Smash TV

By Bobinator

**Smash TV – Arcade, NES, SNES, Master System, Genesis, Game Gear, ZX Spectrum, Commodore 64, Amstrad CPC, Commodore Amiga, Atari ST, PS1, PS2, PS3, Gamecube, XBOX, XBOX 360, PC**

**Publisher:**

**Midway (In arcades)**

**Acclaim Entertainment (Most ports)**

**Developer:**

**Midway (in arcades)**

**Computer versions –Probe Software**

**SNES & NES – Beam Software**

**Genesis, Master System, & Game Gear – Probe Software**

**Themes:**

**Cyberpunk/Dark Sci-Fi  
Run N’ Gun**

**Sidekicks/Co-Op**

**So 80’s/90’s It Hurts**

**Genres:**

**Action: Single Screen/Arena**

**Action: Top Down View**

**Designers:**

**Eugene Jarvis**

**Mark Turmell**

For about as long as video games have been a thing, there have been attempts to take older video games and bring them into a more modern area. This trend has had a few periods where it’s been especially common, probably starting around the late 80’s to early 90’s. Very rarely, a game’s homage tends to end up even more popular than the game that spawned it, and Smash TV is probably one of those rare cases.

Smash TV is a spiritual successor to <i>Robotron 2084</i>, a particularly classic game spawned from the mind of pinball and arcade designer, Eugene Jarvis. As one of the very games to use two sticks for movement and firing, Robotron was a game known for its brutal difficulty and insanely fast pace. Eight years later, the basic concept between the two games remain remarkably the same. Sure, arcade hardware has made considerable leaps since then, but the DNA between the games is pretty similar.

Smash TV takes place in the grim, cold future of 1999, only a few short years after the conquest of Earth by the New Order Nation. (NOTE: This is a joke. Link the Revolution X article here. :P) The most popular TV show of the future is Smash TV, a deadly game show where one or two shirtless guys run through room after room, shooting thousands of people for fantastic prizes like VCRs and beef. As Contestants 1 & 2, it’s up to you to survive the studio’s three arenas and win all sorts of fabulous prizes. All while being goaded on by the show’s flashy host, who is sure to absolutely not betray you in any way. The plot takes a lot of inspiration from The Running Man, only this game show happens to actually be sincere. Sure, you’ll probably die a lot, but the crowd is actually rooting for you.

The goal of the game is pretty simple. The Smash TV studio is made up of three arenas, each made up of a map of interconnected square rooms. Once you enter a room, waves of enemies will continuously enter from the four doors at its sides. Once you kill enough enemies, you’re free to enter the next room, and things go on like that until you reach the boss of the arena. Every time you clear the first room of an arena, you’re shown a map. You’ll want to pay attention to this, as you’ll often be given a choice of which door you want to exit a cleared room from. Remembering where the special prize rooms on the map were and taking the right exits can lead you to special prize rooms, where you can use to boost up your score to astronomical levels.

The left stick moves your contestant around, while the right stick fires your current weapon in whatever direction you hold it in. This means that you can move in one direction while firing in the opposite direction, and you’re basically going to need to do this all the time if you want any chance of surviving. Other than that, however, that’s basically all you need to know. All you can do, and all you really ever <i>need</i> to do, is run and shoot. The only button the game actually uses is the ‘Start’ button, which has no use aside from continuing. And that’s a good thing, because letting go of those sticks for a moment will probably kill you.

What the game basically does is send in dozens and dozens of enemies in your general direction at once, spawning more and more without any sort of pause until you clear a room. It gets pretty intense, especially since a single touch from any enemy or projectile will instantly kill your contestant. Given how many enemies the game throws at you at once, and the fact that you only get a single room with which to move around, keeping yourself from getting cornered and beaten to a bloody mess is always going to be your biggest priority. Sometimes, you won’t even get a full square to roam, as certain rooms will give you even less room to maneuver by walling off a big corner of the map.

The most common enemy you’ll face on your quest for prizes are bald guys carrying bats, of which the game will spawn them by the proverbial truckload. A single shot from even your default weapon will instantly kill them, but their sheer numbers mean by the time you kill one group, two more spawn in. There’s quite a few more enemy types than that, as well, each of which adds their own little wrinkle to things. Tanks take a lot more short to kill, and can spew a spread of bullets around the screen. Mr. Shrapnel is a fat guy who will explode if you don’t kill him quickly, sending a ring of deadly shrapnel throughout the room. Orbs will position themselves in place and start creating a laser grid, giving you less room to move if you don’t take them out. All of these come together to cut off your escape routes and surround you, and that’s not even counting the deadly mines scattered all over the floor. Touching one of these will make your contestant instantly explode into pieces, so they’re best avoided at all costs.

The enemies themselves aren’t that smart, as they’ll generally either just wander randomly around the arena, or they’ll take the quickest path towards you that they can. It’s their sheer numbers you really have to worry about, as without some extra firepower, you’ll never be able to kill an entire horde before they close in on you. Thankfully, the game drops in plenty of power-ups to help you out, and you’re going to want to grab every single one you can find. There’s a couple of different types of shields to protect you from enemies, shoes to boost your speed, and bombs that clear the screen of enemies. The game’s even nice enough to drop the occasional extra life, although it’ll only buy you about another half minute of game time. What you’ll really want to go for, however, are the fantastic prizes the game drops. The more cash and gold you pick up, the higher your score bonus will be at the end of an arena. You’ll also pick up various prizes that earn you instant points, like a dozen VCRs, six 2600’ inch TVs, and a couple of copies of the Smash TV home game.

Most useful of all the powerups, however, are the special weapons that spawn around the arena every so often. These will replace your default machine gun for as long as your ammo holds out, as shown by the green bar underneath your score. Special weapons come in a few different varieties, depending on the weapon icon you pick up. The most useful of these is probably the rocket launcher, since its projectiles will tear through the weaker enemies in a single shot. You will <i>not</i> survive long without a special weapon in hand, as your default gun is just too weak to kill anything before it rams right into your face. Something like the spread shot, on the other hand, can clear out enough of a crowd to give you enough space to dash to the next special weapon that spawns.

Every arena ends with a boss fight, a long, grueling affair where you’ll not only have to destroy the boss, but in some cases, dismantle it piece by piece. Take Mutoid Man, for example, a giant, muscly guy who somehow ended up with a tank for legs. While you’re avoiding his laser vision and trying not to get run over, you’ll have to blow off both of Mutoid Man’s arms, before moving to his head, blowing his torso open before blowing up the actual torso, and finally, blowing up his other, smaller head hiding just underneath his torso to actually kill him. It should also be noted that only special weapons can actually harm bosses, meaning you’ll have to risk death to pick up weapons that show up around the boss arena. Bosses tend to soak up a lot of damage and can take up quite a few of your credits pretty easily, usually because they’re just so huge on screen that they’re way too difficult to actually avoid.

Pretty much any sort of high level play you’ll be doing will involve finding the many secrets the arenas hold. Some rooms have hidden exits that’ll lead you to secret rooms full of goodies. You’ll need to discover all of these, as well as pick up the keys that spawn in the game every so often, to earn access to the Pleasure Dome. And what <i>is</i> the Pleasure Dome, you may ask? Well, it’s a secret room where the floor cycles through a bunch of retina-burning colors, while bikini-clad women can be collected like the cash and gold bars you’ve been picking up throughout the game. Totally worth it.

And that’s how the game goes, quick, unrelenting, and brutal. The most valuable resource you have is space, and you’re always doing anything you can to gather as much of it as you can. The only real breaks in the action are when you’re ready to leave the current room you’re in, but even then, the game will try to kill you if you mess around for too long. The whole problem with the game is that due to its very nature, it gets pretty repetitive quickly. While the game throws in plenty of new enemies, the general concept never changes for as long as the game lasts. Eventually, it’s hard not to get sick of it by the time you start to reach the end, especially for how blatantly the game stacks things against you. On actual hardware, you likely won’t get to that point, however, because the game is so difficult that you have to be some kind of wizard to even get through the first arena without losing a credit.

Where Smash TV really shines, and what’ll drive you to finish it, is the presentation. Like any good arcade game should have, there’s tons of goofy sound effects that are loud and easily recognizable. The music does a great job of establishing that frantic “game show” feel, as well. It’s a pretty nice looking game for its time, as well, with varied environments to shoot your way through. While the first two arenas look like futuristic studio sets, the third puts you in something that looks like an episode of Legends of the Hidden Temple. There’s also some pretty huge sprites on the bosses, which get progressively more mutilated the more you fire onto them, which is a pretty nice touch. There’s plenty of ultraviolence on everyone else, as well, from the way most enemies explode into red splatters, or the way your unfortunate contestant gets blown to bits when he steps on a mine.

The best parts would have to be the occasion where the host of the show will appear, popping off a quote like “Total carnage! I <i>love it!</i>” when you enter a particularly challenging level. He’ll even quote Robocop every so often, saying “I’d buy <i>that</i> for a dollar!” when you come across the first boss of the game. Also note the absolutely sinister grin he gives the two ladies by his side just before his little box scrolls off the screen. He’s just so infectiously cheerful about his job that it’s actually a shame that you have to kill him in the final stage of the game. The entire game is just so delightfully goofy that most of its issues are easily forgiven, from the way your contestant explodes into pieces from contact with a mine, to the way the levels get names like “BUFFALO HERD NEARBY”.

Overall, despite its flaws, Smash TV is definitely a game worth trying, just for the sheer spectacle of it. When you’re just getting into it, it’s incredibly fun, helped by a fantastic presentation and an intuitive control scheme. It’s the game’s “classic” arcade difficulty that really keeps it from being great the entire way through, sadly. In short bursts, however, it’s a great game for the sorts of times when you want a game about shooting a whole lot of things without much getting in the way of said shooting.

There’s a vast number of ports for the game across all sorts of computers and consoles, and these tend to vary wildly in their quality. The console ports are generally your best bet for an accurate port, although some versions do better than others at replicating the game’s control layout. The computer versions tend to go off on their own little tangent entirely, which works better on some versions than others. If you want the most authentic experience short of emulation, there’s quite a few retro compilations you’ll find the game on, as well.

The big problem is that most of the ports limit the number of times you can continue, some of them not letting you continue entirely. As you’d imagine, this makes beating the game a <I>lot</i> more difficult without a ton of practice. Most of the older ports, aside from the SNES version of the game, also have to deal with that there just aren’t enough buttons to replicate the arcade’s control set up. They get around this in a few ways, with some ports letting you use a second controller’s D-Pad as the second stick. If you don’t have two controllers to spare, most ports will have a ‘Lock’ button that will freeze your firing direction in place. It’s a decent compromise, although it’s lacking the precision a second stick offers.

The Super Nintendo version, renamed Super Smash TV on the box and cartridge, is actually probably one of the best ports you’ll find. The second stick has been remapped to the face buttons of the SNES controller, which generally works just as well. As far as gameplay’s concerned, it plays almost exactly like the original game, with only a slight drop in speed. Surprisingly, they’ve even managed to fit in most of the violence from the arcade version, with only the big bloodsprays from some of the bosses being removed. There’s also a secret “turbo” mode, unlocked by picking up five question mark powerups and beating the game. If you can do this, you’ll begin a second loop where the game plays at double speed and sends even more enemies at you. “Good luck! You’ll need it!” indeed.

The NES version, while cut down pretty heavily from the arcade version, is actually pretty enjoyable. This is mostly due to the fact that there are generally never as many enemies on screen as once as the arcade has, and the pace is somewhat slower. This means that, with some practice, it’s actually possible for actual human beings to clear this port on a single credit. And that’s good, because you don’t really have a choice: Run out of lives, and you’re done. The graphics are cut down pretty heavily, especially with the shade of orange that’s pretty much all over everything, but there’s a surprising amount of digitized speech kept from the arcade. It’s actually a pretty fun game on its own, differences from the original version aside, and it’s worth seeking out.

The Genesis version is more or less inferior to the SNES version in just about every way, sadly. The controls don’t suffer that much from a three button pad, since you can get by just using the button that locks your firing direction in place. Something about this particular version feels very off, however, and it feels like all the hitboxes are somewhat off center, which makes an already difficult game even harder on you then it already is. While you do get seven lives per credit, you only get a single continue per player, which means even beating the first arena isn’t a sure thing. All the graphics have been redrawn entirely, with almost everything coming out worse, and even a Matt Furniss soundtrack doesn’t do much good for this port.

But the Game Gear port makes the Genesis version look like the arcade game in comparison of how awful it is. It should be noted, first off, that this is a terrible, terrible game to have on a handheld. This is a game where tons of enemies are constantly moving around en masse, and when you put on a screen as blurry as the Game Gear’s… well. The result is a game where you have absolutely no room to move and you have absolutely no idea what anything is, even if you happen to be playing on an emulator. That might not even be so bad if the game didn’t run at about five frames per second, meaning that you’re dealing with a choppy, indistinct mess, especially when you figure the Game Gear’s screen into things. The only good thing about this port is that the main theme sounds kind of nice. That’s literally the only redeeming thing.

The Master System is based off of the Game Gear port, only with a larger screen and bigger sprites occupying it. This is good, as this lets you see the many underlying problems with these two ports much more clearly. You’re still dealing with a choppy framerate that’s only marginally more playable then the Game Gear version. The many other reasons this version, as well as the Game Gear version are so unplayable is that everything is too damn fast, meaning that every enemy rockets around the screen before you can react. Oh, also, every enemy now kills you on touch. Actually, they don’t even have to touch you to kill you. That pretty much kills any chance of having a good time with this port right there. But hey, the one single song in the game is pretty nice.

The ZX Spectrum version feels like a different game entirely, which makes sense, given the limitations the system had. While the basic concept remains, this port has a much different feel to it, so much so that it almost feels like an entirely new game. Most of the enemies that would normally show up much later in the game, like the tiny snakes, show up right from the first room here, and they usually spawn right in the middle of the screen. Even the guys with the bats behave completely differently, spawning in the middle of the room and moving around randomly, which makes them much more dangerous. The game never spawns nearly as many enemies at once as it would in the arcade version, which might explain some of the enemy behavior changes.

Aside from that, though, it’s still a pretty similar game, although the gameplay differences might take time to get used to. It’s also a pretty impressive feat for the hardware, since it manages to hold together with so many enemies on screen pretty well, without much of the “bleeding colors” you usually get on the hardware at all. It’s still not an especially pretty game, however, and the sound effects are more or less non-existant, aside from a nice chiptune cover of the game’s main theme on the title screen. It’s a pretty good shooter for the hardware, although it’s best thought of as its own, unique game that shares a similar concept.

The Amstrad plays about the same as the ZX Spectrum version. It does, however, look much nicer than the Spectrum version, given that the CPC version uses more colors and has a generally chunkier look to it. The sound effects are also generally much meatier, which definitely beats out the static that the Spectrum version uses for pretty much everything. Overall, it’ll really depend on your preference on what obscure British computer you prefer, since both versions play nearly identically.

The Commodore 64 version is much closer in terms of gameplay to the original arcade version, and it’s actually a pretty playable port. You can use both of the C64’s joysticks to play the game just like you would in the arcade, with the tradeoff being that there’s no two player mode. Surprisingly, this port is actually one of the easier ones you’ll find, even more so than the NES version. There’s not quite as many enemies sent out at once, the pace is a little slower, and the game spawns extra lives a lot more often. Even the graphics come through pretty well, including the big boss sprites, and the only real flaw is that there’s no in-game music, leaving everything somewhat quiet. It’s still a pretty great port, otherwise, and it’s worth at least emulating.

The Amiga version looks and sounds a good deal closer to the arcade version, since it includes a lot of the digitized speech and sound effects the 8-bit versions were missing. It also includes the two player mode, and it even lets you plug in four Amiga joysticks for a ‘2 players, 2 joysticks mode’. Unfortunately, something about this version feels a little choppier than other versions, and it has the same issue as the Genesis version where the hitboxes feel ever so slightly off center. Combined with the fact this port is just as tough as the arcade version, it can be a little difficult to actually play. The sprites are also much bigger in this version, which can occasionally make things even more difficult for you. There’s no in-game music, either, even though the system probably should have been able to support it. It’s not an awful port, especially for the home computers, and it’s nice to have a computer port with a two player mode. Unfortunately, the C64 version is still a little more fun, given its kinder difficulty and smoother speed.

The Atari ST version, aside from a smaller color pallete and weaker sound hardware, including a lack of digitized speech, is exactly the same as the Amiga version.

You can find Smash TV on the <i>Arcade Party Pak</i> for the PS1, which isn’t much more than a no-frills emulation of the arcade game. It does come with some video interviews with the developers, however.

The game can also be found on the <i>Midway Arcade Treasures</i> compilation for PC, GameCube, PS2, and XBOX, as well. This is basically a standard emulation of the arcade version without any notable extra features. It does, however, support the right analog stick for something closer to the original arcade control scheme.

The XBOX 360 version is an emulation of an arcade game, much like the other ports to modern systems. What makes this one unique is that it features online play for two players over XBOX Live, as well as having achievements. Unfortunately, with Midway’s bankruptcy, this version was taken off of the service some time ago.

Finally, you can find the game on the <i>Midway Arcade Origins</i> compilation released for the XBOX 360 and PS3, which Is, once again, an emulation. No online play, either, but hey, at least you get leaderboards. Everybody likes leaderboards, right?

**Total Carnage – Arcade, SNES, Game Boy, Jaguar, Amiga, Amiga CD32, DOS (1992)**

**Publishers:**

**Midway(Arcade)**

**ICE(Amiga)**

**Songbird Productions (Jaguar)**

**Malibu Games(SNES)**

**Developer:**

**Midway(Arcade)**

**Black Pearl Software (SNES)**

**ICE(Amiga)**

**Hand-Made Software (DOS)**

**Themes:**

**Military**

**Run N’ Gun**

**Sidekicks/Co-Op**

**So 80’s/90’s It Hurts**

**Genres:**

**Action: Top Down View**

**Designers:**

**Eugene Jarvis**

**Mark Turmell**

Two years after the release of the original Smash TV, Midway would put out a sequel. For whatever reason, however, it seems that nobody really remembers Total Carnage. Maybe it was because Street Fighter II fever had hit arcades everywhere, maybe it was just that this game just isn’t really a huge leap from what Smash TV was already doing. It has most of the same issues, particularly in terms of general repetitiveness, without much in the way of huge improvements. For whatever reason, however, it’s practically unknown compared to its prequel, except for its appearance in a few retro compliations.

While shirtless men are shooting their way through deadly game shows, a war is on the horizon. The evil General Akhboob, despot ruler of Kookistan, is using his resources to create an army of mutants. He is also, despite his constant protests otherwise, not making baby milk of any sort. Meanwhile, at the United Nations, the decision is made to send in the Doomsday Squad, two shirtless guys who specialize in running around and blowing stuff up. As Captain Carnage and Major Mayhem, it’s up to you to shoot your way through Akhboob’s forces, rescue as many captured civilians as you can, and generally feel very awkward, given how the whole conflict the game is based on turned out.

The controls are almost exactly the same as Smash TV, with two joysticks per player. One will make you move, while the other makes you fire in any direction. In terms of basic gameplay structure, however, it’s pretty similar to the original game. You’re still maneuvering your character around, fighting off hordes of enemies while trying to collect the power-ups you’ll need to fend them off. The other big change from Smash TV is that you’re no longer kept to a single room at a time in your quest to blow everything up. The screen is usually always scrolling in some direction, although there’ll be plenty of times where you’ll have to stop and fend off a few waves of enemies. The game’s split into three distinct sections, much like Smash TV, although Total Carnage tends to feel just a little bit longer than its prequel.

The biggest new wrinkle to the established gameplay is the ‘bomb’ button. Throughout the game, you can collect bombs that will act like a landmine when you drop them, exploding on contact with enemies. If you’re near something particularly large, however, it’ll call down an airstrike instead, pummeling it with bombs. The real reason you want bombs, however, is that using one gives you a single second of inviciblity, giving you a chance to slip away from danger. This actually adds a little depth and strategy to things that Smash TV didn’t really offer, although it’s not a huge difference. It is, however, pretty nice to feel like you have <i>some</i> sort of control over how long your quarter lasts, even if the game’s still quite the quarter muncher.

There’s quite a few other changes, as well, some of which are more interesting than others. Throughout the game, you’ll come across warp points that’ll either bring you to a challenge room, or actually let you skip ahead further into the game. Challenge rooms will generally either put you against a few waves of enemies or challenge you to destroy as many of a certain kind of object as you can, but you’ll also usually find extra lives hidden inside them. Warp points will instead bring you to a specific point in the game, no questions asked, and the game will even give you a four letter password you can input at the start of a new game to skip to that point. Given that you’re likely never going to beat this game in a real arcade on your first try, this is actually pretty kind of the developers.

Most of the power-ups and weapons from Smash TV return, along with a few others. There’s a new flamethrower, which deals obscene damage at close range, along with a jetpack that lets you float over land mines. You’ll still need to keep a look out for keys if you want to unlock the Pleasure Dome and get the best ending, but this time you’ll need <i>220</i> of the things if you want the chance to hang out with the Smash TV guys. These are generally scattered all over the game, so if you want them all, you’ll have to grit your teeth and play through the entire thing. You’ll also find plenty of gems and tiny American flags you can collect to boost your score at the end of a section. The random prizes don’t make an appearance, being replaced by captured soldiers, reporters, and tourists that you can collect for bonus points.

There’s plenty of new enemies, some of which are upgraded versions of the foes you’d go against in Smash TV. You’ll still go up against a few thousand or so mooks who haven’t mastered the concept of “ranged combat”, sure. Some of Akhboob’s soldiers take to turrets to fire at you from a distance, as well. Occasionally, you’ll also have to deal with the occasional vehicle, like a fleet of fighter jets who rain missiles down onto your head, giant tanks that spew out about a dozen guys on fire when destroyed, and jeeps that’ll quickly run you down if you don’t move out of the way. There’s actually quite a bit of enemy variety, even more so than Smash TV had, and the game does a good job of making sure they keep things interesting, if pretty overwhelming.

The mines return from Smash TV, and lead to a similarly bloody end if you happen to wander onto ne like an idiot. There’s also a few new hazards to keep an eye on, besides the mines. There are barrels that’ll explode if you <i>don’t</> stop shooting at them, oddly enough, sending out a ring of projectiles for you to dodge. You’ve also got points where the game will rain down time bombs on your head, forcing you to collect them all before they go off, as well. The game also likes to spawn homing missiles from out of nowhere, forcing you to dodge around them until they go off or drop a bomb to absorb the explosion.

There’s only a couple of bosses, compared to Smash TV’s four, but they take so much punishment and take so long to kill that the game doesn’t even really <i>need</i> more than that. The first boss is Orcus, a giant green head with two arms with guns on the end, with a smaller demon head atop the whole thing. The game claims that Orcus is “the mother of all boss monsters”, which is a little bit of a stretch, but he’s still a pretty tough fight. He takes quite a while to kill, given how many pieces of him you’ll have to blow off. You start with his forearms, move on to his bloody arm stumps, his eyes, and finally the little head on top of his own giant head. And then there’s General Akhboob.

Genral Akhboob may well be most overelaborate final boss you’ll encounter, except for a few possible contenders in the JRPG genre. He has no less than <i>seven</i> different forms, most of which put you against his battle craft. Once you destroy that, he gets blown back into his nuclear room thing and becomes a giant cyborg head. While most games would be contend to conclude here, finishing this form reveals that Akhboob was apparently Adolf Hitler the entire time, forcing you to blow up <i>Hitler’s</i> giant cyborg head. And unlike Bionic Commando, this Hitler head fights back. His final form, somewhat disappointingly, makes him become a giant demon head. After all, after a game that challenges you to destroy Hitler’s giant head, dodging the missiles he spews out of his mouth and listening to him screaming random German at you, anything after that just doesn’t quite compare.

But you’re not done, yet, as the final phase of the fight involve Akhboob’s many clones leaping out from his own bloody jaw stump. Clone after clone will pour out, with your goal trying to catch every one that pops out. Miss a single one, and you get a slightly worse ending out of it. Catch all of them, and you get a sequence where you strap Akhboob into the electric chair he previously tried to use on you. For such a morbid ending, it’s actually played for laughs, considering it ends with him exploding like a Mortal Kombat boss, leaving behind a charred skeleton. And to be fair, given all he put you through, it’s actually pretty satisfying. It’s unlikely you’ll ever get to see that satisfaction without a steady supply of quarters or your finger on the “insert credit” button, however.

The entire problem with Total Carnage is that while there are a few improvements to the general structure, there’s not much that fixes some of the underlying issues with Smash TV. Much like the original game, it’s actually a lot of fun when you’re just starting off, but the further in your get, the more likely it is you’ll end up getting bored. The more complicated enviroments mean that you have less room to maneuver, meaning you’re probably going to die a lot more, bombs or not. The game is also just as long as the original game, if not longer, so unless you cheat to the end, the game still quickly wears itself out. It’s definitely worth playing through the end just to see the ridiculous final boss, but there’s just not much to make it worth playing through more than once.

Compared to the original game, where you had crowds cheering you on, this game actually feels somewhat hostile to you, the player. The game is constantly either threatening you or mocking your skills, it’s generally even gorier than Smash TV, and there’s one particularly mean surprise at the end of the second section, where you get captured by ten of the guys you’ve been killing en masse for 2/3rds of the game. This puts you into a minigame where your commandos get strapped into electric chairs, forcing you to button mash to escape. Fail to do this, and you <i>lose your entire credit, right then and there</i>.

The biggest draw of the game is, once again, its presentation. While the game will occasionally use sound clips from the original game, the real star of the show is General Akhboob. He’ll show up every so often in cutscenes to taunt you, usually ending it with a quote like “I’ll buy <i>you</i> for a dollar!” or, more truthfully, “You suck at this game!”. What’s also great is the way the game tallies scores after each of the three sections. After showing your total score, the game will show your commando firing his gun wildly into the air and giggling to himself, as the game tells you that “PLAYER ONE KICKS BUTT!”. What’s even better is when you have another player with you, as the player with a lower score will stand in the background pouting to himself, thinking something like “Player One got lucky”. The silliness is present throughout the entire game, like how the game will randomly announce that “YOU ARE THE WEASEL MAN! YOU SHALL ABSORB TOTAL PAIN!” before sending horde upon horde of axe-weilding mutants at you.

The graphics have been subtly improved since Smash TV, usually showing through in larger, more detailed sprites that have more animation on them. <i>Total Carnage</I> generally does everything “bigger” than Smash TV did, from the bosses to the occasional screen-filling tank you’ll be expected to blow up. And things blowing up is something this game does very well, with bigger objects you destroy practically bursting into a blinding <i>rainbow</i> of explosions that can leave you distracted by the sheer beauty as a missile hits you in the face. The sound, just like you’d expect from a Smash TV sequel is loud, overdriven, and contains plenty of digitized speech. General Akhboob has a ton of speech, himself, going from insisting he’s only making baby milk to taunts like “You’re pretty good… NOT!” The music is all right, with the game’s main theme being an militaristic 80’s action movie sort of theme, although the rest of the music isn’t really as notable.

Total Carnage is fun for a while, at least when you’re just going into it. It’s loud, goofy, and it generally never stops being challenging the entire way through. On the other hand, whatever issues you may have had with Smash TV are probably still going to be an issue here. It’s still pretty repetitive, and it’s still not remotely close to a fair, balanced game. But if you’re a fan of the cheese Midway made themselves known for, and if you had fun with Smash TV, it’s a worthy enough game to seek out and play through just once.

There aren’t nearly as many ports of the game as Smash TV, and sadly, most of them are pretty dire. If you’re looking for a legal way to try it out, your best bet is Midway Arcade Treasures 2. This compilation gives a pretty no-frills emulation without any particularly fancy features, but it’s still pretty much the best way you’re going to play this game legally.

The Super Nintendo version was ported by an entirely different developer than the SNES port of Smash TV, and it’s much worse for it. The gameplay remains more or less the same, although the controls for firing feel somewhat unresponsive at times. And of course, you’re still dealing with limited continues, and this particular version doesn’t even care to tell you how many you happen to have. It’s the general presentation that’s this port’s biggest failing, though. Everything looks grainier and muddier, and the SNES’s more limited color pallete really don’t help this port much, either. The music and sound don’t fare much better, although most of the digitized speech actually comes through.

And compared to how much Smash TV got away with on the SNES, there’s a lot more censorship. Most of the blood has been removed, or recolored blue or green in places where it couldn’t be removed. General Akhboob now promises that you’ll only be “annihilated”, as opposed to ‘drowning in pools of your own blood”. And in the best ending, you simply throw him in prison, where he promises his revenge like he’s some sort of long forgotten GI Joe villain. Obviously, you don’t get to fight his Hitler form, either, although that means that there’s one less form for you to fight. Overall, it plays decently, but it’s just not as fun as the original arcade version.

The Game Boy version is absolutely horrid in just about every conceivable way. In some ways, it manages to overtake the Game Gear version of Smash TV as the worst port of the two games, and it might just have a place on the worst ten Game Boy games of all time. Much like Smash TV on the Game Gear, the developers took a game that clearly didn’t belong on a handheld, and then put it on a handheld regardless. This isn’t a situation like the ZX Spectrum version of Smash TV, because that version, despite its quirks, was still capable of offering <i>fun</i>. This does not.

The first issue is that a game like this clearly doesn’t belong on the Game Boy, so you’re dealing with tiny, grainy gray sprites that can’t possibly be identified, especially while they’re moving. This isn’t as much of an issue, because this port removes just about any enemy in the game that doesn’t slowly move towards you, meaning that any sort of variety in the gameplay went with them. Strangely enough, this version actually gives you a health bar that drains quickly in contact with enemies. It’s somewhat useful, but your health drains so fast that it probably won’t help you much, anyway.

There’s several other gameplay “additions”, as well, none of which do anything helpful whatsoever. Bombs are replaced by grenades, with get thrown out about a couple of inches in front of your character, creating an explosion so small that you’ll basically never want to use them. There’s two new weapons, with one being a spinning diamond that spins around your character, killing anything that gets too close. Only you can’t actually shoot with it, and enemies can still hurt you while you’re using it anyway, making it actively harmful to you to pick up. There’s also the flamethrower, which goes out about an inch from your character, which also makes it more worthless than your starting weapon.

The gameplay, as you’d imagine, isn’t much of an improvement, either. Mostly, it just involves standing in one place, waiting for enemies to slowly waddle towards you so you can kill them. There are barely any points where you’ll even be dealing with projectiles, making for a very slow, boring game in general. The graphics are unidentifiable at the best of times and plain ugly at the worst, and the sprites are so small and grainy that even an emulator won’t help you tell apart the vaguely man-shaped blobs coming towards you. The sound effects sound like they came straight from an Atari 2600, while the only in-game music plays during, oddly enough, the boss fights. And it’s probably the most inappropriately jolly, whimsical music you can use for a game such as this.

Among other annoyances are that General Akhboob is even wimpier in this version. He won’t make you “swim in pools of your own blood”, or even “annihilate” you, he’ll just “make you regret” not exiting his country. Overall, Total Carnage, given its terrible sound effects, gameplay, graphics, and just general awfulness at everything, may well be one of the worst games on the system, and we’re talking about a handheld that had <i>The Tasmanian Story</i> on it. Run screaming.

The DOS version looks and sounds the most like the original arcade version, and it plays fairly decently. You get a lot of options for how you want to control the game, including the option to use two joysticks, if you happen to have them. The biggest problem with this version is that the camera is a little more zoomed in, meaning you don’t really get as much room to move, and there’s a lot more screen scrolling than there was in the arcade game. This can be kind of an annoyance, especially when you have projectiles coming just off screen and you can’t always tell where they came from. It’s a pretty playable port aside from that one glaring issue, though.

The Amiga version is utterly awful, and everything about it just feels wrong. It only takes about a minute of gameplay to realize just how many underlying issues this particular port has. For starters, this port has a particular quirk where dead enemies take a couple of seconds to actually die, meaning that they can move into you and actually <i>kill</i> you while they’re exploding into blood. The flamethrower has had its range reduced to the point of near uselessness, and bombs no longer give you invicibility of any sort. The issues compound from there, but you also have to deal with the Amiga’s loading times, its one button joystick (Although the game offers the option of using a two button pad, in fariness), and absolutely no music in the entire game, whatsoever. Even the Amiga port of Smash TV got the core gameplay reasonably accurate, something that can’t be said at all for this port. The CD32 version, aside from using a different controller, is identically awful.

The Jaguar version, released as a homebrew cartridge in 2005, looks and sounds fairly closely to the arcade version, aside from a lack of in-game music. The color pallete’s also somewhat off from the arcade version, although not quite to the extent of the SNES port. Unfortunately, given how tough it is to actually play most Jaguar games on either actual hardware through emulation, it’s hard to say for sure how close to the arcade version it gets.

After Total Carnage came and went in the arcades, Midway never put out another twin-stick shooter of any sort. Apparently, there were plans and discussions for a long time to make a sequel to Smash TV, all the way up to Midway’s bankruptcy in 2008, but it never came to be. The closest there was was <i>The Grid</i> an arcade game that’d take the “deadly game show” concept and put it into the context of a deathmatch-based third person shooter. Sadly, <i>The Grid</i> never left arcades, and has never been emulated on anything. However, Smash TV lives on, in some form or another, from the many, many twin-stick shooters that would spawn from it. While there’s just as many that probably spawned from its spiritual predecessor, Robotron, you only have to look on your average digital distribution service to see the impact the game would go on to have.