000 points and at 150% you need 15,000 points.

High Score Board

SEGA

If a video game doesn't have a battery backup, high score boards are basically worthless. Why bother entering your name when your score will be gone the next time you play? Beats me. Since there's no battery in either version, I found the high score board pretty worthless — initially. I changed my mind after seeing how Sega handled it.

Each score is accompanied by two letters in addition to the player's name, score and how many credits were used to achieve the score. The first letter tells whether or not you played with Ramping on. The second shows which difficulty setting you played at. This is a much better way to motivate you to beat the board by playing with different settings.

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

SEGA

If you don't like simultaneous two-player games this category is meaningless. However, if you love to play head-to-head, it can make all the difference. I enjoy playing games like *KLAX* with friends, so this feature was important to me. Sega has two-player capability, NEC doesn't.

There's no noticeable slowdown in game speed as two players go at it at the same time. You can even play a different wave than your opponent — at the same time!

There is one annoying problem. You and your opponent get tiles in a different color sequence when playing like-numbered waves. Since neither of you ever plays against the same setup, luck can play a large part in which one of you wins. One person can really get the short end of the stick if the computer throws out a bunch of different tile colors all the time, instead of a stream of a few colors.

MANUAL TIE

Both manuals are virtually identical in their explanations of how to play the game and which sample patterns they provide. I found a scoring error in the NEC manual. No big deal.

The big problem with the Sega manual is that it doesn't explain how to play with two players! I didn't even realize there was a two-player mode until I read the game box!

All you have to do for a two-player game is have the second person tap any button on their controller at any time during the wave selection screen — or at any time during the first player's game!

OVERALL RATING

Both versions are very playable, but NEC has better play control, graphics and is a bit more "friendly." Both offer a great deal of challenge and endless hours of fun.

If I want to play alone, I use the NEC. If I want to challenge a friend, I set up the Sega Genesis. Although I'm disappointed that two-player games don't have the same tile sequences, I still enjoy the challenge of going for tougher and tougher Klax patterns to keep ahead of my friend's score.

RASTER

Game Guru (Continued)

Question # 1

Dear Game Guru,

I'm having a wee bit of difficulty playing Sega's new game Moonwalker. How do I defeat Mr. Big's green soldiers in Round 5-2?

Dazed and Confused in Canton

Answer

Dear Dazed,

The green soldiers are Michael's toughest opponents. To make your task easier, go to the area where Mr. Big appears and shoot the middle ceiling laser with a Hat Attack.

Shoot the laser while Bubbles is still on Michael's shoulder. That way you won't

be attacked while you shoot. Now it's just Mikey vs. the soldiers — without the worry of overhead laser fire hitting you.

Question # 2

Dear G.G.

I own EA's new Genesis game "Populous" and I love it! BUT, I am getting a little sick of only being able to jump four to seven worlds at a time. Is there any other way to jump ahead besides conquering every fifth or so world?

Supreme Populous Addicts & Zealots

Answer

Dear S.P.A.Z.

Yes, there is a way. When you call up the password screen, enter numbers instead of codewords. You do this by holding down the "B" button as you enter the password. The number to enter is 5 times the World number you're jumping to.

e.g., To play World 350: go to the password screen; hold down the "B" button (to cycle through the letters and get to the numbers); enter the number "1750." For the final World (#494), enter the number "2470."

Question # 3

Dear Enlightened One,

Where can I find the 2nd warp whistle in Super Mario Bros. 3?

I Blow But Nothin' Comes Out!

Answer

Dear IBBNCO,

Good question. In the Genesis version, it's located under the dump truck. In the TG-16 version it can only be obtained after you've kissed the Wicked Witch. In Lynx you must climb Mount Fuji and wait at the top until the Teradactyl drops its egg on your head. As for Nintendo, uh, I'm not picking up any vibes. Sorry.

ED — G.G. is just kidding. *SMB* is only available for Nintendo folks.