

Night Rescue (1984) – Anschuetz/Weisgerber/Anschuetz

Game Play

Night Rescue puts you on a daring attempt to rescue civilians with your hot air balloon before they are taken prisoner by the invading forces. The player must navigate through a lengthy journey through a city without crashing into any of the buildings or ground, avoid obstacles, and rescue as many humans as possible. The enemy consists of tanks, rockets, helicopters, and a manic warplane. You must maneuver through a city-scape and reach your ultimate destination where you rescue the last hostages. Each rescued hostage gives you 100 points.

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.

Night Rescue is a game in which you guide your balloon over enemy territory on a secret mission to rescue your country's spies who have infiltrated the enemy's city. The journey, which begins over the mountains on the outskirts of the city, is extremely dangerous because any contact with enemy terrain or the enemy reconnaissance plane and helicopters results in the loss of one of only five balloons. In addition to this, the enemy has planted double-agents who will destroy your balloon if you attempt to rescue them. Upon reaching the outer edge of the city you must make a soft landing on the top of the headquarters of the resistance, at which point you will begin another run above the city.

The balloon is controlled by moving the joystick left, right, up, and down to move in the corresponding direction. The balloon's position may be "fine-tuned" by pressing the fire button while moving the joystick left and right. Moving the balloon up and down is made treacherous by the forces of inertia acting upon it. To land on the resistance's headquarters you must be both scrolled and "fine-tuned" all the way to the right. Scoring in Night Rescue consists of 100 points for each rescued agent plus a bonus for reaching the resistance's headquarters which increases for each new set. At the end of the game you may play again by simply pressing the START key.

Recollections

Night Rescue was actually based on four different games. The first two games were home computer games called Protector, by Synapse, and The Tail of Beta Lyrae, by Datamost. Both of these games were clones themselves of the third game it was patterned after, Williams Defender. Protector, The Tail of Beta Lyrae, and Defender were side-scrolling shoot-em-ups. Night Rescue copied the city-scape environment of the home video games, while also incorporating the rescue objective of Defender where the main player had to land on top of the characters to be rescued at the bottom of the screen. The fourth game that Night Rescue was patterned after was Choplifter, which was initially developed for the home computer scene and, in a very rare turn of events, was subsequently released as an arcade game.

Choplifter was also a side-scroller, featured a helicopter as a main player, and also had a mission where characters at the bottom of the screen had to be rescued. Night Rescue, however, was not a shoot-em-up, but rather a game of skill and timing.

Night Rescue had a beautifully rendered city-scape of futuristic buildings and made use of the many-colored palette of the Atari 8-bit computers. The game was rendered in an Atari Graphics mode that wasn't available directly from BASIC, but could be accessed by writing various memory locations within the Display List with the correct values to enter the "hidden" mode. This mode added additional colors to each character. There was even a special trick that "borrowed" a color from Player/Missile graphics to be used as an additional color in each of the characters.

Mapping out the city-scape on graph paper was a creative process. Instead of black and white (1's or 0's) colors for the bit-mapped 8x8 characters, each character in this special graphics mode could have 4 or 5 colors. The city-scape was several screens wide, and was rough-scrolled through 8-bits at a time. Unlike many side-scrollers that force the player in one direction, usually left to right, the Night Rescue player could control the direction of horizontal scrolling with the joystick. The player's mission was to go from the left side of the city-scape to the right-side, through several screens of buildings and caves, but at any time the player could turn around and go back left to rescue more humans for points or avoid obstacles like the flying plane.

Originally, since the game was set in Germany during WWII, a Nazi flag was used as a recurring character in the landscape. Eric, Robert, and John realized that a Nazi flag may not be politically correct if the game were to be published, so they changed the flag to be a modern Germany flag with three colors. They also added extra redefined characters to change the helicopters' orientation from left to right.

The main player controlled a hot air balloon. The balloon was moved left/right/up/down with the joystick. When the balloon moved left and right, the terrain scrolls in the opposite direction. A really unique method of control was added to fine-tune movement. This was accomplished by pushing the fire button while moving left and right. If the fire button was pushed while moving, the balloon moved 1 pixel at a time left or right, and the background didn't scroll. This maneuver was essential to master in order to rescue some of the humans tucked away in very difficult to reach areas in the gamescape. The balloon movement was also affected by very realistic vertical momentum. The longer you held the joystick in a vertical direction, the more the momentum was built up and it takes a while to counteract this momentum to slow down and go in the opposite direction. This momentum, and the need to sometimes fine-tune movement with the fire button, made maneuvering in tight quarters very difficult.

While the balloon mostly travelled from left to right, an out-of-control plane obstacle constantly got in the way of the player as the plane travelled from right-to-left. The plane actually moves in a sine-wave pattern, and the A/W/A Team initially actually used a mathematical equation to control the plane. The equation's sinusoidal movement was taxing on BASIC and slowed it down, so another algorithm was used that moved the plane up or down a pixel as it travelled until it hit an upper or lower limit and reversed direction. The plane stuck to the top-third of the screen as it moved from right-to-left. When

the plane departed the left side of the screen, another one soon followed from the right. The plane was always in the way of the player, and constantly forced the player to adjust positions.

One interesting part of the game that gave the player an option was the cave section. The player had the option to navigate through a tight cave which was loaded with lots of humans to rescue for points, or the player could take the somewhat easier route above the caves but always in the path of the plane. This decision was really equally weighted one way or another, and the decision really depended on a risk/reward strategy and the skill of the player. The gameplay of Night Rescue was very good – it was easy to get the hang of and very hard to master. Once the player reached the base at the right-end of the city-scape, he was rewarded with bonus points and started all over. The next time through, the plane flew a little faster and it was a little harder to complete the mission.

Night Rescue was the second game that the A/W/A Team sold to COMPUTE! Magazine, again for \$400. Like Kooky Klimber before it, for some reason the game was never published. One memory that John has to this day is that he always felt that he was (partly) to blame for Kooky Klimber and Night Rescue not getting published. The A/W/A Team believed Night Rescue was more polished and valuable than Kooky's Quest and wanted more money than the \$400 offered for Kooky's Quest. John had a phone conversation with a lady at COMPUTE! Magazine that turned kind of hostile. He finally agreed to the \$400 anyway when they lady said "take it or leave it". John was hardly diplomatic at that age! They eventually published "Crazy Climber" games for other platforms, but never published either Kooky Klimber or Night Rescue, so John always wondered if that was a snub due to that phone call!