

Kooky Diver (1986) – Anschuetz/Weisgerber/Anschuetz

Game Play

The object of Kooky Diver is to swim from your boat to the ocean floor, retrieve treasures from a giant clam, and swim back to return it to your boat. All the while, you must avoid a school of fish, a shark, and the closing clamshell. You only have three divers to complete your mission. While not moving, you are constantly descending at a slow rate toward the ocean floor. You can use your joystick to move in any direction to move and avoid the shark and fish. If you are hit by a shark or run over by the school of fish, you die immediately and precede head-first toward death and Davy Jones' Locker. When you reach the clam, you must wait until it opens up before you can retrieve the treasure. The treasures change each time you collect one. The first treasure is a pearl, the second one is a trophy cup, and so on. The opening and closing of the clam is random, so you must tread water waiting for it to open, all while your oxygen is running out. Once the clam is open, the diver must swim to the treasure, press the fire button to retrieve the treasure, then quickly make it back to the boat before the oxygen level reaches zero. The oxygen runs out much faster when you are weighted down by the treasure. Once you return the treasure, your mission starts over and you must retrieve the next treasure until all three of your divers have died. You can place the treasures on the coral reefs to each side as a way to not run out of oxygen. Some of the larger items require this "rest stop" in order to bring the item to the surface. If your oxygen is less than 50 percent when you reach the surface, it will be restored to 100 percent.

The following description of the gameplay was written by the A/W/A Team to be submitted to a computer magazine along with the game.

Yes, he's back and he's kookier than ever. But this time, instead of climbing another building, Kooky has taken the opposite extreme and has begun a search for lost treasure. On his dives, he will encounter black pearls, treasure chests, pistols, vases, steering wheels, and many other treasures. But what Kooky doesn't know as he begins his expedition is that not only are there a dangerous shark and a school of man-eating piranha to block his path, but that a giant clam has swallowed all of the treasure! You, as Kooky, will have to dive for the various treasures and attempt to bring them up to the salvage boat. To move Kooky in any particular direction, just move the joystick in the corresponding direction. To tread water, push the joystick in any of the diagonal directions. You must time it just right so that the clam's mouth is open when you touch the treasure in order to have a chance to make a successful salvage. If the mouth is open and you are touching the treasure, merely press the fire button on the joystick and you will have picked up the treasure. Of course, if you touch any part of the clam when its mouth is closed, you will lose a life. After you have a treasure in your possession, you will use up your limited supply of oxygen rather quickly. Luckily, there are three coral reefs for you to deposit your treasure on while surfacing for more oxygen. Provided that your current oxygen level is below 50 units, you will completely fill your tanks every time you bring your head

out of water. To drop off a treasure on any reef, all you must do is make sure that Kooky is only touching the yellow portion of the reef. At this point, the treasure will automatically be set there with no further actions required. To pick up a treasure again, simply press the fire button while touching the treasure as before. Of course, any collision with the piranha or the shark will cause instant death and send Kooky plummeting toward the ocean floor. After three deaths, your game will end and the high score will be shown. At this point, you can press the "START" button on the computer to start a new game with three new divers. You may end up doing this quite a few times at first because after all, nobody ever said that diving was easy!

The ultimate goal of the game, however, is to deposit your treasure in the boat that is moving across the top of the screen. To do this, just touch the boat and your treasure will appear inside. At this point, a new treasure will appear inside the clam, and you can now try to get this treasure to the boat.

Recollections

Kooky Diver was primarily written by Eric Anschuetz. The game is really unique and not patterned after any commercial arcade or home game. The top row with the waves and the boat implement a rough scroll technique. The diver, fish, shark, and pearl are obvious uses of the four Player/Missile graphics allocated on the Atari 8-bit computer. The coral reefs, the waves, the boat, and the clam shell are implemented using redefined characters.

A technique that is used in this game and many other A/W/A games is the background sound effect, since games are much more boring without them. Since the games were written in BASIC, there really wasn't time to play a real melody during the display list interrupts. So the A/W/A Team used a technique where an assonant tone is produced through the Pokey sound chip and it sounds as if it is a wavering tone. It's kind of annoying after a while, but it is much better than silence and could be accomplished with one line of code! There was a lot of experimentation with the various parameters of the BASIC SOUND command to get a semi-pleasant-sounding background tone that sounded right.

This game is really polished and doesn't have any glitches or bugs present as in some of the other games due to the fact that this game doesn't really push the envelope of what can be done with Atari BASIC. The game initializes really quickly and it doesn't take long to start a new game at the end of a game.

A really good professional feature of this game is that at the end of the game, everything doesn't just freeze on the screen or go back to the start menu. After the game is over, the fish and shark keep swimming, and the bottom display toggles between the score of the last game and the high score / restart prompt. This implementation of an "attract mode" was something almost non-existent in type-in home games.

This game was programmed in one long day after Eric dreamed of the game the night before. The concept art that Eric drew the morning after his dream looks nearly identical to the finished game. The

game was quickly coded from there. From concept to game in 24 hours was pretty amazing for a 20-year-old!

Eric used his first display list interrupt in this game – an advanced technique that allowed some code to be written in the brief time that the TV finished scanning one line and then waited to scan the next line (all at 60 hertz). The DLI was used to change the color of the score line at the bottom to green, thus using an additional color not normally available in the Atari's four-color display palette.