Retro Entry Judging Feedback

Please provide your thoughts on this entry. This feedback may be released to the public at the results stage.
If you are unable to judge this entry please state this in your feedback, do not leave your box blank whatsoever!
All judging MUST be complete by Saturday 28th October with trophies selected on the website.

Entry Name:	Knuckles' Clackers
Entry By:	GenesisDoes
Hack Based On:	Knuckles' Chaotix
URL to Entry:	https://shc.zone/entries/contest2023/915

Name of Judge	Feedback from Judge for This Entry
D.A. Garden	A 32X ROM hack of Knuckles Chaotix. Now there's something you don't see every day. The intro is very loud and abrupt. I wasn't ready for it. I will say from the start that a lot of these music ports from the title screen's intro and onwards aren't too good. I know the 32X is difficult to work with, but most of them were very simple and I muted things a lot, only checking for new tracks when something different happened. And when it did, I'd give it a quick listen, only to be put off and then mute it again. I know the 32X is capable of much more, though.

Techno Tower Classic Acts 1 - 3
The one zone available, with 4 acts to go through. Straight away, the porting of Sonic Crackers stage art (and the animated art/cycling palettes) is very well done, and looks incredibly accurate. However, the level layouts aren't very good. There's a lot of running round loops and curves just to run head first into a badnik. They are also very confusing, with dead ends and it's sometimes not clear where you can go to progress in the level. Quite a lot of level objects also use either the wrong art or wrong palette. I applaud the inclusion of working loops (which were non-existent before), but this also shows why they were absent, with your partner getting stuck on the wrong layer a lot. The badnik that fires multiple homing missiles is a royal pain, and as soon as I hear that shooting sound effect, I just know I'm going to get hit; regardless of where I go or what I do. The new monitor to remove your partner is also weird in that it doesn't break, but can also be undone by calling your partner. Not too sure of its purpose, really. I also had all rings just flat-out disappear in Act 3. It was very odd, as I could still hear them being collected, but I saw nothing.

Techno Tower Classic Act 4
A boss rush similar to ideas I have seen before, but this time in Knuckles Chaotix. The new monitor that separates you and your partner makes immediate death very easy to do, as if your partner gets hurt during a boss while untethered, you will instantly die and be returned to the Hub level. Not cool. The background is a bit too small and so we get a flat blue background for half of the stage, which is a little tough on the eyes.

Summary
As a proof of concept of what can be done with Knuckles Chaotix, this is impressive. As an actual playable ROM hack, it falls short in many areas. The music in general is quite |

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	unpleasant to listen to at times, and as a result, I found myself muting it quite a bit. It could definitely do with some improvements. I think there's also a lack of focus here. It's great that you've accomplished some of the feats here, but I think that they should be refined with some direction into something new.
Jubbalub	
Ravenfreak	I was excited to see that there was a Knuckles' Chaotix hack entered in this year's contest. I know GenesisDoes has been working on this hack for a while, so I was eager to start playing it. However, I was quite disappointed with the music ports in this hack. Even with the extra 32x hardware, I feel that the music ports are lacking. While the percussion takes advantage of the 32x hardware, the FM and PSG parts of songs are bland. The level layouts in Techno Tower Classic are decent, I did find Act 2 to be the most fleshed out act and had fun running through the zone. As for the other layouts, eh I found them to be a bit too confusing and times and there's way too many badniks placed in one area at a given time. These need to be spaced out more, especially the homing enemies. As for the new combi-break monitor? It's probably my favorite new added feature, and honestly I would love to see a fully fledged Knuckles' Chaotix hack with this feature added in the game. It was fun running through zones not being tethered to another character, though there are some parts of each level that can be tricky to navigate without your partner, so level layouts will need to be changed in order for this power up to work flawlessly. Overall this hack has some problems that need to be addressed, like the lacking music ports and over abundance of badniks, however it's impressive seeing a Knuckles Chaotix hack. I hope to see the hack in future contests, with bug fixes since I do see potential in this one.
SSF1991 (Donnie)	I was not expecting a hack of Knuckles Chaotix, that's for sure! From a technical standpoint, this is very impressive. From a level design standpoint…it's okay. There were times where I'd get sent right into an enemy when I'd least expect it, and the difficulty increase is a little annoying, but it's rather harmless overall and nothing I can't really complain about. The Combi Breaker mechanic that the new monitor provides is fun, but I can see how this would create problems in a game that is designed around the ring-tethering. Still, this has a lot of potential!
SunkythePootis	If I had 5p every time a Sega 32x hack showed up at the Hacking Contest, I'd have 10p, which isn't a lot but it's weird that it happened twice. Of all the Sonic games that can fall under the Retro category for the Sonic Hacking Contest, I certainly wasn't expecting Knuckles Chaotix to receive any kind of rom hack this year, due to the notorious complexity of the Sega 32x hardware, and the original game itself being rather unconventional for a 2D Sonic game. At first the hack starts out in familiar territory with a fully playable recreation of the old Techno Tower level seen in the "Sonic Crackers" prototype. More original stage layouts start coming into play from Act 2 onwards, and by Act 4 a couple of familiar Sonic 2 assets make a brief appearance, including working bumpers from Casino Night Zone.

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	Techno Tower Classic's level layouts are generally pretty good, which is frankly a big improvement from the original game's levels. While the original Chaotix felt like it was dragging its feet with the often large but hollow level design, the currently available levels in Clackers are more compact and offer considerably more platforming by comparison, all while still keeping the sense of verticality from the what you could now call "Modern" Techno Tower. While the main usage of the Combi Ring was for reaching higher areas, there was this part of me that was actually having fun using the mechanic this time around, solely because of how more often I could use the mechanic in each level. The only real issue I have with the demo, is the new "Combi Breaker" monitor which breaks the ring tethering between the two player characters. In single player, the CPU character in Chaotix doesn't share the same AI system as Tails in most 2D Sonic games, where it automatically tries to follow where the player is going. From what I can gather from playing, the CPU in Chaotix seems to roughly copy the button presses Player 1 makes, which ends up leading to them getting stuck in corners once the ring tether is broken in Clackers. The hack seems to treat this the same way as losing your partner with no rings, as I've had Clackers start the losing portal sequence soon after the detached CPU player got hurt by a stage boss, despite me still having 6 rings collected at that moment. As a result, I soon treated the Combi Breaker powered as a 10 ring penalty and immediately went to call the CPU partner back to restore the ring tether. I could see this being more handy when playing the 2 player co-op as a short break from the bouncy Combi Ring mechanic, but I can only speak from the perspective of playing with the CPU here. Overall Knuckles Clackers is an impressive proof of concept, and a rom hack that I'm very interested in seeing where it goes from here.
SuperEgg	Knuckles Clackers was something I wasn't expecting to see, but a well received surprise. I'm going to start with my notes of the gameplay of the hack, as sadly, there isn't much for me to discuss. I know, kinda odd. The gameplay of the hack is still Knuckles Chaotix, so if you came here hoping teether rings and teamwork has been axed, you've sadly come to the wrong place. I'll be very honest, I didn't have a lot of fun playing this hack. The level designs, while some have potential, most are still somewhat frustrating. I at some point stopped taking notes. A true highlight however was the Techno Tower Act 4. I enjoyed it a lot, except the parts where my partner would swing on back like a Houston hobo after seeing you walk past him on Tuesday. And much like said hobo, when Robotnik swings and hits him, he goes down in one hit and somehow drags you along. It took me a solid 15 minutes to figure out how I kept dying, but yeah, GenesisDoes, please fix.

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	Outside of the gameplay aspect, the technical marvel of working on this hack is incredibly impressive. This isn't some basic hack where you changed the language and added a save feature to Mean Bean Machine and expected it to pass as some grand hack, you put a lot of work into this. The fact there are new levels **and** with loops is insane to me. Along with it, there are musical changes, and I read about all the changes under the hood. While this hack isn't some grand standing example of level design or art changes, the technical work behind it and the above and beyond commitment you have done is enough to push it to my top 3 picks for the Contest. I hope to see this next year, with gameplay that bolsters the insane amount of technical work you have achieved.
Yoshister	A Chaotix hack is a rare sight but a welcome one! I really like the old Techno Tower sprite work and the music ports here, the hack looks and sounds really nice! Unfortunately the level design doesn't feel like an improvement from the base game. Most levels feel very big and empty, full of halfpipes and non-threatening enemies. The tutorial and Techno Tower levels felt more like I was going through the motions with the combining gimmick being mostly an annoyance. Otherwise there's not much to say, but I look forward to seeing this one be updated, hopefully with better level design.