CUTHBERT GOES CLONING:
PORTS, PLATFORMS AND THE DRAGON 32 MICROCOMPUTER
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INTRODUCTION

In the middle of 2019, the UK's National Videogame Museum (NVM) unveiled its latest, and by far its largest, exhibit. 'Platform 14' explores the phenomenon of converting – or 'porting' – videogames across different systems. It allows visitors to investigate what is lost, what is gained and what changes as 'the same game' is translated and remade for different platforms. It is a physically large, even imposing, exhibit that comprises twenty four 50 inch displays. Half of the displays are dedicated to providing instruction and interpretative context, with the remaining fourteen dedicated to playable versions of a game. Crucially, then, these are fourteen versions of the same game that are viewable, and playable, simultaneously. The focus on the conversion of a single game across multiple platforms and the simultaneity of display are absolutely central to the exhibit which is predicated on the idea of facilitating comparison of different platforms. The exhibit opened showcasing fourteen versions of *Donkey Kong* ranging from home computer incarnations such as the ZX Spectrum and Dragon 32, through TV-connected consoles such as the Nintendo Entertainment System and handheld devices like the Game & Watch. Versions on display included titles created or licensed by Nintendo as well as unofficially-sanctioned 'clones' or remakes.

As well as being undeniably arresting in its size and scale, the exhibit is intended to draw attention to a crucial question that cuts to the very heart of videogame history, game preservation and exhibition and, I would argue, impacts on all aspects of game studies scholarship yet which is very rarely acknowledged or discussed. Quite simply, with so many games having been developed and released across multiple platforms, when we speak of, analyse or even reference a videogame in our bibliographies and ludographies, which version of that game do we mean? When we speak or write about *Donkey Kong* either in everyday conversation or in our academic enquiries, what do we mean? What could we mean? And, most importantly, what is at stake by failing to recognise the imprecision?

In this chapter, I wish to focus in particular on the Dragon 32 platform and the unexpectedly circuitous role this UK-developed home computer plays in the story of *Donkey Kong*. I place my focus on the Dragon for a number of reasons, not least of which is that, despite the surge in scholarly and popular interest in histories of videogaming, the Dragon is often wholly absent or merely relegated to a footnote. This is, in part, due to the US-centrism of much videogame history that as Grabarczyk (2018) and Wade and Webber (2016) have noted. Yet, it is also connected with the Dragon system itself which played a comparatively minor and short-lived role in the busy and fast-moving home computer European marketplace of the early 1980s. However, there is more to this than trawling through the history of a comparative obscure gaming system, and many of the questions I seek to raise in exploring the Dragon arise from, and shine light upon, distinctive regional and international development and publishing practices that saw games rebranded, renamed and reframed as they moved between Japan, US and Europe. Ultimately, what is so fascinating about the case of the Dragon 32 and, especially the case of *Donkey Kong* and the Dragon, is the way in which one of the most iconic of Japanese videogames comes to have its globally-recognised cast of characters substituted for the corporate mascot of a small Cornish

publishing company creating software for a Welsh-Spanish home computer platform. This, then, is the story of how Kong became King and Mario became Cuthbert.

A PLATFORM STUDIES PLATFORM

At the heart of the Platform 14 exhibit is a desire to explore the impact of underlying computing systems – the gaming 'platform' – on games and gameplay. It is worth noting at this point that the videogame platform has become almost so prevalent within the contemporary marketplace that it is tempting to overlook its history and consider it simply a natural part of game hardware design and business. However, since the earliest days of gaming, the conversion or port has been a mainstay of the marketplace with games like Pac-Man and Space Invaders appearing (and continuing to appear) on almost every conceivable platform.

As such, a central thesis underpinning the Platform 14 exhibit is that, by virtue of its design, each videogame platform, whether it be a dedicated videogame console, a general purpose home computer, a handheld device or mobile phone, has its own distinctive capabilities and limitations which, in various ways, shape, enable and restrict the creative work of game developers. In this way, the exhibit demonstrably takes much inspiration from 'Platform Studies' approaches to videogame scholarship (e.g. Montfort and Bogost 2009; Altice 2015; Therrien 2019) where we learn that factors including the availability of memory, the design of graphics and sound processors, and the interactions and bottlenecks between software, firmware and hardware layers, all play a crucial role in shaping the look, sound and feel of games created for specific platforms.

The visibility of platforms within the discourses of gaming culture, coupled with the significance of platform studies approaches to game scholarship, ensures that investigating the relationships between gaming hardware and software and, most importantly, the impact of computing systems on experiences of play, are key areas of concern at the museum. Less clear, however, is precisely how to tackle the design and implementation of exhibits facilitating the exploration of these complex topics. While our exhibit does, indeed, take much from platform studies approaches, it deviates in an important manner. Ultimately, as its name might suggest, Platform 14 is not about any one platform, but is about the journey of a game across multiple platforms. This is a subtle but, we believe, essential shift in focus which moves away from demonstrating the distinctive or unique qualities of a given platform by showcasing exemplar games, and instead focuses on the transformations that occur as one game is recreated on different systems. In this way, and in particular by comparing the conversion of one game across these multiple platforms, we might differently witness the impact of each system and its complex affordances, limitations and potentials. By encountering these multiple examples simultaneously, we might even more effectively see the influences, traces and residue of the graphics, sound and processing capabilities of the platform on the game developers' ability to (re)produce a given game.

Ultimately, it might seem that Platform 14 is an exhibit about lineage and genealogy. It might seem that it is primarily concerned with establishing a game's origins and charting the deviations and modifications it undergoes as it is, perhaps imperfectly, rendered across differently accommodating hardware systems. However, I prefer to think of the exhibit not as setting out a timeline of originals and adaptations or parents and children, but rather as exploring the potentialities of each platform as a site for gameplay.

ENTER THE DRAGON

Launched in August 1982 by Dragon Data Ltd, the Dragon 32 entered an already highly competitive UK home computer marketplace. Consumers had plenty of choice with the Sinclair ZX80, ZX81 and ZX Spectrum and Commodore VIC-20 all vying for attention. But, crowded though this market may have been, it was not considered to be saturated and, looking to stave off the financial pressures brought on by dwindling sales of its lines of diecast cars, toy manufacturer Mettoy established Dragon Data to capitalise on this new opportunity. Though Mettoy went into receivership in 1983, significant investment from the Welsh Development Agency ensured that Dragon Data Ltd lived on and production of the Dragon 32 computer shifted to a new factory with increased capacity in Port Talbot, Wales.

The Dragon was an unusual computer in many ways. Unlike most other machines developed and sold in the UK that were based around the comparatively less powerful Zilog Z80, the Dragon had a Motorola 6809E chip at its heart. This meant that, from an architectural standpoint, the Dragon had more in common with the Radioshack TRS-80 Color Computer, later rebranded as the Tandy Color Computer. This machine, affectionately known as the CoCo, had been released in the US in late 1980 and was still extremely popular when the Dragon launched in the UK three years later. As well as giving it a performance edge, the 6809E CPU gave the Dragon partial compatibility with the CoCo which would prove to be particularly beneficial in facilitating the porting of software between the systems. Additionally, as the CoCo had already been on the market for a few years, a bank of software and, crucially, programming expertise had been built up. This effectively opened up the potential for a library of software in the UK that the Dragon alone might not have been able to support.

Technicalities aside, one of Dragon Data's great coups had been to secure UK distribution of their machine through retailer Boots. Primarily known as a pharmacist, and initially called Boots the Chemist, the Nottingham-based retailer had a nation-wide high street presence and had begun diversifying into carrying photographic equipment (and also offering film processing), toys and electronics alongside cosmetics and toiletries. With this sweet-smelling shopwindow, the Dragon initially performed well with reports of between 5-10,000 machines per week rolling off the production lines (Linsley n.d.)

Things did not remain rosy for long, however, and Dragon Data soon found itself in financial trouble, at least partly as a consequence of the large scale premises into which it had moved. Almost every month, the Dragon User magazine ran stories on the company's financial woes or speculation about a potential solution. Yet, for all the promise, in 1984, Dragon Data Ltd called in the receivers. As Ralph Bancroft reported in *Personal Computer News*,

> "There is plenty to buy here, from fixtures and fittings to the whole company," said Dragon's managing director Brian Moore. "It is almost certain that somehow, somewhere, there is someone interested in providing 200,000 Dragon owners with continuing support."
>
> (Bancroft 1984: 4)

Following continued speculation about a buyout form Tandy, the company was sold to Spanish startup Eurohard S.A. who shifted production of the Dragon from Wales to Casar de Cáceres. In addition to developing new products some of which were based on prototypes inherited from Dragon Data, Eurohard continued to sell the Dragon until the company finally went out of business in 1987.

By the end of Eurohard's existence, the Dragon 32 was getting rather long in the tooth which was not a receipt for success in such a rapidly developing marketplace. However, it is interesting to note that commentators were not brimming with enthusiasm even at the beginning of the Dragon's journey. Reporting from the fifth Computer World Show in 1983, Gregg Williams, Senior Editor of US *Byte* magazine, gave the machine a decidedly lukewarm reception despite its apparent technological superiority.

> The Dragon 32 is named for its standard 32K bytes of memory – quite a selling point in a country accustomed to microcomputers with memories as small as 1K bytes… The Dragon 32 seems to be a very adequate machine, but there is nothing exceptional about it.
>
> (Williams 1983: 46)

Looking back in an altogether more pointed review, Kris Sangani (2009) uncomplicatedly relegates the Dragon 32 to the status of a 'gadget that design forgot' positing two key reasons for the 'failure' of the machine. One was the Dragon's upper case-only character set that limited the machine's usefulness in education contexts, and two concerned that Motorola chip.

> Gaming was the biggest driver in the home computing market. The Dragon's Motorola MC6809E processor, although computationally powerful for its time, proved very poor for serving up graphics.
>
> (Sangani 2009)

The rather short shrift given to the computer in the 1980s coupled with the fact that, when it is mentioned at all today, it is very often in the context of curiosity or failure might go some way to explaining why, while there is excellent scholarship exploring the histories and cultural impact of systems such as the BBC Model B (e.g. Gazzard 2016), comparatively little historical work has been conducted on the Dragon. Indeed, it is perhaps an example writ large of the criticism offered by Apperley and Parikka (2015) of platform studies as a whole in that the constitution of the platform as an object of critical attention is at least partly dependent on the existence of, and desire to create and collate, an archival base of materials from which to draw.

All of this contributed to the challenge of developing the interpretative materials for the Platform 14 exhibit, but in researching the Dragon 32, its catalogue of games and the ecosystems of development and publishing that surrounded and supported it throughout its lifetime, some truly unexpected and valuable materials and insights arose. Crucially, these help reconstruct the UK gaming situation of the early 1980s and, most excitingly, throw light onto the ways in which games were transformed as they moved across national boundaries and markets as well as across computing platforms. And, despite claims to the contrary, let us begin by stating that the Dragon 32 played host to a great many games, not the least of which involved a large ape and a seemingly inexhaustible supply of barrels.

DONKEY KONGS

The popularity of *Donkey Kong* in the arcades ensured that conversions for home computers, consoles, handheld and tabletop devices came thick and fast. While their quantity could not be doubted, these ports were of wildly varying quality with Intellivision version deemed 'the definition of mediocre' (Loguidice and Barton 2014) and Coleco's Atari VCS version rumoured to have been intentionally underdeveloped to favour the version being sold for the company's own competing Colecovision console (Profundo 1983: 5). Unlike many of these demonstrably or even deliberately

imperfect ports of *Donkey Kong* which omitted gameplay elements and sometimes entire levels present in the arcade game, Microdeal's 1983 Dragon 32 conversion contained all four stages with no omissions. For this reason alone, it was already an enticing proposition. Barrels, conveyor belts, springs and hammers were all present and correct. Of course, like any platform, the Dragon's audiovisual fingerprint was there for all to see and hear. A 'high resolution' mode ran in monochrome while two colour versions reduced the graphical resolution in exchange for the Dragon's truly garish colour combinations of acid green or dreary buff. Of course, this was a Dragon game and it bore all those hallmarks of other games created within the parameters of the Dragon platform, but there was no doubt that this was *Donkey Kong*. Except that it wasn't, because this was *Donkey King*.

Indeed, upon closer inspection, we find that there are no references to Nintendo anywhere within the game's multiple screens, or on the packaging or in the, admittedly sparse, accompanying documentation that comprises just the cassette inlay card and instruction for play. Instead, game development is credited to US developer Tom Mix Software and, in the UK, the title was published and distributed by Cornwall-based Microdeal who, as we shall see later, were a major publisher of games for the Dragon 32. All of this should allay any lasting remnant of suspicion we might have that this was a licensed version of *Donkey Kong*. There certainly were licensed versions including Falcon's *Crazy Kong* arcade cabinet that Nintendo strategically used to help satisfy domestic demand when their own manufacturing could not keep pace (see Nintendo of America, Inc. v. Elcon Industries, Inc. 1982) as well as home console and tabletop versions that were handled by Coleco.

This, then, is no regrettable typo on the title screen. *Donkey King* is a carefully chosen name that unambiguously signals a connection between this Dragon 32 title and the phenomenally successful Nintendo games of (almost) the same name. And, according to sales charts published in the UK's *Dragon User* magazine, and compiled by high street retailer and pharmacist *Boots*, the tactic worked as Donkey King sat proudly atop the Dragon software charts (*Dragon User*, June 1983: 5). In fact, so effective and unambiguous was the connection with *Donkey Kong* that, as reported just a few pages later in the same issue of Dragon User, it piqued the interests of Nintendo who requested the name be changed.

> **Changes forced on Donkey King**
>
> MICRODEAL HAS withdrawn its highly successful game for the Dragon 32 — Donkey King.
>
> This move follows a statement from Computer Games that it considered the name an infringement of its copyright on the title Donkey Kong.
>
> Microdeal has agreed to alter the game which has been extensively advertised In the computer press. Microdeal, managing director John Symes said: "If they have trade-marked it, then fair enough, we are happy to comply-
>
> "Actually it won't cause us too many headaches, we were going to replace it anyway, Now we will call it The King."
>
> (Dragon User, June 1983: 9)

There are, of course, some inescapable ironies here. First, in 1982, Nintendo, themselves, had faced a claim in the US from Universal Studios alleging that *Donkey Kong* infringed on the King Kong trademark. The case was found in Nintendo's favour largely as a result of a previous case involving Universal's that claimed the characters and setting of King Kong were in the public domain (see Casillas 2013). Perhaps more pointedly, however, on the very same page as the confirmation of Donkey King's domination of the Dragon UK software charts is a letter from a *Dragon User* reader sharing a 'useful routine which is ideal to put a copyright on all programs written by us amateurs' (*Dragon User*, June 1983: 5). It is also notable that Tom Mix, the US developer of *Donkey King*, continued to use as their corporate logo an ape-like creature surround by barrels long after this renaming episode. Indeed, the Kong-like logo appears on the cover art, printed on the cassette case, and in print advertisements for the Tom Mix's 1984 Dragon 32 game *Buzzard Bait* which was published and distributed in the UK by Microdeal and which was, for its part, a clone of Williams Electronics' *Joust*! (see Dragon User August 1984: 52).

It is clear, then, that while issues of intellectual property were very much in the commercial and public discourse surrounding software and gaming, this remained a marketplace in which officially licensed and unofficial clones sat cheek by jowl. Indeed, even though, as John Symes promised, Microdeal's *Donkey King* was renamed to became *The King* later in 1983, this was the only change, with the content of the game itself remaining utterly unaltered. As such, *The King* sat alongside other clones of *Donkey Kong* rejoicing under similarly creative variations of the original name including *Krazy Kong* (Personal Software Services, ZX-81, 1982), *Killer Gorilla* (Micro Power, BBC B) and *Dunkey Munkey* (Intellitronics, CoCo, 1982).

Of course, each of these different versions of the game, regardless of whether they are officially sanctioned and licensed, presents a unique take on *Donkey Kong*. Each has its own distinctive claim to Donkey Kongness. There is, without doubt, a palpable canonicity about the Nintendo Entertainment System and Game & Watch versions of *Donkey Kong* that is bestowed by the imprimatur of Nintendo, even though, in the latter case, this is offset by dramatically pared down design and gameplay. *Donkey King*, on the other hand, carries none of the authority of a sanctioned Nintendo product and might even be said to erode the company's status as originator in its brazen references and unapologetic cloning of gameplay, yet it is a faithful reproduction that retains and represents far more than just the essence of *Donkey Kong*. What is particularly notable here is that, while *Donkey/The King* is demonstrably an unofficial, and unsanctioned clone, it is in many ways a more complete, and perhaps faithful, port of the game than many of the licensed iterations.

Ultimately, I believe it is possible to argue that Donkey King is Donkey Kong insofar as all of the clones, official ports and unofficial remakes contribute to our understanding and experience of *Donkey Kong*. Taken together, we might say that they are all *Donkey Kong* just as, in their own ways, none of them are.

CUTHBERT GOES CLONING

To further explore this notion of the relationship between licensed and unlicensed games and between clones and remakes, I wish to turn to a character that many Dragon 32 gamers will recognise as the real king of the platform.

Cuthbert was the de facto mascot of prominent Dragon 32 publisher Microdeal and was the titular star of many of the games the company distributed in the UK throughout the early 1980s including

Cuthbert Goes Walkabout, *Cuthbert in the Jungle* and *Cuthbert Goes Digging* to name but three. At first blush, Cuthbert might seem an unlikely mascot for a videogame publisher or game series although we should perhaps remind ourselves of the longevity of a moustachioed plumber and blue hedgehog. Those familiar with *Mad Magazine*'s Alfred E. Neuman character will likely feel more than a little deja vu when encountering Cuthbert and, while it might be fanciful to suggest it was deliberate, this resemblance does hint at an interesting position Cuthbert occupies with respect to intellectual property. We might also see Cuthbert as a characteristically 1980s attempt to inscribe an audience for games through marketing and branding materials, though we should, equally, note how the attendant assumptions and presuppositions about the identities of players that pervaded the period are writ large in such a representation (see Provenzo 1991).

As a Dragon 32 gamer, Cuthbert was a difficult character to ignore. As well as featuring so prominently in so many well-publicised games, as Microdeal's corporate figurehead, he would grace the occasional and infrequently published *The Cuthbert Chronicle*. This marketing magazine served to advertise Microdeal's current and forthcoming gaming titles with features and reviews that ranged from the predictably gushing, as in the case of *Cuthbert in the Cooler* which was deemed 'All in all… Magic', to disarmingly honest, as in the case of *Athetlyx* which concludes with 'Yes I really like this one!! (sarcasm). Reviewers Opinion Not Very Good' (*The Cuthbert Chronicle* 1985: 7). Regardless, the publication served to comprehensively cement Cuthbert's position as mascot not only as Microdeal but also of Dragon gaming in general given the publisher's breadth of output. As such, Cuthbert's beaming visage was etched into the memories of players. Not that much reinforcement was really required as Cuthbert appeared on the cover of every game in which he took the lead role.

Microdeal's cover art was fairly consistent across its titles and made use of hand drawn depictions of action loosely, and sometimes very loosely, drawn from the digital gameplay. Of course, there were few of the concerns over misrepresentation that we might be more familiar with today and certainly no legal requirement for 'not actual gameplay' clarifications. Indeed, rather than feeling any concern over the potential mismatch of cover image and actual gameplay, these hand drawn illustrations added to the excitement by providing an imaginative interpretation. The cover art was precisely not a facsimile of the world rendered by the Dragon's graphics chip but rather a further creative conjuring that sat alongside and enhanced one's own envisioned world. It would be too simplistic to say that the comparatively bare audiovisual representations of Cuthbert et al's adventures demanded the imagination of the player to fill in the gaps, but it is certainly the case that they encouraged such embellishments and augmentations.

That said, even though one might be well used to recalibrating one's expectations, it was still surprising to see how little Cuthbert on the box looked like Cuthbert on the game screen. Those Dragon users sufficiently familiar with the computer's palette and the prevalence of its uniquely vicious green and gloriously drab buff would not be expecting great fidelity in colour reproduction. However, on loading *Cuthbert in the Jungle* or *Cuthbert Goes Walkabout*, one could be forgiven for wondering why Cuthbert in the game appeared notably taller and more slender and, most unexpectedly, in *Cuthbert Goes Walkabout* at least, appeared to be wearing a stove pipe hat.

Perhaps one answer might come from our knowledge of videogame graphics and the history of early game character design. Returning to *Donkey Kong*, the story of Jumpman/Mario's origin is sufficiently well-documented not to require retelling but what is important to note here is that Mario's profession, and thus what little backstory the character could be said to possess, was

essentially backfilled to fit the visual representation. Perhaps it was considered that the sight of Cuthbert wearing a stove pipe hat on the cassette cover would be too shocking, too out of character, too much like Cuthbert was cosplaying Isambard Kingdom Brunel. At the time, I gave it very little thought and dedicated all of my mental resources to playing the game. However, with the benefit of hindsight, a broadening knowledge of game history and an increased awareness of 1980s development and publishing practices, a new explanation is revealed. As such, and at the risk of sounding like a conspiracy theorist, perhaps the wiry stick figure character taking centerstage on screen in *Cuthbert Goes Walkabout* is not really Cuthbert at all.

As we have seen above with the myriad Kong-likes, the shelves of UK games retailers throughout the 1980s were filled almost to breaking point with a combination of officially-licensed and unofficial clones. Lest we think that *Donkey/The King* was Microdeal's only foray into cloning, the pages of *The Cuthbert Chronicle* reveal this to be a more widespread approach. Similarly, while some clones made an attempt to lexically disguise their points of inspiration. *Katerpillar Attack* and *Mr Dig* might initially throw us off the scent but these far-from-oblique nods to *Centipede* and *Mr Do!* do not require much work to decode. Other titles abandon even this level of linguistic playfulness with *Skramble* (*Scramble*) and *Pengon* (*Pengo*) taking the *Donkey King* approach to naming. In doing so, these titles almost draw more attention to the original than outright duplication would have. There can be little doubt what one might expect from these titles even if they do not exactly say as much, even if only by one letter difference.

But among these self-evident and unabashed clones of popular arcade games with their differing approaches to nominal attribution sit the titles in the Cuthbert series. Prima facie, these are original games. Certainly, their naming does not immediately betray an arcade heritage in the manner of *Pengon* and *Skramble* and, we should remember that, were there an arcade heritage to betray, it would be unusual not to find it proudly declared. The Cuthbert games, however, seem to make no such proclamations. In fact, the titles of the games in the series are, if anything, rather prosaic and perhaps even a little dreary. *Cuthbert Goes Walkabout* does not brim with the urgency of Taito's *Space Invaders*, Activision's *Pitfall!* or Universal's *Space Panic*. It doesn't even have the intriguing ambiguity of Namco's *Galaga*, Midway's *Gorf* or Konami's *Amidar*. And yet, *Cuthbert Goes Walkabout* is *Amidar*, just as *Cuthbert Goes Digging* is *Space Panic* and *Cuthbert in the Jungle* is *Pitfall!*. By which, I mean to say that, each of these apparently original Cuthbert games is a clone of an existing arcade or console game in precisely the same way that *Pengon*, *Katerpillar Attack* and *Donkey King* are clones. We could argue that the naming of the Cuthbert games serves to obfuscate their origins and hide their source material more effectively than *Donkey King* ever attempted to. However, we might also note that, and perhaps express some degree of surprise, that the Cuthbert games do not seek to explicitly draw on the commercial and cultural capital of their source materials in the same manner as *Donkey King et al*. Given the bold, even unapologetic, nature of the naming and marketing of clones we have seen during this period more broadly and in the Dragon 32 library of Microdeal in particular, we might wonder why these games were not marketed as *Amidor*, *Astro Panic* and *Trapfall*. Perhaps the Cuthbert brand was considered strong enough to carry the games, or perhaps the originals were not considered to have sufficient capital in the UK, or perhaps they simply had less than Cuthbert.

This last point is worth pondering as, if we dive into the history of Cuthbert in the Jungle, we find that the game was, indeed, was called *Trapfall* when it was first released for the CoCo platform in the US. The game was developed by Ken Kalish as a clone of David Crane's extremely popular *Pitfall!* action adventure game and Cuthbert did not feature. Cuthbert was added only when the

game was licensed by Microdeal for sale in the UK. And, let us be clear, Cuthbert was added in the sense that the game was rebranded and renamed, but not reprogrammed. Indeed, in subsequent interviews, Kalish has expressed some degree of amusement, if not bemusement, at the renaming of the title for the UK market (Kalish 2004).

It is for this reason that, while Cuthbert appears front and centre on the cover art of the UK Dragon 32 game, the in-game graphics do not much resemble the cheeky, red-haired schoolchild. But why would they? The character in *Cuthbert in the Jungle* quite simply is not Cuthbert because this is *Trapfall*. In the same manner, Steve Bak's *Cuthbert Goes Walkabout* is a Cuthbert game insofar as the cover art and game title declare it such but it we might equally read it as *Amidar* retrofitted through packaging and naming. Armed with this insight into the development and publishing practices of re-releasing games, if we now revisit the Amidar clone known to UK Dragon 32 players as *Cuthbert Goes Walkabout*, we no longer need to ask why Cuthbert is wearing a stove pipe hat. That is not Cuthbert. It is Cuthbert on the cover art, just not in the game.

LONG LIVE THE KING

What, then, can we take from these vignettes and insights into 1980s Dragon 32 gameplay, development and publishing? What sense can we make of the Dragon 32 Cuthbert games and of *Donkey King*? Firstly, it is intriguing to find how complex the histories of these games are. While they are clones, that they do not reveal their points of origin so readily, reminds us how important it is to look beyond the canonical boundaries of game studies and escape the epistemic threshold of platform studies (Apperley and Parikka 2018). However, these games are more than obscure curios. Each title plays an important historical role. *Cuthbert Goes Walkabout* is part of the story of *Amidar* just as *Donkey King* is part of the complex history of *Donkey Kong* and vice versa. These games also reveal much about the national and international flows of ideas and intellectual property and about the business models and marketing practices of an emerging industry. The multiple transformations these games undergo as initially clones from a source title and subsequently renamed, reframed and reintroduced into the market help us piece together geographically and historically specific moments in gaming that tend to be subsumed under weighty discourses that privilege the already popular or grand narratives of a global games industry.

It would be tempting to ignore games like *Donkey King* and the Cuthbert series either because they attain only marginal success on a marginal platform or because, by being clones of other titles, they occupy an inferior position in relation to a fetishised original. However, what I find particularly intriguing about Platform 14 is the way in which it both helps to clarify and problematise the relationship between different games and platforms. By placing a large number of instances of the 'same game' in front of the visitor/researcher simultaneously, the exhibit can both aid in the consolidation of timelines and assertions around the lineage of originals, ports and clones. Yet, it can also encourage the reconceptualisation of the rigidity of such connections by focusing on points of access. In this way, rather than demarcating lines of influence and originality between titles, the spatial layout and simultaneity of the exhibit encourage a reconsideration of the various games as multiple elements that comprise the greater constellation of the particular game. For me, the exhibit helps me move beyond questioning *Donkey King* as a clone of *Donkey Kong* and into a discussion about how both games, and all those others besides, contribute to the larger concept – or constellation – of Donkey Kongness. Each game adds, takes away, modifies and reframes just as each game offers a potential point of access to the world of Donkey Kongness. They also remind us that Donkey Kong is not a game solely located in the past It continues to be played and

remade and it continues to accrue new meanings as new players play it and new research is conducted on it. It is for this reason that the Dragon 32 *Donkey King* was simultaneously presented alongside Nintendo's DK52, the arcade version, the 2012 Intellivision remake (*Donkey Kong Arcade*) and the *Pauline Edition* ROMhack that switches the roles of Mario and Pauline (Mika 2013). It is also for this reason that no Platform 14 history of *Amidar* could exclude *Cuthbert Goes Walkabout*.

It is also for this reason that no *Donkey Kong* history should be without reference to Cuthbert as there is one final connection that speaks eloquently to the practices of cloning and renaming. While *Donkey King*'s name change ensured it notoriety, it was not the only *Donkey Kong* clone available for the CoCo upon which the Dragon 32 computer was based. Ken Kalish, whose *Trapfall* had become *Cuthbert In the Jungle*, had also created a *Donkey Kong* clone. Released in 1983 and published by Med Systems Software in the US, this version also changed but one letter in the original game's title to become *Monkey Kong*. However, in the print advertising for the game, the connection to Nintendo's *Donkey Kong* was (over) confidently stated with the copy emphatically announcing that 'Mario jumps into action on the Color Computer!' and closing with a reference to *Donkey Kong*'s in-game's challenge 'How high can you go?' There could be no doubt, then, that while this was not a licensed version of *Donkey Kong*, this was intended to reproduce that game and, crucially, its woodworking protagonist. Indeed, the in-game graphics do an admirable job of recreating Mario's trademark cap, overalls and moustache. However, while this graphical accuracy might be fitting in this instance, it is rather more jarring were one to load the *King Cuthbert* version of the game which replaced the *Monkey Kong* name in favour of the more bankable Microdeal mascot but left all other aspects of the game unchanged. In an interesting twist, the original US-developed CoCo game initially sold under the monicker *Monkey Kong* had been rebadged and renamed as a Cuthbert title by UK-based Microdeal and rereleased back into the marketplace. If we felt that Kalish's tall, rangy *Cuthbert in the Jungle* sprite did not look much like the Cuthbert from Microdeal's cover art and promotional materials, here was an altogether more portly creation that was, self-evidently, always intended to be Mario. Indeed, as Kalish notes in a brief retrospective, 'Any game could be retitled so that "Cuthbert" was in the title :)' (Kalish 2004). The circularity of these licensing and publishing processes are notable in themselves but what is most deliciously ironic about this situation is that the new title of this game brings together 'Cuthbert,' a character demonstrably not present in the game itself, and the word 'King', that unequivocally reminds us of Microdeal's deft navigation of the original concern over the use of the *Donkey Kong* name.

As such, at least part of our aim in developing the Platform 14 exhibit is to help focus attention on the complexity of researching, speaking and writing about games given their multiple, interwoven, co-dependent existences across time, markets and, crucially, across gaming platforms. So, when we say *Donkey Kong*, what do we mean? What can we mean? By considering the case of *King Cuthbert*, we see just how multifaceted that question can be and how important historical and region specific research are in helping unpick the multiple competing, and perhaps even contrasting, answers.

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