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# Firefox extensions: fun and games

## Or several ways to waste time

Anthony Taylor

**F**irefox is more than just a web browser. It's also a cross-platform arcade machine. No quarters necessary.

### An ode to Ralph H. Baer

I owe much of my life to Ralph H. Baer. Oh, he doesn't know it. He doesn't even know me. But that's how it goes in these days. Much of life is owed to strangers.

If you want a measure of success, I will give you a yardstick: wasted time. Or rather, leisure time. Ralph H. Baer has given many of us a legacy of time spent in front of a television, twiddling white squares around with a paddle. So it is Ralph H. Baer is a very successful man.

In 1969, Ralph H. Baer invented Pong [1]. Doing so, he invented video games.

I've sacrificed months of my life on the alter of video games since Dad and Mom purchased the family's first Pong game back in 1977, a Sears model with detachable paddles.

Blame the rainy Thorne Bay winters. Blame my budding geekness. Wherever blame may be placed, I wasted hours of my life irretrievably to those little white squares and the harsh electronic *ping* of the square ball.

I'm obviously not the only one.

There is a dictum among developers that the first program written for any new platform is "Hello, World". There is a second dictum that the second program written must be Pong. These mandates are ignored at the programmer's peril, though nobody really likes Pong. It's just how things

The Firefox extensions window



are done. Maybe we are simply trying to recapture the wonder of our childhood. If so, there's entirely too much nostalgia in the world.

### The games

#### Pong!

In the world of Firefox, there are not one, but two versions of Pong. Both offer the same great gameplay. One has the added advantage of using a square ball. The other includes the ability to play against others in an on-line Pong death-match.

Eduardo Garcia Lopez is responsible for PingPong 0.7 (<https://addons.mozilla.org/firefox/1724/>), a simple implementation of the classic game,

Aside: installing Firefox extensions

1. Start Firefox.
2. Click the “Tools” menu item.
3. Select “Extensions”.
4. Down at the way-bottom-right of the “Extensions” window, click the “Get More Extensions” link.
5. Choose from the vast number of useful, semi-useful, and useless extensions.

All the extensions reviewed here are in the Entertainment (https://addons.mozilla.org/search.php?cat=6&app=firefox&appfilter=firefox&type=E) category.

replete with nostalgic touches such as the square ball and hard-to-control paddles. I bow to you, Eduardo. Your love of old games surpasses mine.

Eduardo is not the only one to turn my more-or-less modern computer into the 1969 equivalent of a wooden box full of a handful of tubes and a pound of copper wire. Captain Caveman has devoted hours of his or her life to develop the finely-crafted PONG! Multiplayer 2.2 (https://addons.mozilla.org/firefox/554/). The good Captain’s effort has turned out a slightly more modern version of the game, with an octogon of a ball, and sound, and smoother paddle movement. There is ostensibly an on-line component of the game, but tales of my mad, mad PONG! skillz precede me. I have yet to find a challenger in the two times I checked the lobby.

In the end, they are still just Pong. Both games attempt to take up residence in that empty pit where my childhood innocence once stood, wide-eyed with a paddle in its hand. Those times are passed, though, and now Pong just doesn’t suit. It’s like playing Aztec on an Apple ][ emulator. The memory of Pong is stronger than Pong itself.

## Pacman

In the long-ago, far-away years of the video arcade, no game captured the hearts and quarters of boys and girls like Pacman. Part of it was the mystery—who was this man of the Pac? Represented by a chomping circle of yellow, Pacman wore an eternal expression of mild amusement as he alter-

nately ran from, and then toward, the evil quartet of ghosts. He typified the American dream: scarf pills and fruits while running from impossible fears, until the terrifying moment when he is touched by a ghost and the wedge of his mouth eats his own head.

I still have nightmares.

There are two Firefox options for this classic game. The first is Ingo Oppermann’s Pacman 1.1.0 (https://addons.mozilla.org/firefox/2053/). Mr. Oppermann has gone for the 286-era computer game feel, rather than the realistic arcade experience. The graphics are rudimentary, the gameboards lack the tunnels of the original game, and the sound effects are present but elementary. This was a wise decision on his part. Arcades were highly overrated. The game has a simple, clean feel to it, and is quite playable.

The second is the manlier PagMan 1.0 (https://addons.mozilla.org/firefox/2160/), by mackers. Mackers has given a silent but sturdy reproduction of the original arcade game. The movement is a little choppy, but the game is both visually appealing and true to the original. I do miss the intermission chase scenes, though, and the tinny, synthetic music that has been emulated by the likes of Ms. Pacman, The Postal Service, and that guy who did Pacman Fever.

All-in-all, both Pacman variants are worth a good ten minutes of playtime, at a minimum.

## Card tricks

Want to know what I hate?

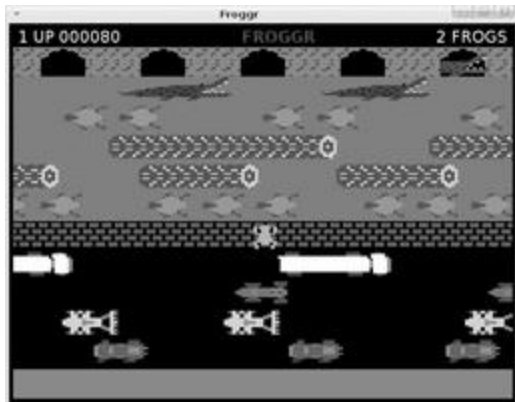
Among other things, I really don’t like computerized card games that play themselves for me. A three-by-five pack of cards is probably a bit more convenient to tote around than a six-pound laptop, and the physical cards have the added benefit of not playing themselves.

Mr. Stephen Clavering has produced a very-complete Cards 0.98 (https://addons.mozilla.org/firefox/1562/) extension for Firefox. It suffers only from one great problem: clicking on a card causes it to automatically move to an appropriate stack. This leads me to wonder:

What’s the point?

There is nothing so patronizing as a game that won’t let you play it yourself. Randomly clicking on cards causes

Look out for the alligators!



them to fly about the gamefield willy-nilly, not allowing you the chance to not notice the black queen that could go on the red king.

Except for that complaint, Cards is an excellent extension with 39 games, the majority to which nobody knows the rules.

## Rocks

Remember Asteroids, the cool game in which you destroy space rocks by striking them with your spaceship? Mackers, fresh from the PagMan victory, has given to the world Mozteroids (<https://addons.mozilla.org/firefox/2157/>), an impossible-to-control variant of the old vector-graphics classic. Don't get me wrong, Mozteroids looks pretty, in a pixelated sort of way. But the ship either spins too slowly, or too quickly, and moves as if it has been blindfolded and spun around until it cried, and its brothers teased it and called it a crybaby.

It blows up nicely, though. So do the rocks.

## Amphibious delight

Mackers, mackers mackers. You have given us PagMan and Mozteroids. Who could ask for more?

And yet you insist. Your piece de resistance? Frogger (<https://addons.mozilla.org/firefox/2165/>). A subtle, strange game in which you push a hapless frog in front of a convoy of tankers carrying toxic chemicals, or perhaps under the wheels of the never-ending stream of fast-moving sports cars. Or perhaps the poor

beast is eaten by a hungry, grinning alligator. In all the various ways the frog can die, none is more satisfying than pushing it into a cave at the far end of the field, where it is turned to stone in a wide-mouthed monument to traffic-avoiding, alligator-starving amphibians everywhere. This is perhaps my favorite game of all.

## Falling-block puzzles

Mr. Stephen Clavering has done it again, in a good way. His Blockfall (<https://addons.mozilla.org/firefox/1403/>) game is an aesthetically pleasing version of Tetris. It starts off slowly, but increases speed at an adequate rate. The blocks are pleasantly shaded, with excellent hues. In a fit of madness or genius, Stephen has included two additional modes: hexagonal blocks, or triangular blocks. Both are substantially more difficult than the regulation square block. If you think you are a tetris master, you might consider this a challenge.

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In the end, they are still just Pong  
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Mackers provides an excellent Tetris entry with Xultris 2.2 (<https://addons.mozilla.org/firefox/2155/>). Although this is a more prosaic rendition of Tetris, the gameplay is quite traditional and quite fun. The animated blue-flame background is a nice touch.

## Also-rans

There are other games available for Firefox, as well. There's a really nifty car race game called Xoom (<https://addons.mozilla.org/firefox/2159/>) (by none other than the prolific mackers). There's a Minesweeper-like game called Mines (<https://addons.mozilla.org/firefox/1049/>). There are more, many more. Explore the Entertainment (<https://addons.mozilla.org/search.php?cat=6&app=firefox&appfilter=firefox&type=E>) section of the Firefox extensions repository (<https://addons.mozilla.org/firefox/extensions/>).

These are all quite fun little games. As tastes vary, you may find you enjoy some I didn't, and despise some I enjoyed. This is the spice of life.

## Why games?

With all the high-tech, attention-grabbing, CPU-sucking, highly-graphical games in the world, it's difficult to understand the goodness and fun of these silly little games written in the least-efficient manner possible. Firefox was never designed as a gaming platform, and yet its extensibility has drawn a few adventurous game programmers.

Why is this important?

In the install instructions, there is no distinction between OS X and MS-Windows, GNU/Linux or \*BSD. These are the first games, the trials and experiments. With a little luck, we'll see bigger, more advanced games written in a truly platform-independent manner, downloadable and playable with the ease of Firefox extensibility, with no question of your platform-of-choice.

And if we don't, these games are still fun diversions, enjoyable in the most fundamental video game tradition: the tradition of Pong and Pacman. I give thanks to Ralph H. Baer.

Smiling at me from the bottom of my Firefox window, Abe Vigoda seems to amiably agree.

## Bibliography

[1] Winter, David "PONG-Story" (<http://www.pong-story.com/>),

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### About the author

Anthony Taylor: Tony Taylor was born, causing his mother great discomfort, and has lived his life ever since. He expects to die some day. Until that day, he hopes to continue writing, and living out his childhood dream of being a geek.