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Case Study #1

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Game Overview
- Title
  - Mines of Minos
- Developer & Publisher
  - Commavid
- Platform
  - Atari 2600
- Release Date
  - October 1982
- Historical context of the game's release and its place in the industry.
  - This game initially received positive feedback, but went highly unnoticed for a couple reasons:
    - Commavid was a company based in Illinois and founded in 1981 which released only a few games during its lifetime. Several of its released games were "interesting" but would be classified as hit or miss overall.
    - The video game crash of 1983 caused this game, along with all of Commavid, to be swept under the rug. They quickly became defunct, leaving Mines of Minos to be forgotten by many.
- Game's genre and comparison to similar games of the time.
  - Maze
  - It was heavily criticized for being a Pac-Man clone, which is highly false. Several other maze-like games came out during this time such as Lock'n'Chase and Lady Bug. Apart from including mazes, the mechanics, level design, and ending all make it a unique game.

Gameplay Mechanics and Level Design
- Core gameplay mechanics and how they shape the player's experience.
  - You can move in any cardinal direction and shoot a singular mine which lasts for a few seconds. You can only shoot one mine at a time and only one mine may be on the map at a time.
  - You can navigate the maze-like areas where you are chased by enemy aliens. Each alien is worth 20 points. When an enemy comes in contact with the mine, they die and the mine is consumed, allowing you to shoot a mine again.
  - Your goal is to collect robot parts (orange dots) to create extra robots. Collecting these parts also gives you 70 points. Every 1000 points, increases your power level by 1, which is damage dealt with your mine. You can move onto a new level or maze at any time, in which other types of aliensworth more points can be killed, but require more powerful mines to kill quickly.
  - The movement of the aliens, along with how limited you are in your defense, can lead to highly intense moments requiring you to time your mines and space properly to survive. It is a surprisingly mechanically-heavy game.

- Level design and how it affects gameplay.
  - Each maze has a unique design, each with their own chokepoints and straightaways that can make certain situations easy or difficult.
  - Each maze slowly fills with water from the top-down. Water slows your character and prevents you from firing your mine, essentially leaving you as a sitting duck to the alien invaders. You want to reach the 1000 point requirement quickly, before the water consumes too much of the level.
  - The robot parts are required to beat the game, but spawn randomly around the map. This prevents you from camping a corner of the map, but can lead to terrible situations where it spawns deep in the water, guaranteeing your death. You have to gather points as quickly as possible to prevent these types of situations, and to be able to move to the next level safely without being too weak to fight back.
  - Increasing types of aliens can create difficult scenarios, and each have their own methods to be defeated based on the design of the map. You can very quickly be pincer attacked (think Pac-Man) before being able to get two mines off. There are other types of enemies which can slip through walls, or some with insane speeds, meaning you have to be extremely careful not to get blitzed.

Graphic and Audio Design
- Game's visual appearance, artistic choices, and how they contribute to the experience.
  - With the limited amount of RAM given to the designers with the Atari 2600, Commavid did its best to create visuals suited towards the story. A majority of the artistic expression comes from the sprites for the mining robot (your character) and the aliens. The colors are bright and basic colors, typical of games during the time. Some of the mazes are very symmetrical, which makes the maps a little less interesting to navigate but pleasing to the eye.
- Sound design, including music and sound effects, and their impact on the game.
  - Some of the sound effects in the game are typical of Atari games in general during that time, while others are a bit more unique. Walking has a loud clanking mechanical sound. The mine has this phaser-like wavy sound. Alien death sounds like an explosion. There are also sounds involved with collecting robot parts which is pretty satisfying in my opinion. Because the game is very fast-paced, these SFX are extremely important in keeping you immersed in the gameplay.

Narrative and Storytelling
- Narrative structure, main plot points, and setting.
  - The setting is in the mines of minos, where you are a mining robot that is trying to defend against alien invaders. In some ways you are defending humanity by defending these mines.There is no context given for why they chose the name Minos, which elicits an image of a minotaur from Greek mythos. Maybe the robot, in some way, is like the minotaur that protects the mines from the invaders. The excerpt from Commavid is as follows:
    - `Mines of Minos`
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■ Something terrible has happened in the mazelike Mines of
  Minos. The smoothly running robot operation has been
  interrupted by an invasion of monstrous alien life forms!
  Aliens stalk the corridors of the mine; only a single robot
  survives to battle them. Desperately he struggles to find and
  assemble pieces of his fellow robots scattered around the
  mine while avoiding the pursuing aliens. If he can assemble a
  large enough robot army, he can battle the aliens to fight
  his way down to deeper levels of the mine and even destroy
  the alien command center at the lowest level. But if the
  aliens catch him he is doomed and his only weapon against
  them is his stock of time bombs.

■

■ Can you avoid the monsters and assemble enough robots to
  expel the alien invaders from the Mines of Minos? Find out in
  this latest video challenge from CommaVid.

- Character development and how it integrates with gameplay.
  - There is no character development, since there are none of the usual mechanisms for it, like dialogue or cutscenes. The context is given by the Atari Manual entry, which few people read at the time. You simply are a robot with a mission to assemble your dead robot companions, and take back the mines. The character does not change from there.

Impact and Reception
- Critical and player reception, including reviews and feedback.
  - Several reviews at the time praised the game for the number of mazes it has, their size, and variation ([Lou Hudson](#) 1983). More recent reviews also seem to praise the game for its intensity and difficulty ([Video Game Critic](#) 2015). Criticisms of the game seem to be that it copies that maze aspect of Pac-Man, and that there is lacking detail in the maze. However, it makes up for the lack of detail by size and map variation, while bringing in new mechanics for revival as well as a more defensive type of attack method that is different from the usual Atari game.
- Game's impact on the gaming industry and its cultural significance.
  - Overall, the game had very little impact on the industry and little cultural significance simply because it was released right before the crash of '83. Poor sales meant that many families were unable to play the game before the company went under, making these kinds of games difficult to find physically and largely went unplayed. As a maze game, it definitely brought in refreshing new mechanics that signified innovation in the genre, but whether or not it inspired other games is difficult to say.

Reflection
- Was the game "fun"? What made it fun or not?

- ○ The game was "fun" because it requires you to track a lot of different moving parts in order to succeed. Apart from collecting robot pieces, being able to maneuver quickly and place mines strategically to off as many aliens as possible creates a lot of pressure that can be thrilling in a way. The added water mechanic also creates a time pressure that is almost a bit unfair.
- ● Reflection on the learning experience and ease of research
  - ○ Overall, a very fun game that should have found more success were it not for the crash. I think despite being very limited in its graphics, the game does a good job in creating pressure and enticing the player to continue further into the maze without losing focus on the goal. It makes me consider how to properly give pressure to players of my board game without making it too difficult. I think Mines of Minos achieves this pretty well, despite me failing a dozen times to make it past level 3. Research-wise, the context questions were difficult to answer simply because there are no articles written about this game. The best I could find was an image of a magazine review from 1983 to give context about how it was received at the time (Lou Hudson). I also used this video to give some context on further levels and see what a real Atari enthusiast had to say about it. The comments also concur that this game is a hidden gem with very little on paper about it.