

Insert Coin To Play...NOT!

Turn your computer into an arcade with an emulator By Sean Pratz

ArCADE-style retro is pretty fashionable in gaming circles lately. Microsoft has released several games that can turn your PC into a virtual coin-op arcade, and Midway has done the same thing for consoles. These aren't rewritten programs, they're exact copies of the games that appeared long ago in arcades and bars everywhere—called emulators. They work by fooling an original program, like Pac-Man, into thinking your computer is actually the old game-cabinet hardware from the 1980s. The only difference is that your computer doesn't have a coin slot.

Hop on the Net and download an "arcade emulator." These programs work like the commercial collections above, but are developed by volunteers for fame and glory—not money.

The emulator that allows you to play the most games is MAME (vintagegaming.com/mame.phtml). The initials stand for "Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator." MAME will let you play over 2000 arcade games—classics (and some not-so-classics)—from the '70s, '80s and '90s.

An emulator only emulates hardware. It's a bit like having the arcade game cabinet but no program to run on it. Even with MAME installed you won't be able to play

games unless you've got the game software to plug into it. In arcade machines the software is usually hard-wired onto a ROM board, like a game is hard-wired in a Nintendo cartridge. In fact, unless you own the ROM board you're not even supposed to make copies because the software is copyrighted.

A resourceful gamer can find 2000 games if they know where to look or how to search—just as a resourceful music lover can find a Metallica song to, er... sample.

These copyrighted games, however, haven't been manufactured for years. The webmaster of a site carrying several hundred arcade ROMs says, "The only reason I don't carry all the games that MAME can run is because there's not enough space

on my server. A smart surfer who knows how to use search engines could find every game available in less than a day, and download them all in a few hours."

The MAME developers themselves won't tell you where to get the ROMs, either. You'll have to rely on your search engine skills to find what you want at underground sites (see box). Of course you didn't read here that good keywords to try are "ROM" and "arcade."

Save your quarters for the laundromat and download MAME instead. You'll have the world's most well stocked arcade right on your desktop. •

RELATED LINKS

Midway Games

midway.com Sells several collections of classic arcade games for the PC, as well as for the PlayStation, Dreamcast and Saturn consoles.

Microsoft

microsoft.com Return of Arcade and Revenge of Arcade collections offer some classics specifically for PCs running Windows.

Emulation doesn't end with MAME. Arcade games aren't the only games people play, console gamers have plenty of choices as well:

Stella

www4.ncsu.edu/~bwmott/www/2600

Does a great job of emulating the Atari-2600.

The Virtual ColecoVision

classicgaming.com/vcolecto
Emulates what was one of the most advanced gaming consoles available in the 1980s.

AGES

ages.emuunlim.com

Plays games for the Sega Genesis.

Nemu

nemu.com

Emulates the Nintendo 64.

The only emulators available for PlayStation games are **Bleem!** (bleem.com) and **Connectix Virtual Game Station** (virtualgamestation.com).

Steamtunnels Radio

The return of the Steamtunnels 24-hour live deejay broadcast. A seamless mix of funky house, crunchy techno and jazzy trip-hop. Join us on a rhythmic trip...

A faster-than-56k net connection is required (such as DSL, cable, or T1). Tuning-in is as easy as a single mouseclick!

<http://steamtunnels.net/radio/>