RETROGAMING TIMES monthly
ISSUE #67 - CHRISTMAS 2009

'70s   '80s   '90s   NINTENDO 64

COVERING 3 DECADES OF MERRY GAMING

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Press Fire To Begin
by Bryan Roppolo

It's that time of year again jolly folks, when sleigh bells ring and joyous laughs fill the still winter air. Every time the Christmas season rolls around all I can think of are the days of going to the big toy stores like Toys 'R Us and Children's Palace and hoping that somehow one of the many toys and video games might somehow end up sitting under my Christmas tree. As a matter of fact, I believe that the only time I ever received a new video gaming system (or computer) was on Christmas day. I can remember the time when I received an MBX voice recognition system for my TI-99/4A computer one Christmas. Boy, that had to be the best Christmas ever, as my sister and I ended up playing the games we got for it a lot. I mean being able to control a character on screen by voice was beyond cool (and still is may I add!). My favorite games, by the way, are still Bigfoot and Superfly for the TI with the MBX add-on attached. I'm sure many readers of Retrogaming Times Monthly probably have a lot of their own fond memories of Christmas, as it's one of those seasons where many wishes do indeed come true.

Some things you will notice is the fact that we have changed the header for this issue, with fancier text and graphics, as well as added sections for the different types of content covered in RTM. This is something that you can expect to see every month, as I think it makes the magazine look better and makes it easier to find the information you are interested in reading about. This month we of course have a pixilated Santa and elf in the header. Next month will have some different characters and you'll have to tune in to see what that one looks like. I hope everyone has a wonderful Christmas and I also hope that this issue stands as the best one of every year. What could be better than trying to make the Christmas/year end issue of Retrogaming Times Monthly the best one yet every year?

Retrogaming News
Upcoming Retrogaming Events

MAGFest

MAGFest is a video and computer gaming festival run by fans, for fans. It is being held January 1-4, 2010 in Alexandria, VA at the Hilton Mark Center. Some like to call us a convention, others like to call us a party. Both of these are somewhat accurate, but really, MAGFest is a unique experience that we hope you'll enjoy. While similar to most fan-based (anime, Sci-Fi, fantasy, etc) conventions, we do things a little differently. We're a lot more laid-back. We don't have a huge dealer room. We have a large focus on music (2+ concerts worth). Our special guests tend to fit right in and socialize with the rest of the crowd. Our "costume contest" has a reputation of being a "costume roast". Lots of attendees set up games in their rooms and leave their door open to invite others inside. To find out more on MAGFest, visit our site at http://magfest.org/.

World Of Commodore 2009

The Toronto PET Users Group (TPUG) is pleased to announce the World of Commodore! TPUG is celebrating its 30th Anniversary and would like everyone to join us for a weekend of all things Commodore! The event is being held Saturday December 5, 2010 at the Admiral Inn in Mississauga, Ontario. Some of the things that will be occurring at this years event include demonstrations of new hardware and software projects using Commodore equipment, screenings of Commodore related videos,

vendors selling hardware and software, a raffle of Commodore-related items, and the always popular freebie table! Please feel free to drop off any items you no longer want and help yourself to some goodies. You never know what you'll find! After the formal show ends on Saturday the festivities continue with an informal evening of socializing, hacking, gaming and other things, so please feel free to make a weekend of it. Check out more at http://www.tpug.ca/woc/.

High Score Monthly! Profile

I want to give my congrats to Christian Keilback, aka MightySquirrel, for winning the 2nd and sadly the final High Score Monthly! Christian quickly got 2,180 points when his video ended in under 5 minutes. Good show Christian! He won the brand spanking new Atari 2600 homebrew Dungeon along with its wonderful poster from our friends at AtariAge and from our editor Bryan Roppolo. Bryan also included a nice letter which was packaged along with the game and can be viewed here. Thank you Bryan! Let us know how the game is Christian.

For those of you interested in reading Christian's Bio and finding out exactly what this classic gaming fiend looks like, check out the August issue of RTM where we printed a write up on him along with a picture.

We had to end High Score Monthly! due to poor response. But, just like Frankenstein's Monster, we might see it again in the future. Please keep sending your requests to Bryan or I if you want the contest to come back. We will only bring it back if the demand is great enough.

Thank you to all of the High Score Monthly! players and fans!

-Paul Zimmerman

Christmas Memories From The Golden Era
by John Reder

It was late 1979, I was a 14 year old boy looking through a Service Merchandise catalog while dreaming about the coming Christmas. I was a big fan of electronic handheld games and had looked completely through that section and was almost finished when I noticed, near the back pages…something I didn't quite recognize. I was looking at two video game systems that connected to your TV! The first thing I noticed was the high-tech touch-sensitive keyboard on the Magnavox system and the second was the fact that the TV screen in the ad didn't show a PONG game on it. Instead, it was a color picture of some kind of racing game like you'd see in the arcades! What the h…I muttered to myself, then I noticed that you could plug these cartridge things into it for more games like Blackjack, Baseball and a cool looking space game called Cosmic Conflict…hmmm I thought to myself, could this Cosmic Conflict game really be like flying a spaceship?! After a short Star Wars style daydream about flying through space and shooting enemies with my laser blasters I took a look at the other system prominently displayed on the opposite page from a company name I kind of recognized from the pinball arcade down the street…Atari. After some careful thought I decided that the one with the big keyboard looked pretty neat and it had that awesome Cosmic Conflict space game for which I knew I just had to own! I realize now 30 years later that this was a pretty lame reason, but at the time it looked like something from a science fiction movie and it really sparked my imagination. I took a pencil and put a huge circle around it knowing that my parents used those circles to base their Christmas purchase decisions on. My mother noticed it, and decided that she needed to talk with me about the price which was a whopping $179.99, she and I knew that this was a bigger ticket item than my parents typically spent; they also had to make sure that my sister had an equally good Christmas, if not in cost at least in similar items. They finally decided to get it for me and my sister would receive another electronic game called Microvision by Milton Bradley as her big ticket item.
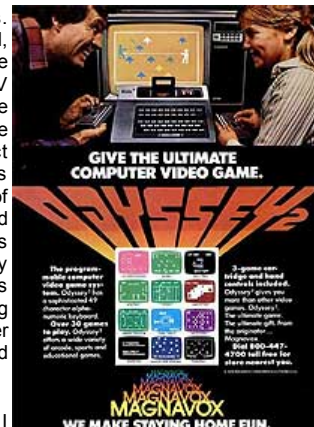
Soon Christmas came and I quickly found the Magnavox Odyssey 2 under the tree and thought that the box was the coolest thing I ever saw, its explosive letters popping out at me and all those video game characters like race cars, football and baseball players all zooming out. This helped to set my mind into the right frame to play any game from that era. In those days the graphics were simple placeholders for your imagination to attach your fictional characters too; in your mind you were seeing those pictures from the boxes and their accompanying manuals. After a few tense moments wiring the thing up to my TV and my parents begging me not to electrocute myself while hooking it into the antenna (back then we didn't know any better), I powered it on and quickly learned what the screen looked and sounded like when you turned it on without a cartridge in the slot, basically it's like your system threw up onto your TV screen accompanied by a loud static/explosion hisssssssssss!!! After briefly loosing my mind and getting my heart back into my chest, I managed to turn it back off and carefully read the manual which clearly said to "insert the cartridge BEFORE you turn the system on". Crossing my fingers and hoping that I didn't fry my system in its first two seconds of life, I gently inserted the cartridge that came with it (Speedway, Spinout and Crypto Logic) into the slot and then turned it back on… and… that's when I heard the cheerful tone sound that to this day makes me nostalgic for those first few days of video game system ownership …BOODELLLLETT… as the colorful words "SELECT GAME" appeared on my TV screen. Wow! I wish I could bottle that feeling and sell it!

Other Odyssey 2 games that were found under the Christmas tree included Armored Encounter/Sub Chase, Cosmic Conflict, Football and Baseball! I remember my dad challenging me at a game of Football and also completing my first successful pass to score a touchdown against his team, it was an amazing feeling and I believe it was the last video game I ever played against my dad. That was one moment that I haven't forgotten in all these years. Later Christmases and birthdays brought me more and more Odyssey 2 games but the greatest Christmas of all was, by far, the first. I will admit that the Odyssey 2 games got better over time with a few disappointments sprinkled in like Alien Invaders Plus, but the best ones came long after those first few holiday seasons. I had some friends and cousins end up with Atari VCS systems and I have to admit I thought that they were cool, but for years I was convinced that I made the right choice with the Odyssey 2. I even credit it for launching the first sparks of my computer career with those valuable lessons I learned learning assembly with the Computer Intro cartridge and its unbelievably well done spiral bound tome of 1970's computer secrets!

During the later years with my Odyssey 2, I was given the "Voice of Odyssey" sometime around 1982, which was one of the coolest things I had ever seen at that time. A handful of games took advantage of it, but the most fun I had was using the Type and Tell cartridge to create synthesized speeches and then taping them with my tape recorder. Other High points were the "Challenger Series" games starting with UFO and leading to Pick Axe Pete and the best Pac-man clone of the time, K.C. Munchkin,

followed by his later post-Atari-lawsuit version, K.C.'s Crazy Chase. As a side note, I wrote a free homebrew game poking fun at this character for the Atari 2600 called K.C.'s Crazy Nightmare – feel free to visit my web site and download it here http://tacticalneuronics.com/content/KCsCrazyNightmare.asp.

The last highpoint of owning my Odyssey 2 system came with the "Master Strategy Series" starting off with The Quest for the Rings. This was something to behold, a beautiful board game/map with real quality metal playing pieces and an artful keyboard overlay, the set was completed by a solid heavy chest-like box and beautifully illustrated golden players manual. This Lord of the Rings inspired dungeon crawl made great use of the keyboard and was an amazing adventure game experience for someone who was just getting into Dungeons and Dragons. Finally, something similar to Atari's great game named Adventure rounded out my later Odyssey 2 days!

I still have my Odyssey 2 and I recently purchased an Atari VCS, initially to play the cartridge versions of some recent homebrew games I wrote but quickly I started collecting some of their best offerings to round out my historical "Golden Era" of video gaming personal collection. The two systems are wonderful and if you ask me today I can find reasons why each one is superior to the other in their own way, but I give props to Atari for having by far the best overall library. Odyssey 2, although not as successful as Atari, managed to release a few games that gave me pride in it. Later in life I discovered that many of these titles were written by one man, Ed Averett, for whom I can thank for some of my best childhood video gaming memories! As a 21st century programmer I can only dream to have such a professional influence as he did.

By the way, my sister's Microvision, a handheld game that came with a packed in copy of Block Buster (a breakout clone), was never graced with more than a handful of games (I believe she also had the bowling game for it). It was an idea that was a decade or so ahead of its time leaving a void until the Nintendo Gameboy came along to take the ball and totally run away with it.

That's my story. Here is wishing all of you a wonderful Christmas/Holiday season.

John Reder programs homebrew cartridges for the Atari 2600 among other systems. If you are interested in seeing more on what John has done, check out his website at http://TacticalNeuronics.com.

1982: The Best Christmas Ever
by *Dave Mrozek*

Video games have long played a big role in my holiday festivities, but the Christmas of 1982 is the one that rekindles the fondest memories. This was the point in history when video games were really taking off. There was an arcade on every corner, several competing home systems to choose from, and groundbreaking titles like Defender and Q*Bert appearing on a weekly basis. I owned - and cherished - a small but well-maintained collection of Atari 2600 games.

My parents always went a little overboard for Christmas, and on this particular year they went a little crazy and said I could ask for three video games. And that was in addition to all the other stuff I normally got! Sure , there was no guarantee I would get all three, but I knew it was just one big mind game. I had to choose wisely however, because when your income is limited to grass cutting and snow shoveling money, new games are few and far between.

My first choice was Frogger. I had played it over at several of my friends' houses and it was one of those universal games everyone seemed to enjoy. How many games can you say that about today? My next choice was Donkey Kong. I was fully aware that the Atari 2600 version didn't exactly set the world on fire, but it was Donkey Kong for Pete's sake. I instantly fell in love with its "climb the girders" concept since I first laid eyes on it at the local bowling alley. My third choice was the less-popular Star Raiders. Why? Well, with two arcade hits under my belt, I was looking for something with a little more substance. Star Raiders was a first-person space shooter that came with its own special keypad controller! Atari games that came in "fat boxes" (like Indy 500) were hard to resist, because you always felt like you were getting so much more for your money.

I would have been perfectly happy with those three titles, but I had an ace up my sleeve. It was a family tradition for me to exchange presents with my younger sister Mary on Christmas Eve. Sure enough, when her gift to me appeared under the tree, it was shaped like an Atari cartridge. Go figure! I examined the box constantly, as if I was going to discern its contents by feeling the box. I made several attempts to trick Mary into divulging the name of the game, but I have to hand it to her - she never let on.

I handled that gift so much that by the time I actually opened it on Christmas Eve, it was all bent up! The game was a real shocker: Realsports Volleyball. I had never even mentioned that one in my frequent conversations about Atari games. I played it that night and thought it was great. It was a two-on-two beach volleyball game with a scenic blue ocean in the background. After playing it for a while, I left the room, and when I returned my sister was exclaiming about something on the screen. Low and behold there was actually a shark fin patrolling in the water on the horizon! It was by far the coolest thing either of us had ever witnessed.

On Christmas morning I worked my way through the huge pile of gifts to gradually uncover Frogger, Donkey Kong, and Star Raiders. While firing up my Atari 2600 console my mom handed me one last gift. I wasn't too excited because it was shaped like one of those clothes boxes which usually contained a shirt, socks, or some other worthless article of clothing. But when I brushed aside the tissue paper I nearly had a heart attack. It was E.T.! E.T.!! That's right - it was the newly-released Atari cartridge that had generated so much fanfare. At that point it was official: Best. Christmas. Ever.

My sister and I had a blast playing these games while sitting on the carpet still littered with bits of wrapping paper. We would cycle through all of the games but we were especially fascinated with E.T. Okay, I know what you're thinking - E.T. is considered one of the worst games of all time. But we didn't know that. As we guided that little alien between contiguous screens, E.T. would often fall into holes and sometimes find goodies. In one pit there was a dead plant, and when E.T. walked over to it the plant sprung to life! It was pure video game magic. The game didn't make much sense, but that made it all the more intriguing.

In retrospect, the fact that my sister kept repeating, "this is a really good game" was probably an indicator that E.T. wasn't very good. I mean, when a game is good, it's self-evident. Nobody has ever uttered the words, "You know what? Pac-Man is a really good game!" Du-uh! I vaguely recall that the E.T. box still had a $19.99 sticker on it - pretty reasonable for a new Atari cartridge! In retrospect, this probably indicated that retailers had seen the writing on the wall and were trying to unload as many copies as possible before the holidays were over.

One part of Christmas that always sucked was the obligatory visit to relatives for dinner. I can't recall who it was we visited that year, but I do remember taking the game manuals in the car so I could study them on the drive. On the way back, I had to strain my eyes because it was getting dark. The Donkey Kong manual stated "You'll find that this cartridge is full of special features to make DONKEY KONG exciting every time you play." This tantalizing phrase suggested the game was chock full of hidden rooms and other Easter Eggs. In reality, those Coleco games never contained any extra surprises at all, and usually played the exactly the same every time! No sharks here!

It's difficult to believe that just one year later the video game market would crash and my Atari 2600 would take a backseat to a brand new home computer. It was the end of an era, but I will never forget that perfect storm of video game bliss that struck in 1982.

Dave Mrozek AKA The Video Game Critic (www.videogamecritic.net) is currently celebrating ten years of writing classic game reviews on his site.
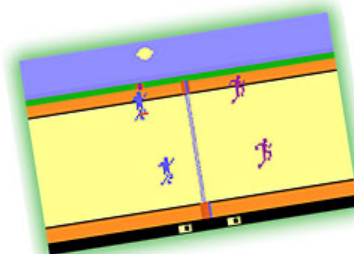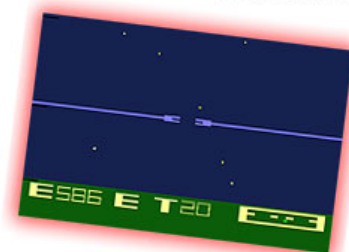
REALSPORTS VOLLEYBALL

FROGGER

DONKEY KONG

STAR RAIDERS

E.T. THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL

Fooling The Stores: A 1984 Guide To Videogame Return Policies

by Mark Sabbatini

Note: These are the musings of a 16-year-old juvenile delinquent. Any resemblance to the author's attitude 25 years later is purely coincidental. The following should be read as if it were 1984.

"I'm sorry, but it really isn't the thought that counts.

Relatives and others ask for wish lists, then tend to show their dense side by ignoring them. It's not like it's a money thing since I'm not asking for new computers (OK, I pestered the foster parents endlessly into buying one last year, but that was as a "family" gift). I list handheld games and cartridges from the under $10 bargain bin. I'm fine with cheapo walkmans since they seem to break constantly no matter the price. Digital watches get cheaper and more novel every year. Food in many forms is great, if the electronics thing bothers them. And there's usually plenty more, with nicely detailed references to where in those thick Christmas catalogues they can be found.

What I don't remember listing is clothes because 1) they're a necessity, not a gift and 2) picking your own during annual back-to-school trips works about a thousand times better than having others try to guess your size and preference, invariably incorrectly.

But I can safely assume a significant portion of the boxes on Christmas morning, especially from distant relatives, will contain things I'm supposed to wear (in a living example of the worst stereotype, one of my grandmothers actually sent the same sweater two years in a row).

So December 26 has become an annual pilgrimage – on foot, by bus or whatever – where a pile of stuff gets traded for things I like. I've only had one or two occasions where a relative eventually asked to see how something they sent looked on me, so the potential embarrassment factor is low enough to be worth the risk.

Since I'm almost always looking for new handheld games, cartridges for the Atari or Colecovision, or software for my Radio Shack Color Computer (the "family" thing was something of a courtesy title), the following are the stores I hit and how they rate in terms of willingness to take things and games worth acquiring. The best obviously give cash or credit without receipts, and are large/gullible enough that you can keep playing and exchanging a game until you're sick of them.

Some stores are starting to get a little wiser, realizing it's pretty easy to copy software and albums, but most aren't there yet. So here's the places (at least in my hometown of Denver) worth hitting while the getting away with it is good:

Target (A-)
Get there when the doors open and these guys are golden. Opened, no receipt, from a different store (peel off the price stickers and other giveaway evidence) or whatever, they'll almost always give you cash or exchange credit. They're getting a bit tight about opened albums, but you can usually at least get credit if you're persistent. Also, if you don't have a receipt you'll only get whatever an item's lowest price has been during the last 60, 90 or some odd days. They have an above-average selection of handhelds and cartridges, and some really good day-after sale prices. Good first stop for everything you can get by them, especially since they tend to be the first to open around 7 a.m. or so, and getting there more than five minutes late means you can get stuck in lines that are insane.

Sears (B)
Thank goodness for their Christmas catalog, which allows you to determine if they actually sell the stuff you want to return before you show up and embarrass yourself. They have a pretty good game selection, and you gotta love their live demo station, where you can select and play a bunch of Atari carts for five minutes at a time). They also sell a lot of clothes and "other" stuff, so it's a good all-purpose stop early in the day. They tend to be about 50-50 on giving refunds without a receipt, but everything else is a breeze. The best stores are the ones where you can do trades at one of the registers throughout the store instead of the customer service counter.

Radio Shack (B)
Good about everything they sell except opened software on disk and cassette. Their handhelds tend to be lame and more expensive ripoffs of other companies' games, but it's possible to do a few tried-it-didn't-like-it-swaps, especially if you do the exchanges at different stores. They're also good about exchanging Color Computer software on cartridges, which is great since it's possible to save copies of them on disk (warning: the programmers seem smarter than the salesmen, since a number of newer games have code that tries to overwrite itself as a protection mechanism).

J.C. Penny (C+)
A higher-priced version of Sears. Their Christmas catalog is also worth looking through, but they tend to be heavy on clothes and home stuff, and light on anything worthwhile. Still, the foster parents and other adults in my gift circle seem to favor this place, no doubt due to being able to shop by mail order, so taking back at least a few clothes is part of the annual pilgrimage. They're a bit tighter about giving cash back, and their handhelds and cartridges are more limited in number than other stores. This is where I go at the mall when I'm running out of options.

K-Mart (C)
Similar but not quite as good as Target in every way. Some places are reluctant to give cash without a receipt and the games selection tends to be disorganized and depleted the day after Christmas. Considering the selection is already smaller and second rate in comparison, it's where to go if you've got a receipt or can't get to a better store for some reason.

MD&F (D+)
Ugh. Getting clothes from here often means getting stuck with them, if only because there isn't much to exchange for. They're also tightwads about giving cash without a receipt, plus as a relatively upscale store they have an attitude about teenagers trying to bring stuff back. On occasion they'll have "executive toys" that are just madly overpriced versions of simple handhelds, but it beats something that'll never come out of the closet except when your aunt visits. Only redeeming factor is because their stuff is expensive, if you can somehow get cash (I swiped the receipt for something out of my foster parents' dresser a couple years back) you're in great shape for a trip to a better store.

L.L. Bean (A-)
A bizarre inclusion, but bear with me. Obviously a non-gaming and non-retail (unless you live in Maine) place, but I ask for a lot of stuff from here because 1) I like their backpacking gear and 2) they'll take anything they sell back anytime in any condition. Seriously, I returned a backpack after a couple years of hard use and it was no problem. More common is sending back clothes sent by relatives who can't figure out my size and/or taste. Obviously refunds are by check and that's a pain because it takes a few weeks, followed by a week or so for the check to clear when you get it. I once tried using a check-cashing place after getting my driver's license this year but, wow, do they ever rip you off – they took something like 20 percent for "processing fees," which is only slightly less worse than shoplifting when it comes to immediate gratification."

Apple II Incider - My Apple II Wishlist
by Donald Lee
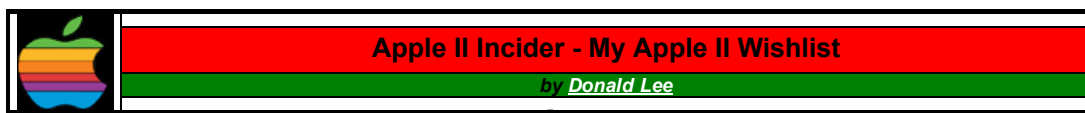
This is a little bit weird. It's a couple of days before Thanksgiving as I write this, but the article is for the DECEMBER issue of Retrogaming Times Monthly. Even though the article is for December, I will note a few things to be thankful for: My health, my family, my friends and my job. I've had lots of ups and downs in 2009 but have appreciated all of the support my friends and family have given me.

As for the December column of Apple II Incider, I'm going to go away from discussing a specific game and go with a Christmas theme. I am going to put together an

Apple II wishlist which will consist of various items that I either would like to have or see created in the Apple II world.

Item #1 - Apple IIGS system

When the Apple IIGS was introduced around 1986, I always wanted to own the machine. Of course, being a teenager at the time, buying a IIGS (list price of $999 without monitor or disk drives) was impractical on my own. For one reason or another I never convinced my parents to buy a IIGS machine for me. For the next decade I was stuck using my Apple IIe, and it wasn't until 1995 when I was attending a 4 year university that my dad got me my next computer, a Compaq Presario running Windows 95.

With the advent of emulators, a real IIGS system is not necessary to enjoy the many programs that exist out there. However, a part of me still would like to get a real one to play with. Despite being over 23 years old, a fully upgraded machine is still useful even in 2009 as there are productivity applications (word processors, spreadsheets, database programs, and desktop publishers) that could still be used today. Thanks to the ingenuity of various people in the Apple II world, Ethernet cards and other hardware have been created over the years. Even though the IIGS wouldn't be able to support a graphical web browser like Firefox or Internet Explorer, developers did come up with a Lynx (text only) browser that runs on the IIGS.

Item #2 - Ultima VI (and beyond) for the Apple II

As many people remember, Richard Garriot (aka Lord British) created an adventure game called Akalabeth for the Apple II 8-bit machines around 1979. Garriot then followed up Akalabeth with a game called Ultima in 1980. As we all know, the rest is history.

During the 1980's I had been a fan of the arcade game Gauntlet because of it's multiplayer aspects, and I always imagined myself traveling around with a group of friends adventuring or fighting as I did in the game. The unfortunate aspect was that Gauntlet was not released for home computers at the time.

Determined to find a game that was similar, I stumbled upon Ultima IV: Quest of the Avatar. I don't think I knew what I was getting into. I was probably expecting an arcade game like Gaunlet but got a role-playing adventure instead. I recall that it took me a LONG time to figure out exactly what I was doing in Ultima IV. However, once I figured out what I was supposed to do, I played the game with a vengeance. Interestingly enough I never completed the game, however, I did become a big fan of Ultima and looked forward to every release.

The week Ultima V went on sale, I purchased a copy and completed the game very quickly. After finishing Ultlma V, I decided to go BACK and play Exodus: Ultima III since Ultima VI was not going to be released for another two years or so. With some help I completed Ultima III as well.

I eagerly awaited the release of Ultima VI, but alas my hopes were dashed. Apple Computer had determined the Macintosh would be the system of the future. The Apple II computers were still popular but the market size was slowly shrinking. Despite some pleas to contrary, the software publisher decided to cancel development of Ultima VI for the Apple II which in turn marked the end of an era. Ultima had been released for the Apple II since the inception of the series and now it was time for it to move on to a more advanced platform.

These days, while I know Ultima VI (and sequels) will never be ported to the Apple II, there are compilations out there for the PC that could enable me to play the games. Alas, it wouldn't be the same as playing the game on my Apple IIe. One can dream though.

Item #3 - Compilation of A+, Incider and Incider/A+ magazines

A+ and Incider were general interest Apple II magazines that began sometime in the early to mid 1980's. The magazines feature product reviews, commentary and news that pertained to the Apple II computer. I was first exposed to A+ magazine and later Incider. Both had their own quirks and charm, but I enjoyed each one greatly. As the Apple II market began to shrink in the late 80's, A+ and Incider magazines merged into one called Incider/A+. The merged magazine lasted for several more years before publishing it's final issue in July of 1993.

I would love to see the entire collection of A+, Incider and Incider/A+ magazines collected so I can re-read them. I don't know how much demand exists for such a project but it certainly would be a great dream come true.

That's all for this month, hope you had a Happy Thanksgiving and will have a very Merry Christmas!

Pitfall!: A Homebrewer's Journey
by *Owen Brand*

I recently had the pleasure of playing a new homebrew game for the TI-99/4A. It is a faithful port of David Crane's jungle masterpiece Pitfall! by Activision. The story here is not the game itself, as many have played Pitfall! and are familiar with it. The real story is in the process the creator went through to reach a finished product. In playing the game, one quickly begins to understand the massive scope of the project. 255 levels, challenging SPRITE dynamics, and pinpoint platform parameters are a few of the hurdles the programmer had to overcome. This port is second to none!

The title screen is the first thing that grabs your attention… A flawless "Activision" title scrolls across the screen followed by the classic Pitfall! vine swing. Once you enter the main gameplay, it becomes very apparent that this programmer paid extreme attention to detail. Everything from the crocodiles in the pools to the rolling logs that zap your points and right down to the actual game physics are pristine in presentation. I was brought back immediately to my own childhood playing Pitfall! on my Atari 2600 many Christmases ago, and I felt a great sense of nostalgia creep over me as I maneuvered Pitfall Harry through the jungles. The only word that I could conjure in my head was "flawless."

I had the opportunity to talk with Filip Van Vooren, the programmer responsible, and get his side of the story. I followed the progress of Pitfall! on Filip's webpage (http://retroclouds.de) while he was going through his "growing pains," but never fully understood the process until we spoke. What follows is a conversation he and I had about this game and the trials he went through to create what is no doubt one of the finest games ever produced for the TI-99/4A and is sure to be a hot Christmas item next year when it comes out on cartridge, well at least in the classic gaming circles!

THE INTERVIEW

RTM: Thanks for taking the time to talk with us a little bit about your game, Filip. I'd like to start by asking you how you got started… What inspired you to write Pitfall! for the TI, and how long did it take you?

Filip: In early 2007 I got fascinated by the Colecovision game console.
At the time I had bought a lot on eBay that also included a bunch of really good Colecovision games. Not much later I learned that the Colecovision had the same VDP and sound engine as our TI-99/4A. That got me thinking. If they have so many good games, it should be possible to get something similar for our TI-99/4A. Actually, I was considering a general approach at first, a translator program running on the PC that reads a Colecovision game ROM image and outputs TMS9900 assembly source. Go figure! Well, even today I haven't completely given up the

idea on that, but that's another story! In November of 2007, we had a discussion on the Yahoo! TI-99/4A group if at least a single-color version of Pitfall! would be possible. I thought we could do better than that and also considered the game to be simple enough I could give it a try. Shortly after I started writing my first code in TMS9900 assembler.

Now -2 years later- I'm still working on it (Revision B, which is the basis for the cartridge version). I don't know how many hours I've spent on writing/testing/debugging. It could be over 1,000 I guess.

Yes, I've been having some complaints from my wife! Seriously, couldn't have done this without her patience and support. I love her very much. Thank you Steffi!

RTM: What was your biggest challenge/hurdle you had to overcome during the process?

Filip: There were many during the different development stages, I'm even fighting some today. For one I had to learn TMS9900 assembly language, had to implement a game engine and needed a way to design the 255 levels.

Pitfall! screenshot for the TI-99/4A

Currently I'm finishing work on the cartridge version. Quite a challenge, I must say. Just recently I was able to reduce RAM memory usage from 1.3K to only 255 bytes. That was required for making the game work on a bare console without any memory expansion. Today I'm working on the bank-switching, making sure the game code fits in 8K blocks. It's looking promising so far.

RTM: Graphically, the game is VERY close to the original... Maybe even better in its presentation. What are some tools you used to achieve your results?

Filip: I used many. At first I wrote some software for extracting most of the graphics from the Colecovision ROM and to visualize the graphics on a PC (decide on sprite patterns, tiles, etc.). Sound data was converted in TI sound format using my own custom tool, but in the end a lot of tools and emulators were involved in the process: Winasm, CV Soundbank, Java Applet, MEKA, and Meisei to name a few. Most importantly, however, had to be Tursi's Classic99 emulator with its excellent built-in debugger. Without it, Pitfall! for the TI-99/4A would not exist today. I'd like to take the opportunity to thank Tursi and all others for the great tools they have made!

RTM: What did you find most rewarding about the process? Are you more internally motivated or externally motivated? In other words, did you write the game for YOU or for others?

Filip: Tricky question. I'm not really a gamer myself, but I love doing new stuff. I have already written enough serious software in my life and writing an arcade game was a totally new experience. Now back to the question. Yes, I developed the game for myself. To prove I could. But I'm not going to play it much, I'll leave that to the gamers.

RTM: What would you change about the final product if you could?

Filip: A lot! Not so much what concerns the game itself, more what happens behind the scenes (optimize source code, add compression etc.). Just recently I was told that on the Atari 2600 only 1 byte (!) was used as seed for calculating the 255 levels. Now that is something I find very fascinating. However, I wouldn't want to rewrite the game anymore. Pretty much done with that. I had a blast doing Pitfall! but now it is time to move on. I have learned a lot which will be of good use in my future TI-99/4A homebrew game projects.

Please check out Filip's website (http://retroclouds.de) for more information about "Pitfall!" and other 'retroclouds' games upcoming in the near future. You can also view video, screenshots, and get status updates from Filip himself on the "Game Development" page of Opry99er.com.

Looking Forward Into The Past
by Owen Brand

We stand at the end of a year and at the end of a decade. During the past 10 years we have seen many new developments in technology, hardware and software innovations, and a new generation of "gamer" come into being. With so much new life in the community of video games, it is interesting to note how much light has been cast on the origins of modern gaming. From magazines, like the one you are reading now, to hundreds of websites all over the net, classic gaming has resurged into the public eye. Cartridges have been replaced by DVD's and Blu Ray's, joysticks have been replaced by wireless remote controllers . . . but the spirit of gaming is the same, whether it happens to be 1979 or 2009.

On a quick search of the most downloaded arcade apps for Apple's iPhone, one might be surprised to discover that several of the top 20 downloads are games that were made over 20 years ago. Games such as Pac-Man, Space Invaders, Frogger, and Galaga top the list of retro-gaming mainstays that have resurged into the mainstream of modern popular gaming. While these games have always been popular for nostalgic reasons, there is something deeper and more tangible that has prompted America's renewed interest in them. Let's take a brief look at the history of gaming in America to try and discover the driving forces behind the renewed passion and desire for these classic masterpieces.

The Magnavox Odyssey
(Image Courtesy of Martin Goldberg)

In 1972, the Magnavox Odyssey was released and the culture of home video games was born. While the "Brown Box" (as it was affectionately dubbed) was the first of its kind and truly pioneering, it would not be until 5 years later that home gaming would become widespread. In 1977, the Atari 2600 was released, reigning in the 8-bit era of video gaming. Since then, there have been tens of thousands of home video games released from "Pac-Man" to the "Call of Duty" series on X-Box, Playstation, and Nintendo. The era of interest for our discussion, however, extends from 1975 through 1985. This is considered by many to be the most crucial period in early game development--the "golden-age" of arcade gaming. Let's look at the key developments in technology and why the games from this era have withstood the test of time.

It is impossible to have a discussion about early game technology and development without mentioning the Atari Company. Atari was responsible for the first home version of Pong, the first affordable home game console. While it was limited to one type of game, it brought the fascination of home gaming to the public and an empire was born. Soon, Atari began work on a multiple-game console which would eventually be named the 2600. Based on the unique and revolutionary concept of ROM (read-only-memory) cartridges, it would allow users to purchase whatever games they wanted for their gaming console. This was the true catalyst for all gaming to follow. Early games developed by Atari and third party game developers included Frogger, Pac-Man, Air-Sea Battle, Football, and Space Invaders. The system would eventually go the way of the 8-bit games in 1984 when the "video game crash" hit. But the seeds of early arcade gaming had already been sown. Hundreds of thousands of people had gotten a taste for the blips and beeps of the golden age of arcade gaming... and to this day, many of these original games are still prevalent in our culture.

So, the next logical question is "Why?" What is it about these games that struck such a chord in us as a culture? I think one has to look at just how widespread they were to get a grasp on the answer. Many households did not own an Atari 2600, but there were many other gaming options at the time, some from unexpected sources. Atarisoft, the software division of the company, became a major game developer for the Texas Instruments TI-99/4A along with the Commodore line of home computers. The games that Atarisoft put out

in the early '80s such as Pac-Man, Pole Position, and Donkey Kong were still being produced for many gaming consoles through the end of that decade (albeit from different sources other than Atarisoft), including the 8-bit gaming giant and relative newcomer to the market—Nintendo. With the rise of Nintendo, the golden era of home arcade gaming came to an end. However, even as you look around today, seeds of that time and era are growing taller and more advanced everyday. Games such as "Super Pitfall" for the Nintendo and "Donkey Kong 64" for the Nintendo-64 systems held large shares of the market during their reign in the game stores—largely due to the historical importance of the characters in those respective games and the nostalgia they created in gamers of that era.

Atari Pong and 2600 game consoles

FLASH FORWARD - December 2009

Today the world of gaming looks very VERY different; touch screen applications downloaded via 3G wireless connections, Blu Ray discs containing games so massive in scope that not even the great visionaries of the 80's could have ever dreamed the possibilities; games that look far more realistic than even the highest-budget blockbuster films of the day. But through it all, through the Medal of Honor's and the Grand Theft Auto's, Frogger remains. Space Invaders" remains. In short, while technology has changed so drastically and so rapidly in the past 25-30 years, the love for simplicity of content remains.

As in most other areas of life, the desire for different types of entertainment runs in circles. In other areas, bell-bottom jeans come in and go out of style. Hairstyles vary from decade to decade, but seem to always go in a cyclical pattern as well. One could also look into trends in music. Whatever the case may be, there is always a cycle that repeats itself. In the case of classic arcade-style games, the same is true. There has been a resurgence in development and consumer demand, and I—for one—am grateful. So next time you plug in your Wii or your Playstation 3, remember the great games of old . . . and know that they are only an iPhone download away from your very own fingertips!

Please Save Christmas Santa!
by Bryan Roppolo

As many of you guys out there might know, I am a big TI-99/4A fan. I've used this system ever since 1983 when I got my first one under the Christmas tree. I still have a picture to prove it! One 3rd party company that made games of the TI system was Funware, a small game factory based in Richardson, TX. Michael Brouthers ran that company and they produced some pretty interesting titles for the TI system. One of those titles was St. Nick, and it's a great little game to review for this special Christmas issue of RTM.

St. Nick contains some very nicely detailed and colorful graphics. The intro screen is perhaps the most beautiful where the player is treated to some music along with a scene where witches invade St. Nick's factory and hypnotize the elves to start scattering all the toys they made everywhere. Can Santa collect all the toys and put an end to the witches curse in time to save Christmas?!? I have to admit that the story is a real interesting one, I mean who would have thought about combining witches and Christmas together? Not me at least!!


As for the game itself, the object is to go around and collect the scatters toys. However, things are not as easy as they may seem. In order to complete a level you must collect the different types of toys in a certain order. Such as having to collect the teddy bears first, followed by boats, etc. There is a little area on the left side of the screen that shows the order in which you must collect your toys. If you do happen to accidently bump into an object out of order, Santa will freeze and an elf will come out and scatter MORE toys on the screen for you to collect all while precious seconds tick off the clock (and trust me, those elves take their good old time too!). This makes it harder to complete the level as only a certain amount of time is given for each screen. On higher levels it is crucial that you do not collect anything out of order, or else that could be the end of Christmas.

In addition to having to watch for stepping into the wrong toy, there are also witches flying around on broomsticks that when hit will also cause those pesky elves to appear again. One of the nice things though is that if you have already collected a certain set of toys, that toy will no longer be placed by the elves that come out on the screen. It makes it a little bit easier, since it means if you end up picking up a wrong item or hitting a witch when you are on the last type of toy to collect, then only that remaining type will be scattered on the screen. This part makes the game actually sane in terms of the difficulty level.

One thing that I should note is that the blocks that you see scattered on the screen can actually be picked up at any time to spell out "SANTA". If you end up spelling the jolly bearded one's name, time will then freeze and you'll be able to pick up the toys in any order that you please. Talk about a nice feature! This was some pretty cleaver thinking on the developers part, although I guess you could say they might have been inspired by Mr.Do! where you get to spell out "EXTRA" for an extra life/early ending of the level.

The only real complaint I have about this game is that sometimes it can be hard to tell if St. Nick will actually hit a toy or not. Therefore, it can be hard to maneuver through a set of toys on the ground that you don't want to touch. St. Nick's head is the only part of his body that does not pick things up, meaning that you have to touch a toy with any other part of your body. This is done in order to allow St. Nick, which is a big sprite, to be able to move between objects on the screen. It gives him some depth so that you can technically look like you are walking over an object but in actuality you are not. Sometimes, however, determining where St. Nick will end up hitting an object is not so easy because of this "depth" and you end up hitting a toy or witch that you do not want to. That's really my only complaint for this game, but once you get the hang of what parts of St. Nick's body matter when it comes to touching an object, you can get into the swing of things very quickly..

In terms of difficulty, this game actually starts out pretty hard, even once you master the collision issue mentioned above. You do have the option to start on levels 1-6 at the beginning of the game, but I would not recommend the top level as things move so fast I'm not sure it's even possible to actually beat it at that point. Although, the elves move faster which is nice since they take less time off the clock to scatter their toys, but the amount of times you will probably end up running into a witch or wrong toy more than makes up for it.
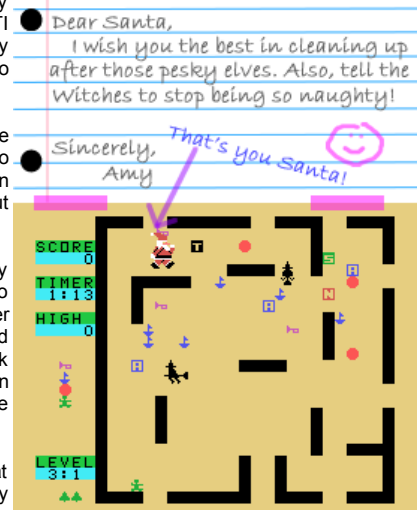
St. Nick is probably the second best Funware game out there for the TI, with first prize going to Henhouse, which is held as many people's favorite TI game. However, for Christmas this little game cannot be beat! This can be confirmed by my friend Joshua who was entertained by this title and kept wanting to play it again all the while figuring out a strategy to win, and trust me this is no easy friend to impress!

Vectrexenstein - In Hibernation
by Donald Lee
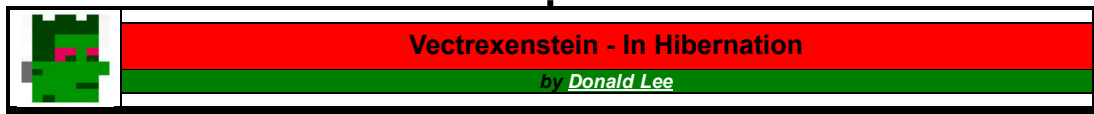
To all fans of the Vectrex system, I'm sorry to say that there will be no game review this month. The reason for this is because the emulator I used the past two months did NOT work with the game images/ROMs I found online. As I noted previously, the emulator I used was developed by someone who did it for fun but doesn't seem to be actively maintaining it.

The good news is that I did find an emulator that has a good number of games that work with it. Unfortunately, the emulator seems to run incredibly slow on my computer, so I couldn't get any of the games running well enough to review them. However, this may not be the fault of the emulator. The computer I am using is several years old, has a small amount of RAM and the hard drive is about 70% full.

I'm going to see what I can do about this and hopefully get back to looking at Vectrex games next month. Thanks for reading!

Dual Perspective - Super Mario Brothers
by James Sorge

Hello, this is James Sorge back with Dual Perspective, the column that reviews games from both the playing and the World Record perspectives. This month, the victim is Super Mario Brothers by Nintendo.

Graphics: D
There are a few fatal flaws in Super Mario Brothers' graphics. One is that they tend to use the same sprites over and over again (don't know if this was an NES limitation or just not enough effort). Second, Fire Luigi has the same color as Mario, that kind of bit the big one. Third, the color schemes weren't the greatest in the world and could be irritating on the eyes at times.
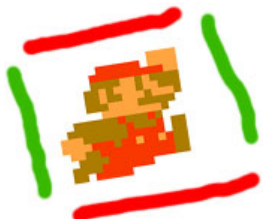
Sound: A
The tunes were classic back then and have formed the basic tune base for the Super Mario Brothers series in general. Some of the most nostalgic tunes are here in all of video games.

Difficulty: F
Generally easy and the game that most later game's difficulties are based on. Kids can beat this title and I know plenty who can beat it and no other. Then again, I know people that can beat Elite Fighters and can't even beat this. A good standard-bearer for the difficulty of an average game.

Replay Factor: A
There are three general tracks to completing this game: Minimalist (using Warp Zones), Full Completion, and Points. This gives you three ways to play the game and keep going. Plenty of reasons to replay this.

The World Record Perspective:
The records in this game might be insurmountable in the speed category, but the points records are not close to being maxed out, especially on the SNES remake. For this review, we'll keep it simple and go over the NES World Records. The minimalist completion: The Speed Demons Archive record with glitches is 5:00 by Andrew Garkidis, and the Twin Galaxies record is tied at 5:08:00 by 3 people. These records are pretty much unbeatable, though to see the sub-5:00 run would be nice if only by a second. Full Completion: SDA time: 19:40.00 with glitches, TG record 20:02.00, no glitches, both held by Andrew Garkidis. Once again, this record is pretty godly, I wouldn't suggest going after it unless you have a million hours or want to prove a point. The points record is 1,201,350, held by Patrick Scott Patterson. This record is not insurmountable, and I know several people from my NES days that would have fun with it if they practiced with 5 lives. It's OK, but definitely beatable.

The Penguin Says:
"I'll take the time to explain this, and coming from a Nintendo based penguin mind you this could be rough. The graphics aren't really the greatest and can be an eyesore at times. Also, there were a few major mistakes in the design of Super Mario Brothers, including Fire Luigi's color and the Minus World glitch. Don't get the wrong, the game is fun, but I still to this day don't see how 40 million+ people have come to enjoy this one while better games don't get more credit. It's solid, but not spectacular, and falls into a category like Final Fantasy 4: The After Years."

"Overall I give the game a **6.5/10**. However, the World Record Points score **can still be beaten**, so I give that a **2.5/5**"

All Eyes On Mega Man III
by Daryl "Zeo" Kiddey

Mega Man III introduces Protoman and has some unique features, including Dr. Wily's first break from that Metriod-Chozo looking machine for the boss battle. Also, it introduces the Robodog Rush, which is much better than the items the previous game had.

Graphics: 10 / 10
The games' graphics sets are very well done for the NES and contain some of the most complicated images on the system, Mega Man 4 is the only game I can think of offhand that surpasses it (Mega Man 5 and 6 are Mega Man 4 clones and are not as polished).

Sound: 8 / 10
The sound on this is good and Protoman's theme is a nice composition, but like the entire series, the actual sounds never really changed from Mega Man I. It could have been better, but was pretty solid.

Controls: 10 / 10

This has what is probably one of he best control schemes in the series. Rush Jet is a virtual platform that is wonderful to use and Mega Man responds very well and very quickly.

Game Play: 9 / 10
Game play is great, taking advantage of new weapons and abilities, and unlike Sega there are no accidental glitches that result in you getting shoved inside of walls and eventually crushed by sliding. The Mega Man II bosses are back in this game, but it's too bad you can't take and use their weapons.

Replay Value, Longevity: 9 / 10
The Doc Robot stages really make you want to replay this game. However, the Wily rounds are a little too easy.

Overall rating: 9 / 10
If you want to get a hold of this game (and you very well should!), I strongly suggest the Virtual Console version over the Anniversary Collection. Well worth the 500 Wii points, especially since that's less than 1/10th of what this great game cost new on the NES! The Anniversary Collection version for the Playstation has the normal porting issues, plus the auto fire and weapons cycling ruin the original experience. The Game Cube version, on top of all the problems associated with the Playstation Anniversary Collection release, also has the A and B buttons switched which really hurts you, especially if you are use to the NES.

Modern Retro - Tekken 3
by *Patrick McClellan*

Whilst fighting games have been around since the late '70s in the form of Sega's boxing arcade unit Heavyweight Champ, followed by the popular Way of the Exploding Fist originally released in 1985 on the Commodore 64 among other systems, it was the Street Fighter series and its inevitable sequels that introduced the masses to a genre that has remained popular to this day. Fighting games emphasized the concept of one on one combat between two human-controlled characters, and the arcade units would become a regular hangout for highly competitive gamers, young and old.

Other fighting franchises were released to critical acclaim and cult status in the early '90s, like Mortal Kombat and Virtua Fighter, and the popularity of such game in arcades flourished. As the decade continued, the popularity of the fighting genre began to deteriorate, partly due to rising complexity of the games and also the increasingly powerful home-consoles released at the end of the millennium, like the Playstation 1 and Sega Dreamcast. As the arcade units began to become scarce, some fans opted away from the fighting genre, as they complained that the arcade feel couldn't be replicated at home on home consoles. Despite this, publishers like Namco Bandai and Tecmo continued to push for more fighting titles, with Dead or Alive and Soul (Calibur) gaining many fans. It was however, a series that had previously stood in the shadow of others in the mid 90s that was to take the limelight. Tekken 3, the follow up to the 1994 and 1995 releases of the same series, was put out on the Playstation 1 in 1998 and is widely regarded as one of the best games of the console generation, and an exceptionally well-crafted fighting experience.

Despite maintaining the same core fighting engine seen in its predecessors, a series of tweaks and improvements in terms of graphics and animations would be enough to perfect the already excellent gameplay mechanics seen in the two earlier games in the series. There were also several additions to the previously petite character roster, with modern-day favorites like the bizarrely-headed King (pictured on the left), taekwondo expert Hwoarang, and Jin Kazama, a boy who claimed to be "Heihachi's grandson", the man who had originally been the 'final boss' in the original Tekken Arcade game. There were a total of fifteen new characters added who hadn't been featured in the Tekken series before, including unlockable ones. This would bring the total number of playable characters to twenty-one.

A new technique added to Tekken 3 not before featured in the series was the ability to sidestep and the emphasis on the third axis. Though unique, dodge and sidestep maneuvers were available to particular characters in previous games, but now the ability was open to every character without a complicated combo-chain to remember. All it now took was a simple push on the joystick or d-pad in the corresponding direction. Another small change was the emphasis on realistic jumping. No longer could a fighter avoid an attack by jumping preposterously high; they were instead limited to a jump which was around the head height of most other combatants, with exceptions being some of the…larger enemies you encounter as the arcade story mode progresses. This addition made the player depend far more on the sidestepping technique, and it became a key technique to master should you want to consider yourself a 'pro'. Juggling the opposition also became a far easier system to master, with increased hit-parameters for a variety of moves, allowing for a more generous opportunity to deal massive damage on the opposition.

The game also included a Streets of Rage style minigame named Tekken Force. This would place the player in various stages against enemies, as you were told to clear each group of foes before being allowed to side-scroll into the next area. Whilst this mode was popular in its own right, it was also played a lot as you would unlock a bonus character, Dr. Bosconovitch, upon a fourth completion. This bonus mode is not necessarily the one for which the game is most fondly remembered however. Tekken Ball, a game almost identical to Beach Volleyball, was unlocked upon completion of the main story mode. It would put the players against each other once again, in a one vs. one contest, but unable to make direct contact with each other due to the net that stood between them. Instead, damage would be dealt if the opponent failed to return the ball and it hit the ground on their side, or if they were hit with a charged attack.

Despite the story being one of the last reasons to play Tekken 3, it is still enjoyable to see the time and effort put into developing each unique character's persona and back story. Family ties amongst other things are revealed and it generally makes for a cheesy, but all-the-while watchable, experience.

The game was released to massive critical praise and to this day remains one of the most popular fighting games of all time. Its Metacritic score remains at an outstanding 96% and it received countless other reviews applauding its excellence. For anyone who appreciates fighting games as a whole, Tekken 3 is without doubt a game worth enjoying even after more than a decade after its initial release.
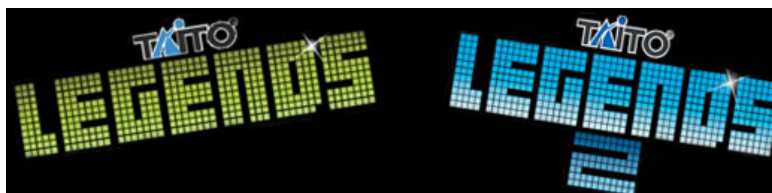
What classic video game enthusiast wouldn't want their very own arcade cabinet for Christmas? Unfortunately, most of us just don't have the space for a full-size arcade game. We have to make do with the next best thing – emulation. For this special Christmas-themed edition of RTM, I will be reviewing not one but two classic arcade game compilations for the PlayStation 2: Taito Legends (released in 2005) and Taito Legends 2 (released in 2006).

In my experience, Taito Legends 2 is harder to find than the original; I have only ever seen one copy of this title (in a small pawn shop), while the local HMV stores had piles of Taito Legends in their discount bin (HMV is a music store chain here in Canada).

Game Selection

Taito Legends includes 29 games, all originally released between 1978 and 1993, while Taito Legends 2 has an impressive 39 titles, dating from 1979 through 1997. Most games in the first collection date from the mid-1980s, while most in the second are from the early 1990s.

As with all of these retro arcade game collections, there are some real classic gems, but there is also some filler. Taito Legends includes Bubble Bobble, Elevator Action, Jungle Hunt, Phoenix, Zoo Keeper, and three versions of Space Invaders (the original, Part II, and Return of the Invaders).

It also includes some lesser well-known titles such as Battle Shark, Exzisus, New Zealand Story, Tokio, and Volfied. Some of these titles may not have been previously released in North America. Gladiator (1986) may not technically qualify as a classic, but I have very fond memories of playing it when I was in high school.

Taito Legends 2 includes the classics Alpine Ski, Front Line, Puzzle Bobble 2, Qix, and yet more versions of the venerable Space Invaders franchise ('95, DX, and Super Space Invaders '91).

It also includes many titles that again were (very probably) not released in North America, such as Cameltry, Don Doho Don, Huri Hinton, Puchi Carat, and the aptly named Violence Fight.

Bonus Content

Taito Legends includes a brief section on the history of Taito (it began as a manufacturer of vending machines in the 1950s). For every game, it includes an image of the original cabinet, an original sales flyer, and hints and tips for the game. For some titles, it includes a video clip of an interview with the original designer. None of this content needs to be unlocked.

Disappointingly, Taito Legends 2 includes only a very brief description of each game and a small screen-shot. There is no other bonus or additional content. It appears to me that this game was rushed into production, and so it lacks the care and attention lavished on the original product.

General Comments

The user interface on both games is simple and intuitive to use. For all of the games, the difficulty level and other options (e.g. extra lives) can be adjusted. Taito Legends has the better looking interface; seeing the original cabinets gives something of the feel of an actual arcade, while Taito Legends 2 merely has a scrollable list of the titles.

Most of the games have adapted very well to the PS2 controller. The buttons are intuitively mapped and there is a diagram at the start of each game explaining the function of each. The difficulty, as always, arises with games that originally used special controllers. Taito Legends titles Operation Wolf and Space Gun both used a machine gun-like controller in the arcade; both of these games are virtually unplayable with the standard joystick. Battle Shark also appears to have had an odd control scheme, but it is quite easy to play with a joystick.

The original arcade Space Invaders used buttons rather than a joystick for left and right movement, but virtually every implementation since has adapted well to a joystick. Apparently, there was a Japan-only Space Invaders collection that included a special arcade-like controller for the PS2, but I have never actually seen this legendary piece of hardware.

Some of the arcade games (e.g. Dungeon Magic and Football Champ, both part of Taito Legends 2) originally supported up to four players, but as neither collection includes support for the multitap, they are now limited to only two players.

As with many of the recent retrogaming compilations, any of these games can be paused at any point. There is no in-game save function, however. This is arguably more "authentic" to the original game, but developers should take advantage of the emulator to add extra features. Settings and high scores are saved automatically at the end of a game.

Overall, Taito Legends is the more solid of the two collections – and that is the one I would most like to find under my Christmas tree. I would not recommend Taito Legends 2 unless someone is a fan of one (or more) of the included titles. While it has 25% more games, frankly, most of those are obscure filler titles. It is more fun than a lump of coal in your stocking, but not by very much.

Feedback on this column is always welcome; please send any comments and/or questions to jhd@interbaun.com. I am also very interested in hearing about any classic PlayStation 2 compilations that were never released in North America (e.g. Data East or Stern collections); please let me know what is out there.

A Pixilated 21st Century!
by Paul "Zimmzamm" Zimmerman

This is a new series of articles about brand new games for modern systems that are using "retro" graphics. I am going to cover Nintendo Wii and DS games that you can buy in retail stores or download from the digital world and are new, original titles using retro graphics. In each issue I will mention what games came out for that month (if any) and talk about one that I enjoy. I will describe the game and give some history on it. Even if you don't have these modern systems, I think you will still find the articles interesting. In addition, many of these games will make great Christmas gifts this year, since they are currently available and can appeal to both the retro and modern gamer alike. It would not be a bad idea to carry this article in your purse when you do your Christmas shopping this year! Now on to the games…

This month I am going to focus on WiiWare. On May 12, 2008 WiiWare games were available to buy from Nintendo's Shop Channel on the Wii system which are new titles that you can buy and download. This is a way for small developers to make simple, original games without the cost and risk of creating one to be sold in a retail store. The developer first needs to be licensed and approved by Nintendo before they can purchase a development kit for around $2000. WiiWare games so far cost between $5 and $15 each and some have an added cost for downloadable content. On launch day, six games were made available: Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: My Life as a King, LostWinds, Defend Your Castle, Pop, V.I.P. Casino Blackjack and TV Show King. With Pop probably looking the most retro.

After that many games had very simple graphics but none really had "retro" graphics. All of that changed on September 28, 2008 when Mega Man 9 was released. This was a brand new Mega Man game in the series, but it used retro graphics and sound/music from the NES era. Check out the video with not just clips of the game but a great interview with producer Hironobu Takeshita who makes a comment on the popularity of classic gaming!

Once Mega Man 9 came out, the public wanted to see and play more new games that used retro graphics, retro sound/music and were fun and simple to play.

On March 9, 2009 Gradius Rebirth was released for WiiWare. This was another game in a well-known series that used retro graphics, but this time they were from the 16-bit era and not the 8-bit:

Mega Man 9 Video with Hironobu Takeshita (producer) interview

On the following Monday, March 16, 2009 Bit.Trip: Beat was released.

Mega Man 9 and Gradius Rebirth came from the big companies Capcom and Konami. But, Bit.Trip: Beat was made in 4 months by Gaijin Games, an independent developer made of 3 people: Alex (designer), Chris (engineer) and Mike (artist). A video interview was done with the team at Gaijin Games and can be found here.

Alex loves the Atari VCS and it's still one of his favorite consoles. He always wanted to make a VCS-era retro game with simplistic gameplay. So, Bit.Trip: Beat was born. Bit.Trip: Beat, originally titled Paddle, was made in a very similar way to how Atari VCS games were made back in the day and how homebrew developers make them today; with only 1 or 2 people. Going back to the basics, the graphics are very much early Atari VCS in style. The game looks similar to Pong and plays like a combination of Pong, Breakout and Arkanoid (there are items in the game). You hold the Wiimote (Wii's controller) sideways and twist it up or down to move your paddle on the screen up or down. The control is incredible and it feels very similar to the Atari VCS's paddle controllers. The designers even added a slight vibration in the Wiimote when you twist it. Very cool! You don't even need to press any buttons in the game, all you do is twist the Wiimote, it's all very simple. You need to hit each oncoming block to gain points and keep going. There are some blocks in the game that make your paddle longer, shorter and can even stop it from moving. If you miss a bunch of blocks, the graphics go to Pong's original black and white graphics with a bleep sound coming from the Wiimote's speaker. At the end of each level you fight a boss. The "boss" for the 2nd level is a game of Breakout (horizontal of course).

Bit.Trip: Beat Video Trailer

Bit Trip: Beat Retro Box

The modern flair that Gaijin Games wanted to add to this title so it was not completely retro comes from the music which sounds like trance or electronica. It is actually a new genre called chiptune, and for Bit.Trip: Beat it is made of samples from Atari VCS and Nintendo Entertainment System games. There are some modern 3D graphic effects in the background as well. Even with these modern touches, the game still feels very much retro. Even during the introduction you quickly see a rainbow zip by that looks similar to Activision's logo that was used for all of their Atari VCS games. The game is simple to play, yet hard to master. A good sign for a classic game design.

If you have a Wii and you don't own this game, buy it now. If you don't have a Wii it would be worth buying one for this game and all of the other retro games available for it. This system is quickly becoming one of my all time favorites.

Since this is the holiday issue of Retrogaming Times Monthly, I want to say Merry Christmas to all of the readers and mention that Bit.Trip: Beat now has a free demo only available on the Wii's Shop Channel through January 31, 2010.

Also, below are some of the "retro-like" WiiWare games that are now available that the retro gaming community might enjoy:

Click on the titles to view a YouTube video for each

Adventure Island: The Beginning
Arkanoid Plus
Art Style: Cubello
Art Style: Orbient
Art Style: Rotohex
Bit Boy
Bit.Trip: Core
Bit.Trip: Void
Bomberman Blast
Bubble Bobble Plus

Contra Rebirth
Dr Mario Online Rx
Driift Mania
Excitebike: World Rally
Final Fantasy 4: The After Years
Frogger Returns
Mr. Driller W
Rainbow Islands: Towering Adventure
Swords and Soldiers
Toki Tori

Powering Down
The Final Bits of RTM Goodness

	Video Game Tattler
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Video Game Tattler
Issue #3
by Anita Beak

Two Decades of Harassment is Enough

In stunning news, the pink female frog from the Frogger games has finally had enough. After more than twenty years of being hopped on by every passing Frogger, she decided to hire an attorney and fight back. "Just because I am sitting on a log is no reason for this continued harassment," she said in a tearful statement outside the courtroom. "I know Frogger is risking his life going across that road, but I am not some prize for him to win. I have feelings and needs of my own." Her attorney was able to get a restraining order against Frogger, who is not allowed to come within two logs of her.

A Boy, A Blob and a Lesson in Healthy Eating

Everyone who grew up with the NES knows the story of the boy and his blob. The little creature from Blobonia had a love for jellybeans. In fact, he loved them so much that he would change shapes when he ate different ones. It made for a fun game and a great story, but unlike ET and other alien stories, it did not have a happy ending. Like most creatures, blobs need a balanced diet. It is necessary for them to grow big and strong and maintain their elastic body. However, this poor little blob lived on a diet of strictly jelly beans. Being a young and naive blob he did not know any better, and over time he felt worse and worse, but did not know what it was. Was it the atmosphere or the constant changing of shapes? He was not sure and he never said anything to the boy, who did not realize that his companion was moving slower and getting weaker. It wasn't until he was bedridden from malnutrition that other members of his planet came to his aid. After they investigated the situation, it became apparent to them that the boy was abusing the blob with his poor diet and constant need to change shapes. The blob was taken back to his home planet and the boy was disintegrated.

Berzerk Budget Cuts

The recession is hitting everyone and that includes the world of video games. From imitation dots in Pac-Man to recycling barrels in Donkey Kong, the belt has been tightened. In one game, the cuts have been felt more than any other. Berzerk, the famous game full of mazes and robots has seen shrinking revenue force them to make drastic cuts. The first cut is the electric walls are no longer charged. When we asked Evil Otto about the move, he had the following statement, "I know we are famous for our electric walls, but they cost a fortune to run. Not only is the cost of electricity expensive, but we have to keep replacing robots that aren't smart enough to not run into the walls." Future cuts may include less robots and changing the gameplay from shooting robots to merely tagging them. The cost of maintenance is horrendous.

Tom Zjaba is the founder of Retrogaming Times and is both a video game and comic book enthusiast. Be sure to stop by his Arcade After Dark site to see a plethora of video game related comics which are not published in Retrogaming Times Monthly.

	Gaming Advertisements
	Games That Can Be Played On-Line

Game Over

Now that this issue has come to an end, it's time to go and plan how you will go about tackling those Christmas presents this year! Plan your strategy, plan your attack, and most importantly plan how you will eventually conquer the new (and hopefully retro) games that you get this year. I know I will be doing a ton of classic gaming this Christmas just as I do every year, since what would the holiday be without a some new retro games under the tree? Until next year...

- Bryan Roppolo, Retrogaming Times Monthly Editor

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