

# Played 'til my fingers bled, it was the summer of '92

Written by dreamkatcha on behalf of Everything Amiga.

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In the late eighties and early nineties, the holy grail of games development was the formidable crusade of devising a plumber-beater for the home computers. One man adamant he'd be the one to nail it, is Ocean's one-time software director, Gary Bracey, and many would argue he hit the jackpot with *The Addams Family*. The positive reception it savoured must have come as a great relief to the entire team as it helped to lift them out of the dire movie-tie-in-game quagmire they were floundering in at the time following less than stellar releases such as *Terminator 2*, *Total Recall* and *Darkman*. Taking a sabbatical from their previous formulaic, genre-mish-mashing titles proved to be a step in the right direction.

Released in 1992, the frightfully (sorry) polished 2D platformer was loosely based on the blockbuster movie of the previous year... I'm sure the name will come to me. It was 'loosely' based on the movie in the same way that the sagging pants, wannabe gang-bangers wear loosely follow the contours of their backsides.

In the film, the family's lawyer, Tully Alford, hatches a plot to inveigle an imposter into the fold posing as Gomez's long-lost brother, Fester, to plunder their burgeoning vault allowing him to pay off the debts he owes to a loan shark. While in Ocean's game, the lawyer takes the whole family - with the exception of Thing and butler, Lurch - hostage, incarcerating them in various quarters of the mansion and surrounding grounds.



As the head of the family, Gomez, it is your mission to stomp to a pulp the end of level bosses holding them captive and release them from their shackles... whether they like it or not (you may be familiar with the macabre, sadomasochistic vibe running throughout the original cartoon on which the film is based - all done in the best possible taste of course).

Reaching them is easier said than done as they reside at the end of some extremely expansive, labyrinthine levels littered with a coterie of comically oddball creatures and unfathomably animated inanimate objects.

You'll encounter quiffed dudes riding in spinning teacups, armless, goose-stepping green aliens, levitating, rotating Hindus, cleaver-waving chefs, bipedal goldfish bowls and teapots, and indecipherable beaked wildlife riding unicycles. Creepy? Kooky? Spooky? Oooky? A sepulchre-load of each is present and correct. Graphicicians, Simon Butler and Warren Lancashire tick every box consummately.



A bit of trivia for you. Part of the original brief was to leave some of the landscapes barren of nasties to enhance the eidolic ambience, though when Simon realised he couldn't pick a fight in a deserted graveyard during the witching hour, he set about populating it with ghouls comme il faut to the scene. If he reads this and I'm never heard from again, will someone please feed my goldfish?

While you're preoccupied with reuniting the family, Lurch - the useless lump - idles on his bony backside, tinkling the ivories in the music room.



With each member of the family you emancipate, his rendition of the theme tune transitions from a stilted, jangly assault on the lug-holes to an accurate facsimile of the score we hear in the opening title screen.

Luckily Thing's contribution is a bit more constructive. He appears whenever you head-butt an 'A' block to provide useful tips and words of wisdom to aid you in your quest; a contrivance not totally dissimilar to an earlier, popular block-busting runny-jumpy game.



Crips and crockery aren't the only in-game obstacles you will face; the environment itself is as much of a threat what with its medieval machinations of lethal airborne blades, spikes and swinging maces, the stoves' searing flames and the slippery ice-encrusted platforms and avalanches which define the freezer zone.

If The Addams Family's difficulty curve were a theme park, it would have you first cavorting on the pedalo-swans, sashaying onto the ball pool and strolling through the hedge-maze. Then abruptly - as you blithely emerge from the soporific shrubbery - handcuff you to Alton Towers' Smiler roller-coaster on which two ladies recently lost their legs! That's not a joke, it really happened.



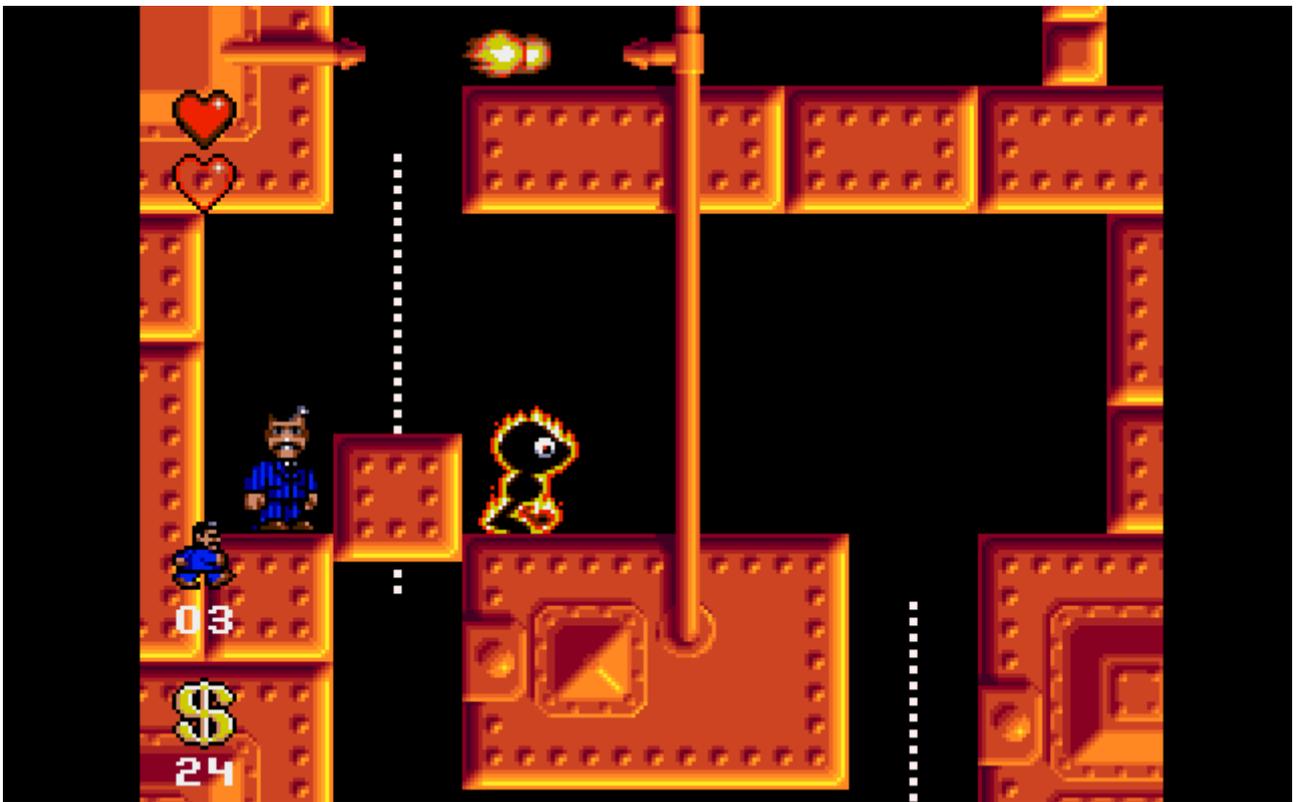
You begin the game at the homestead's front door. Enter this and you are free to climb the staircase and choose to enter whichever door you please, each taking you to one of the game's five themed sectors, which include flying, swimming and gondola/steam train wayfaring segments.



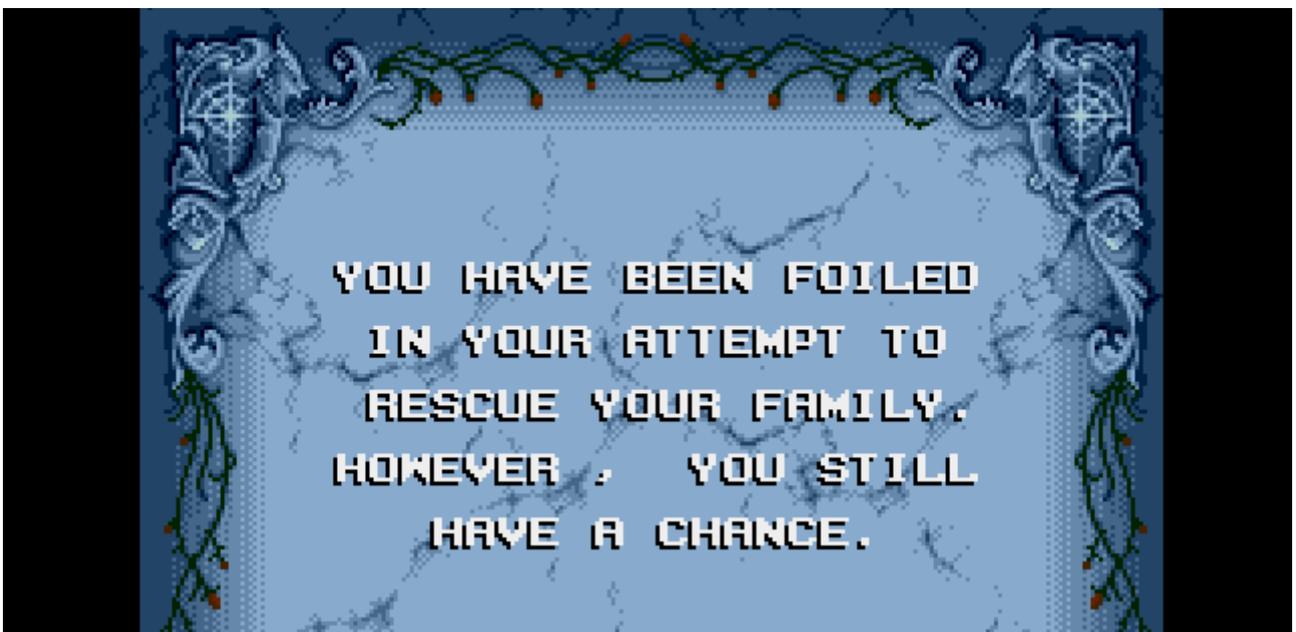
Some levels are a breeze, while others will leave you tearing your follicles out in frustration, yet what's refreshing is the opportunity to progress in a non-linear fashion in that it allows even the most incompetent players to cherry-pick the battles they attempt and to see a decent portion of what the game has to offer before being stumped.

Inertia. If you hate it in platform games, sorry to say, you'll find it in abundance here. Gomez doesn't stop instantly when *you* do, especially on the frozen tundra-alike level which will leave you sliding off the end of ledges to your doom, or right into the path of oncoming adversaries.

Couple this complication with the smouldering, indestructible enemies found in the furnace and you'll be cursing like a melon farmer in a pre-watershed ITV movie.



Before reaching the climax - if you ever do - you'll be presented with the death caption and 'wahhh-wahhh-wahhh' commiseration ditty many, many times. As infuriating as this can be, it never deters you from bouncing back for 'just' one more go, even if you jot down a level's password and return to it a month later. The re-playability factor never wanes.



When you clone the quintessential platformer, you find that it comes gift-wrapped with hidden depths, literally. The Addams Family, like Mario, is jam-packed with secret bonus rooms chock-full of conducive power-ups such as invulnerability stardust, the Fez-copter which will have you reaching for the stars with each successive tap of the fire button, and revitalising extra lives, so many in fact that running out is never really an issue.

Money may make the world go round, but it can also prolong your existence on planet Addams where collecting 100 coins will reward you with a 1-up and passing the 25 coin milestone, an extra heart, while defeating a boss furnishes Gomez with the capacity to absorb an additional hit-point before he croaks. Note that everything you collect has a purpose; striving to fall into a diabetic coma is a sub-goal only found in Zool, thankfully.

We learn from RoboCod that taking the easy, obvious exit is tantamount to shooting yourself in the fin. Ditto in *The Addams Family*, where jumping *above* an escape door and pushing up will often transport you behind the scenes. In the gallery, you can enter the jaws of a bearskin rug, or drop down through the spine of a book in the library to reveal a secret bonus room. Particularly satisfying is jumping out of the brick framework of a level, beyond the platforms and into the ether to seek your fortune. Yes, I believe Mario got there first, once again.



Breaking with home computer tradition, the fire button has been assigned to the jump function, and this goes a long way to cementing the games' console feel. Playing with a joypad, this adds a welcome degree of control and sets the game apart from the crowd of up-to-jump-ers Amiga gamers are more familiar with. Joystick users might find their mileage varies.

Gomez's already-rapid movement and the boost the go-faster shoes power-up confers is clearly a nod towards the frantic game-play action favoured by the spiky blue hedgehog. Head-butting blocks to reveal hints is a trope conspicuously snagged from Mario, as is riding the inflated bullets fired by anthropomorphic canons. Much like in Mario everything except the end of level bosses can be dispatched with one carefully timed thwack to the noggin, ensuring the action is kept fluid and arcadey.

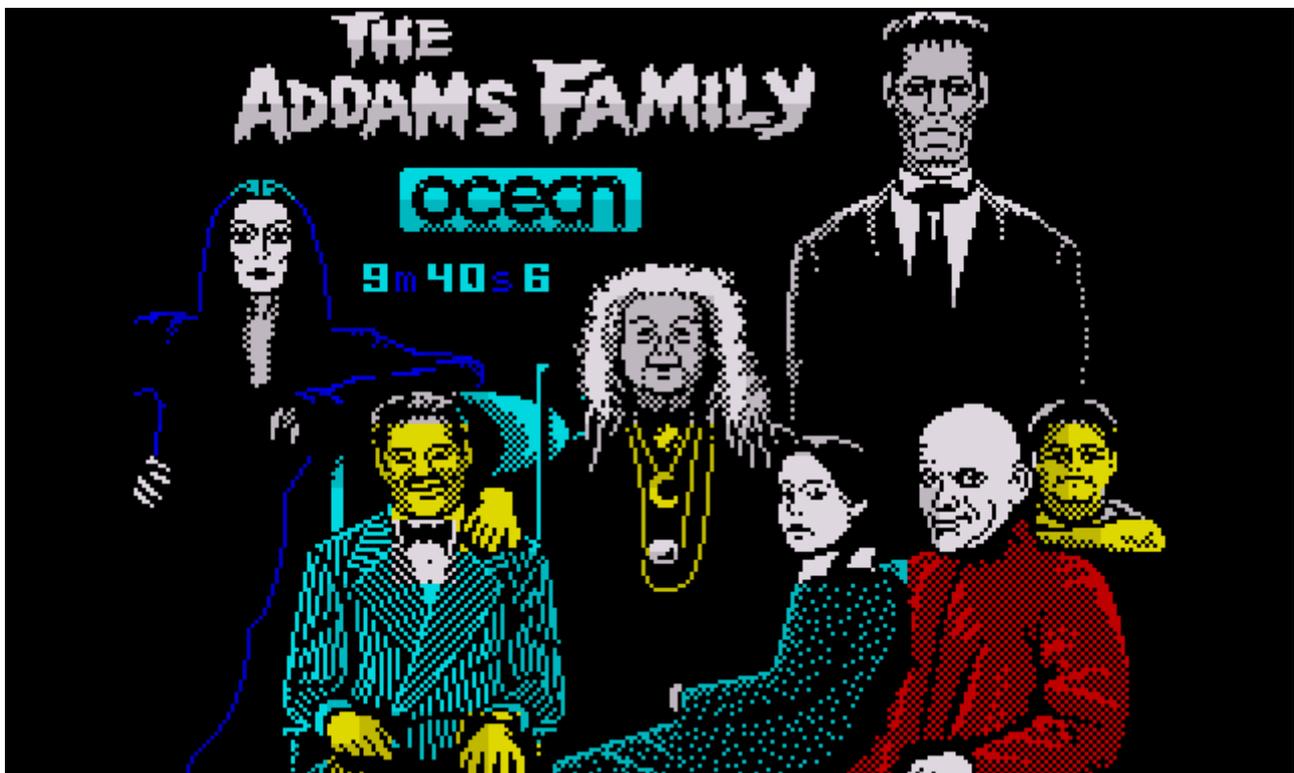
Whilst the game's visuals won't take your breath away in the same way as seeing *Shadow of the Beast* for the first time did, they ooze a witty, whimsical charm that will leave you beaming from ear to ear, and possibly even printing out the graphics' beautifully hand-drawn pixel art for your gaming craft projects... so I've *heard*. Simon and Warren really did a terrific job of tapping into the playful, ludicrous spirit of the source material.

Family or foe, the sprites are teeming with personality thanks to the intricately adroit animation and meticulous attention to detail present throughout. Stand still for more than a few seconds and Gomez will turn to the camera and tap his feet impatiently as if to say, "well what are you waiting for?". Cease running abruptly and you kick up a dust cloud that swirls around your ankles before settling. It's these neat, wry touches that leave the competition choking in its wake. Eyewitnesses tell me the Giana Sisters were forced to drop the 'Great' from their moniker as it no longer complied with the Trade Descriptions Act, and Mick and Mack took early retirement in McDonald Land when Gomez came head-stomping onto the scene.

The quirky, catchy music provided by Ocean stalwart, Jonathan Dunn, is equally inventive. From the immaculate rendition of the iconic theme tune accompanying the opening title screen to the atmospheric in-game music and rousing, spirited boss-battle compositions, every note dove-tails seamlessly with the off-kilter prescribed motif.

I have it on good authority that more so than any other Ocean release, everyone involved with producing *The Addams Family* genuinely loved the experience, and their passion palpably shines through.

*The Addams Family* was released for all the popular 8-bit and 16-bit platforms of the time, even the largely defunct ones. The Mega Drive, SNES, Atari ST and Amiga incarnations were very similar game-play-wise, though a number of intriguing nuances exist which are worth examining.



It was initially the intention to include parallax scrolling backgrounds in the Amiga version, though it was felt this would run the risk of having to ramp up the minimum specifications required to run the game, thereby excluding those Amiga gamers who owned the base level, vanilla machine. The difficult and unpopular decision was taken to exclude them entirely, and the performance benefit can clearly be seen in the game's smooth scrolling and lack of any discernible lag as the fervent action escalates.

Although the graphics in the Atari ST version are less colourful, much to the chagrin of Amigans, it *did* include parallax scrolling backgrounds. The pay-off, however, was botched screen scrolling. As Gomez hits the edge of the play-field, there's a pause while you nudge the boundary and the screen shifts forwards revealing the upcoming obstacles and landscape. It's no substitute for the real thing and introduced the show-stopping drawback of forcing you to make leaps of faith, which often end badly.

Given how easy it is to port between the ST and Amiga, the possibility of inserting the Atari's superior background graphics into the impoverished Amiga version has been discussed over on the English Amiga Board. Speculation has also been made as to the likelihood that the same backgrounds are already present yet concealed. Watch this space. Maybe we could swap the Amiga's superior music for the ST's tiled backgrounds and seal the deal with a spit-handshake, playground style.

The SNES and Mega Drive versions both display a persistent caption at the top of the screen revealing the name of the area you happen to be in. Perhaps this was a useful way of identifying the level players were struggling with when they called those £1 per minute helplines that were always more popular with console gamers.



Likewise, each of the 16-bit console interpretations feature parallax backgrounds, in addition to two extra weapons to compliment the head-bounce. Flinging golf balls or lancing opponents with the fencing foil (neatly relevant as these are two of Gomez's past-times) wouldn't have been possible in the Amiga or ST versions because the single fire button had already been assigned to jumping. 1-0 to the 'up for jump' brigade!

The Mega Drive's background tiles are brighter than the SNES's, and some of the boss-battle music has been eschewed in place of additional sound effects.

Curiously the 'Orville' bird boss was censored in the SNES version. Its main means of attack is aerial defecation and it appears that Nintendo didn't feel this was appropriate fodder for their demographics' delicate sensibilities. I was once viciously assaulted by the mother of all pigeons who I assume was at the time struggling with IBS, and can attest to the fact that it is a traumatic experience no-one should have to endure, so maybe Nintendo had a point.



Fair enough, *The Addams Family* was never going to set the world ablaze, push the boundaries of the genre through cunning innovation, or cram the moustached, dungareed one into *Things*' box and nail the lid shut (unfortunately). Nevertheless, what it *did* do is bridge the chasm between computer and console gaming, draining the green hue from Amigans faces and making them less likely to jump ship. It demonstrated that the Amiga had the teeth to compete convincingly with Sega and Nintendo, and had the platform not met its untimely demise shortly after, it may have encouraged fence-sitting developers to experiment beyond their comfort zone.

Oceans' blatant, unashamed clone is a sponge for tried and tested gaming accoutrements, yet despite being so derivative it remains one of the best examples of its type on the Amiga because it represents pure, distilled game-play. It's fully cognisant of its humble identity and plays to its strengths. It's the very definition of solid, dependable game-play, buoyed with tight, responsive controls, elegantly simple graphics and well-designed maps.

It's not a 'rip-off' unless it's poorly implemented... or an Amiga-exclusive license that's being exploited. No, this is a loving, respectful homage. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.

