The Retrogaming Times

THE BIMONTHLY RETROGAMING HOBBYIST NEWSLETTER

NINTH ISSUE - JULY 2017

PUMPING IRON ON COMMODORE 64!

The Retrogaming Times
- The Bimonthly Retrogaming Hobbyist Newsletter -

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Ninth Issue - July 2017

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Prepare to Qualify

by David Lundin, Jr.

The warm summer months are upon us stateside. In my younger days July would be packed with going to movies, getting into trouble with explosives, spending days escaping from the 100+ °F heat in the pool, spending nights in bustling chat rooms, somehow finding the time in between to work a full-time managerial job, and of course playing video games. I suppose not much has changed. Well, chat rooms aren't what they used to be, but aside from that.

Ahead we have yet another outstanding assortment of stories and memories created by our incredible staff. "Mighty" Matt D. has a wonderful tale of engaging in head-to-head aerial combat on the CoCo, in Retrogaming Feels. When Microsoft entered the console realm they definitely were pushing the idea that bigger was better, right down to the controller. Todd Friedman gives his opinion no the two core variations of the XBox control pad in The Controller Chronicles. The Apple II Incider returns with examples of enhanced sound and music on the Apple II, as Donald Lee recalls. In our cover story, Merman continues the action star extravaganza with the Commodore 64 adventures of Arnold Schwarzenegger, in this issue's More C64! Many of our readers and staff play all games, not just those with a couple decades or so vintage on them, and Donald Lee does double duty this issue with his views on two current pieces of video game hardware. Mechanical video game toys and devices were reasonably popular before digital handheld gaming hit its stride with Game & Watch and Game Boy. Tomy's Blip was a mechanical variation on the classic Pong that proved to be a solid product, which Todd Friedman takes a look at this issue. All that and more are ahead in this issue of The Retrogaming Times.

Before we continue, as Chief Editor I wish to issue an apology for a missing column this issue. Due to previously unforeseen building maintenance at The Retrogaming Times HQ, I was down about three and a half weeks of open time between this issue and the last. I believe on leading by example, and that includes holding myself to the same deadline that all staff abide by. While a substantial portion of my Famicom multicart column was completed, there just wasn't time to polish it properly, so it will be sitting out this issue but will return in the next. Generally this wouldn't a problem but since it was stated in the May 2017 issue that it would be back in July, I wanted to clarify.

I want to again remind our readers if they have comments or questions about anything covered in the newsletter, or there is something they would like featured in a future issue of The Retrogaming Times, to let us know via The Retrogaming Times on Facebook at facebook.com/theretrogamingtimes or contact me directly at trt@classicplastic.net! Of course submissions are also always open. If you have something ready to go, the address is the same, trt@classicplastic.net. "If there is something you want to write about, send it in!" Our next issue will be a very important one, so if you've ever wanted to have something published here, this is the time to send an article in!

Upcoming Events

Compiled by David Lundin, Jr.

Pintastic Pinball & Game Room Expo, July 6th - 8th 2017, Sturbridge, Massachusetts, USA

Do you love pinball? Are you looking for a little relief from the hot summer sun? Look no further than Pintastic New England, which is the first of its kind, centrally located in Sturbridge, Massachusetts. This expo is 30,000 square feet of fun for the whole family. The kids can have never-ending excitement with a caricature artist, face painting, balloon animals, magic, and relieve all of their pent-up energy with a bouncy house. The adults can bring out their inner child with over 200 pinball machines set on free play, all while enjoying an ice-cold beer.

For more information, visit https://pintasticnewengland.com/

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KansasFest 2017, July 18th - 23rd, Kansas City, Missouri, USA

KansasFest is the world's only annual convention dedicated to the Apple II computer that revolutionized the personal computing industry. Held every year in Kansas City, Missouri, KansasFest offers Apple II users and retrocomputing enthusiasts the opportunity to engage in beginner and technical sessions, programming contests, exhibition halls, game tournaments, and camaraderie. Any and all Apple II users, fans, and friends are invited to attend this year's event, this year marking the 29th annual convention.

For more information, visit http://www.kansasfest.org/

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California Extreme 2017, July 29th - 30th 2017, Santa Clara, California, USA

California Extreme is very pleased to officially announce the dates for this year's California Extreme Arcade and Pinball Show. It will be held on July 29-30, 2017 at the same fantastic location - the Hyatt Regency in Santa Clara, California. Please join us for our 21st show with hundreds of your favorite arcade and pinball games, both past and present, all gathered together for another fun-filled weekend of pure arcade excitement for folks of all ages!

We are working on this year's lineup of seminars, guest speakers, and other arcade-themed events that make the show so much fun each year. On that note, we are looking to you, the arcade community, for suggestions for topics and speakers. Is there something you would like to see presented (or even to present yourself)? This is your chance to let us know what you would like to see! Send us an e-mail at info@caextreme.org and let us know. We welcome all suggestions and will consider each one carefully.

Pre-registration is now open, with the registration deadline July 14th, 2017. Additionally hotel registration is now open, see the official site for details.

Start making your plans, requesting time off work, making reservations by planes, trains, automobiles, and especially trucks to come out and join us for another crazy, arcade-filled weekend!

For more information, visit http://www.caextreme.org/

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Video Game Summit, July 29th, Villa Park, Illinois, USA

Remember how much fun you used to have playing Atari, Nintendo and all kinds of games on your computer? Well, you will have the rare opportunity to play these great games again at the Video Game Summit, Chicago's premier video game trade show. In fact, dealers in retro games will be on hand offering games, controllers, systems and memorabilia and will be prepared to buy or trade for the games you have held onto since you were a kid. Who knows, you might just have an Atari cartridge worth $1000 or more collecting dust in your attic.

The Location of the 2017 Video Game Summit is at The Odeum Expo Center in Villa Park , IL.
The date of the show will be July 29th, 2017 from 10am to 7pm.
Admission is $10.00 per person.

For more information, please contact tfried0237@gmail.com or dan@videogamesummit.net
For complete details, please visit videogamesummit.net or avc.videogamesummit.net

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Retropalooza, October 7th - 8th 2017, Arlington, Texas, USA

A celebration of all things retro! Retropalooza was started in 2013 in Arlington, Texas by a couple of guys who enjoy all things retro; from toys to music, to video games... especially video games. As video game collectors, they spent a lot of time and money looking for retro games when they figured it would be easier to bring the games to them. Thus, Retropalooza was born.

The goal of Retropalooza is to bring nerds from all walks of life together for an enjoyable, family friendly time. Good old fashioned fun with like minded people where it will always be affordable, and forever improving.

For more information, visit http://retropalooza.com/

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If there is a show or event you would like listed here, free of charge, please contact David directly at trt@classicplastic.net. Please include a short official blurb about your event along with any relevant links or contact information and it will be published in the next issue of The Retrogaming Times. The event listing will remain posted until the issue following the event date. Big or small, we want to promote your show in our newsletter. **Check out these great events, shows, and conventions and let them know you read about them in The Retrogaming Times!**

More C64! - Arnold Schwarzenegger

by Merman

In recent issues we have looked at the Commodore 64 games featuring Sylvester Stallone and Bruce Willis. So now it's time for another action hero.

PREDATOR (1987)

Major Dutch Schaefer and his team are deep in the jungle on a rescue mission when something starts to pick them off. The Activision game, developed by System 3, starts with a looped animation of the Predator's shuttle landing before throwing Dutch into a horizontally scrolling level. At first you only have to deal with the rebels, and the vultures picking over dead bodies. A choice of guns with limited ammo and grenades can be used. As the game progresses, the Predator's gunsight locks on to our hero and tries to take him out. If the player can avoid it, they do not lose a life. Finally the alien is revealed and Dutch must work out how to defeat the tracking gunsight and trap the alien. If you have seen the film, there are clues on how to achieve this.
While the game received a good review from ZZAP! time has not been kind to it. A bug rendered it unable to be completed on NTSC machines, and the high difficulty level is off-putting to most players. The graphics have dated too, but still have an interesting style.

Predator 2 would make it to the C64, as a side-scrolling game similar to Operation Wolf - but Arnie did not star in that, so we move on.

The detailed loading screen, and jungle fighting in Predator for the C64

THE RUNNING MAN (1989)

The Richard Bachmann* short story was turned into a very different script for shooting, adding a romantic sub-plot and ditching the bleak ending. Set in a dystopian future America in the year 2017 (!), the populace is glued to lethal TV game shows. When Ben Richards, a police helicopter pilot, is falsely convicted of a civilian massacre he is imprisoned in a labour camp. Escaping, he is recaptured by the TV company that makes The Running Man. Coerced into being a contestant on the show, Richards has to avoid capture by the Stalkers. Each has a vicious talent and thirst for blood. Suffice to say our hero overcomes the odds and wins.

The game is very unsatisfying. The player runs through each bland area before confronting and fighting the Stalkers. Ultimately the goal is to reach the TV studio and kill the host, Killian. Repetitive and boring, it was not a big hit.

A good likeness of Arnie on the loading screen, and Ben Richards in bright pajamas

*Richard Bachmann was a pseudonym for Stephen King. The Running Man was released in paperback form to accompany the movie, but it was worth checking out the original collection The Bachmann Books. When someone discovered the connection, Stephen put out a press release saying that Bachmann had died of "cancer of the pseudonym" - after he had inspired the novel The Dark Half and left behind unreleased manuscripts...

RED HEAT (1989)

Arnie plays Ivan Danko, a Russian cop who travels to America to help bring down a drug ring. He teams up with a wise-cracking Chicago cop played by James Belushi. The end result is a violent buddy movie spanning Russia and America, with the film being one of the first given permission to film in Moscow's Red Square. At the box office it was beaten by Arnie's other big move that year - Twins with Danny DeVito.

The game was created by Special FX, a team of former Ocean employees who had started their own studio - and often worked on developing titles for Ocean, such as this film license. The unusual perspective makes the screen look like a film strip, with large sprites shown from the waist up. It starts off with the infamous sauna sequence, with Arnie and his opponents naked in the snow. At one point Danko squeezes a hot rock with his hands to prove his strength, a mini-game included in the game adaptation. Otherwise it is a very disappointing scrolling beat 'em up, ironically with limited opponents because of the graphic style.

A poor rendition of the movie poster, and Arnie fighting in a sauna

TOTAL RECALL (1990)

A lowly construction worker (Quaid, played by Arnie) has dreams of Mars, and so goes to Rekall Inc. to get new dreams implanted. However, there is a problem - the dreams of Mars are real, and his brain rejects the implant. Fleeing to Mars, Quaid makes contact with the rebellion. Through a vision he discovers his destiny is to help the rebellion free Mars from the corporations. Thanks to some ancient alien technology, Mars is transformed and Quaid survives. Based on a Phillip K Dick short story (We Can Remember It For You Wholesale) this was another big sci-fi hit for Arnie.

The game underwent a troubled development. A group known as Active Minds pitched their ideas to Ocean and got the go-ahead. However with time running out there was no game ready to ship. Graphic artist and designer Simon Butler took charge of an in-house team, re-using the platform sections of previous film hit The Untouchables and developing new vehicular sections (to represent Quaid's journeys by taxi on Earth and Mars). The end result scored highly in the magazines.

The platform sections are remembered for their large, chunky sprites - created by using sprites overlays and the built-in sprite expansion. This means a sprite can be doubled in height, doubled in width or doubled in both height and width. Between levels on the disk version were some excellent static bitmaps. The vehicle levels used an overhead perspective and were fun to play. Out of the ashes of the mistake came another good Ocean game based on a film.

Expanded sprites give the platform section a distinctive look

TERMINATOR 2 JUDGMENT DAY (1991)

James Cameron took the reins of the sequel, and Arnie earned hundreds of thousands of dollars for each word he spoke. The story sees a new Terminator sent back in time to kill Sarah Connor, who must protect her son John (the future saviour of humanity, after Skynet becomes sentient on Judgment Day and the machines take over). The rebels in the future have only one option, to send back another Terminator programmed to help. The shapeshifting T-1000 is relentless and Arnie's Terminator makes the ultimate sacrifice to try and change the future.

The low-budget original Terminator did not get a game conversion until many years later, so it was up to the sequel to impress. Ocean were once again the company responsible, and it would be developed for cartridge as well as tape and disk. It followed the pattern of many Ocean licenses, with varied gameplay. The first thing to notice is the superb introduction sequence, displaying a massive scrolling bitmap of the Terminator exoskeleton and a brilliant recreation of the theme music by Jonathan Dunn. Three levels of the game are beat 'em ups, with Arnie taking on the T-1000 in various guises. The famous flood channels chase is recreated, with Arnie on his bike being chased by a truck. Rescuing Sarah from the asylum becomes a platform game, with lifts taking the Terminator between floors.

Between levels are the puzzle games, representing John reprogramming the Terminator. One puzzle sees players sliding tiles to mend the robot's face, another sees them reattaching wires in the Terminator's arm. All the levels have excellent graphics, but it is the gameplay that lets it down. Each level is rather brief, meaning that the excellent presentation and loading the next level takes up more time than actually playing. This is where the cartridge version - which for a time was boxed with new C64C computers, along with a preview issue of Commodore Format magazine containing playing tips - is a real boon. Looking back it is another Arnie game that has not aged well.

A *still image from the impressive intro, and Arnie's first fight against the T-1000 (disguised as a cop)*

RED HERRINGS (2017)

There are several games that people think are based on Arnie's films, but aren't. **COMMANDO** the game from Capcom was not based on Commando the movie - that is a myth. And while there is a game named **CONAN**, it was licensed from the books and not Arnie's 1980s films; in fact it was an original game called Visigoth (with the hero armed with a boomerang, not a sword) that Data East added the name to.

Then there are the games **ARNIE** and **ARNIE 2** from Zeppelin. The original was developed by programmer Chris Butler, and used a clever isometric map to pack in a huge challenge. Why was it called Arnie? Perhaps because it resembled Commando and other action films that Arnie had starred in. The sequel was less successful, featuring some graphic flicker and less precise controls.

Isometric commando action in Arnie, while Conan wields a big sword

As you can see, Arnie has had a mixed success rate in Commodore 64 games, much like his own film career. Later movies from the 1990's would see important console games, but even those could flop - witness the game that accompanied Last Action Hero. Pinball fans were well served though, with a brilliant Terminator 2 table and Last Action Hero also getting a dedicated pinball machine.

Retrogaming Feels - P-51 Mustang

by "Mighty" Matt D.

Hello retrogamers - as you read this, know that father's day was not too long ago. If you've been following along (high five if you have!), you may remember that my father was fascinated by technology and that he brought a Radio Shack Color Computer into our home at a time when most households had no computer. This machine was the source of many "technology firsts" for me - my first typing lesson, first computer programming lesson, first text adventure, and first use of a modem. It was also my first experience with online multiplayer.

Today, most games have at least some online component. If nothing else, there are software updates that need to come in the form of a download. In 1985, computing was still a mostly solitary experience. BBS's and dial-up services like Compuserve and Delphi existed, and we could connect to them with our dial-up modem. Programs could be downloaded for offline use, articles and message boards could be read and posted, and we could even play some simple online versions of board games like chess and backgammon. But arcade style games were not possible. The modems simply transmitted data too slowly to be able to rapidly update player positions and the like at a rate which would make for a fun game experience.

That doesn't mean that programmers weren't always trying, and Tom Mix Software finally succeeded with their release of P-51 Mustang in 1985. By this time the Color Computer (known as the CoCo by its fans) was getting a bit long in the tooth - but it still had its legions of fans, and Tom Mix was known for making quality ports of arcade games for it. Sure, they weren't exactly licensed releases (Donkey King, anyone?), but they were still quite good. They often took out full page ads in the CoCo community magazine of choice, Rainbow.

P-51 Mustang got a full page ad, right inside the front cover. Screenshots were shown, along with the bold type declaring it to be the first real-time simulation across two computers - across the room or across the country! I can't imagine paying 1980's long distance connect charges to play a game, but it would have been possible and this was indeed a big deal. My father, who had a pilot's license and flew single engine planes frequently, already had purchased Worlds of Flight from the same publisher and was enchanted by the promise of a dogfight in a WWII era fighter. Needless to say, he couldn't send a check quickly enough. It tickles me to think of my father being so excited about a new video game (sorry - simulation).

The package arrived soon enough, on cassette tape. We had a disk drive for our CoCo (a pricey add-on), but we only had one. We did have a second CoCo and cassette recorder - one of his friends had given his CoCo to my dad when he'd moved on to an IBM PC. It had sat mostly unused for a few months prior, and P-51 was the perfect way to bring it out of retirement. My dad had ordered the game on cassette so that we could use the same copy on both computers - loading it on one (a process that took several minutes), then rewinding the tape and carrying it over to the other computer to be loaded there.

It was a pretty hokey set up by modern standards. Two computers - one of which was set up on a desk in the rec room with its own TV, modem, disk drives, etc. The other, set up on a tray table in front of the family TV. A null-modem cable ran across the shag carpeted floor between them - basically the 1980's equivalent of a USB cable. My dad - eager for me to have as much fun as he knew he would - made sure I was involved right from the beginning and showed me how to connect the machines and get the software to link them. He used the "good" computer on the desk, while I sat at in front of the tray table on a folding chair. I got the bigger screen so it felt fair to me.

I'll always remember the excitement of the first night we tried the it out. We had to wait for a time when no one else wanted to watch television (we had only one "family" TV connected to cable - ah, the 80's). Then we set up the secondary computer, with cords snaking everywhere around the rec room. Then we loaded the cassette tape first on one computer, then the other. Finally, setting up the "handshake" to connect the two computers via the null modem cable. The whole process probably took around 15 minutes or so - what would be an unacceptable amount of time and effort today. Today, I get annoyed when the PlayStation network wants to update its software and takes 3 whole minutes to do so.

Finally, it was ready. I sat on my runway, he on his. We looked at each other, shrugged, and started our engines. Soon enough, I saw a blip on my screen, as he did on his. Excited, my dad turned to me and said "Fire your guns!" I happily obliged, pressing down hard on the single joystick button. The sound of machine gun fire spit forth from my TV speaker, and a split second later I heard it emanating from the family TV as well. He turned to me again - "That was you right? I can see you! I can see you shooting at me!" We closed in on one another. I lined the tiny image of his plane up in my crosshairs, and let loose a barrage of gunfire. Bullet holes appeared on my father's TV, the only sign the game gives that you are taking damage.

"It works!" he shouted. "We're dogfighting! That's you! Wow!" I didn't often see my dad get worked up about any of the same things I would get worked up about, but this was one of those times. We laughed, each turning our heads to see each other's plane move around on the other person's TV. It took several matches for the novelty of it to wear off enough for us to actually try to play and shoot each other down.

My dad didn't play "games" on the CoCo - he just wasn't interested in frivolous things like that. He didn't read fiction, rarely went to the movies, and hated television (sitcoms especially). He always preferred historical accounts to fictional ones. There were simulations of famous military battles - one could take control of general Rommel's armored division, or command the allied forces during the landing at Normandy beach on D-day. Those were what he enjoyed, and they were completely beyond me. I could make no sense of the low-resolution graphics and text that were supposed to represent the battlefield, or how each key on the keyboard did something different. I wanted to play with him, but he

had as much interest in blasting aliens as I did in strategy. This was different - we already had shared interest in the CoCo, but this was the first time we could sit together and play something.

For many weeks P-51 was the favorite activity for my father and I. When time and TV schedules allowed it, we would drag out the secondary CoCo, run wires all over the place, and play P-51. It did work with the modem also, as advertised, but my dad only knew one other person with a CoCo and a copy of P-51 (you had to direct dial your opponent - no matchmaking lobbies I'm sorry to say). It was fun and the chat feature became much more useful, but finding a time when his friend wanted to play was tough. Besides, it was so much fun to play against each other we didn't care much that we were missing out on that feature.

Aside from the ground-breaking multiplayer feature, P-51 is a fairly simple game - er, again I mean simulation. The terrain is sparse, consisting of little more than flat land and runway lights to signify an airfield. In single player mode, you can fight against computer controlled drones. Your aircraft can sustain damage to different systems, such as weapons, fuel tank, and landing gear. Repairs can be done by landing at a friendly airstrip. It does offer fairly realistic flight simulation for its time, and has a remarkably fast frame rate. Landing is, realistically, the most difficult aspect of it. Full instrumentation is available, with altimeter, airspeed, fuel, and heading occupying the lower portion of your display. For a time period when flight simulator frame rates were usually in the single digits, P-51 is a fast moving ride.

I hesitated having this game (I mean simulation - again, so sorry) as my subject, because of the difficulty in emulating it as a multiplayer experience today. But I feel it too important to ignore. Years later, when my friends and I would marvel at the speed of Doom as we played deathmatch at 9,600 baud, I would fondly remember the time when my dad and I played P-51. I would feel like an old hand at online multiplayer action when the rest of the world thought it was brand new. My dad always insisted that he'd picked a winner when he choose the CoCo over the offerings from Apple and Commodore, and he would use examples like P-51 to prove that he was right.

My father passed away several summers ago. I miss him on father's day, and a lot of other days. He might not have cared much for video games, but he liked his simulations, and he liked computers, and he liked playing with me. Dad, thanks so much for introducing me to computers, and for letting me in on \ to a world so many others wouldn't get to see for years to come. And most of all, thanks for letting me be player 2.

Links:

P-51 instructions from archive.org (seems to be machine-read - lots of errors):
https://archive.org/stream/P51_Mustang_Attack_Flight_Simulator...

P-51 entry on L. Curtis Boyle's site:
http://www.lcurtisboyle.com/nitros9/p-51.html

Color Computer Archive (program archive):
http://www.colorcomputerarchive.com/

Rainbow magazine at archive.org:
https://archive.org/details/rainbowmagazine

Apple II Incider - Cool Things Back In The Day With Apple II

by Donald Lee

David's been asking for articles the past couple of weeks. Unlike the past few issues, I haven't had a ton of inspiration. Work's been busy and had some personal stuff flow by a month ago so I was distracted.

I was texting with a lady friend tonight and we were discussing (surprise) old computers and video games. My friend said that she thought it was cool her old TI-99 computer had voice back in the day. That got me to taking back to some of the things I thought were cool on the Apple II back in the old days.

Here's a list and some comments:

VOICE SYNTHESIS

Castle Wolfenstein / Beyond Castle Wolfenstein: As most Apple II users knew, the systems were limited in terms of graphics and sound when compared to the Atari 400/800 or Commodore 64 machines. But that didn't stop developers from doing some cool things including some speech in Castle Wolfenstein and Beyond Castle Wolfenstein. It looks dated today but it was super cool back in the 1980's to a teenager.

Video: https://youtu.be/fEkVMEyAiFY

Robotron 2084: Everyone has their favorite arcade games from the 1980's. For me, it was Galaga, Pole Position, Star Wars, Mario Bros., Sinistar and Donkey Kong. Not among them was Robotron 2084. I can't recall really ever playing the game in the arcades. Maybe the two joysticks intimidated me or something. Regardless, it's odd that I got my hands on the Apple II version of Robotron 2084 in the 1990's and started playing it. I actually fell in love with it. Despite the Apple II's limitations, the game play, sound and graphics were actually pretty good. Definitely a game worth checking out if you haven't. This also got me to actually play Robotron 2084 at the High Scores Arcade several months back. Since I was on YouTube looking for video of the different versions, I looked at the C-64 version of Robotron 2084. The graphic detail and colors are better but the action seems slow which is unusual. I guess how games play are very dependent on the ability of the developers.

Video: https://youtu.be/rBAFG9TzqEs

EXPANDED MUSIC

Phasor Sound Card + Ultima IV / V / Skyfox: To address the sound limitations of the Apple II computer series, there were a series of sound / music cards introduced. One of them was called the Mockingboard. In later years, Applied Engineering (more known for RAM expansion) introduced a Mockingboard compatible sound / music card called the Phasor. I had my parents go to a store called ComputerLand and order the card which we picked up a few days later.

Mockingboard sound card for Apple II, courtesy collection of David Lundin, Jr.

The reason I thought this was cool was certain programs were designed to take advantage of the sound card. Specifically, games like Ultima IV / V (Origin Systems) and Skyfox (Electronic Arts) had added music which were a nice addition to the games. Seems like Skyfox didn't use the card for sound effects which was too bad but at least the music was nice. It's too bad that not every game took advantage of the sound / music cards but it may have required more effort and development time.

Ultima V Soundtrack: https://youtu.be/WjqRGVFtlDw

Ultima IV Soundtrack: https://youtu.be/Mcak0MU8LSw

Skyfox Soundtrack: https://youtu.be/aQLFwUu5cTY

I had a few more but I think I'll stop here as I have a second article on modern gaming later in this issue! See you next issue!

The Controller Chronicles - Microsoft Xbox Control Pad

by Todd Friedman

In the 1980's and early 1990's Nintendo and Sega seemed to battle back and forth between being the top company in the home console wars, and for the most part Nintendo seemed to be the winner. However, in early 2001 Microsoft decided to add themselves into the video game console arena. They were the king of the home computer operating system as well as other PC gaming areas. But now there is the Xbox. This system drew a frenzy of Microsoft fans and console gamers around the world. The unveiling of the system sparked fear with Sony and Nintendo. This would now be a three-way battle to crown the king of console gaming. The system itself looked cool with the huge X symbol on top, as well as the specs of the the processor and graphics capabilities of the new generation of gaming. But then there was the controller. What now is termed the paper weight of controllers, Microsoft tried to break barriers with the controller and give the gamers a unique experience. But the size was something that gamers were not used to or excited about.

Original Xbox "Duke" controller (left) and Controller S (right)

So let's breakdown all the details on the original Xbox controller. Seeing the controller on TV in a commercial and holding it are two different things. At first, it looks cool with two analog sticks, a D-pad controller, 6 buttons on top as well as two triggers on back, with a giant Xbox logo in center. The idea of two analog controller was great for first person shooters and other action games, however, the analogs were not lined up as they were diagonal from each other which made it difficult to control. You were not sure when to use the D-pad or the analog sometimes. The two buttons, Back and Start were very confusing as well as the Back button was a new feature gamers were not accustomed to. The A, B, X, Y buttons were familiar to Nintendo and Sega fans however the addition of a White and Black button make gamers question the reason behind them. The only thing in my opinion they did right were the triggers on the back which were smooth and easy to use with the design. A problem for younger gamers was to be able to hold the huge controller in their hand and be able to control the action comfortably.

The game that put Xbox on the map and continue today to be exclusively Xbox branded is the juggernaut of Halo. Halo came out on the original Xbox and changed the way people played first person shooters and online gameplay on consoles. People played Doom, Call of Duty, and Medal of Honor, so people were playing first person shooters and they were very popular. The online portion of Halo made gamers all across other platforms to make the switch and join the Halo Universe. Suddenly, Xbox was on top and people did not mind the giant controller and the massive hardware that came with it. As long as the games played and felt better than the competitor, they were hooked. To move the player in Halo, you could use either the left analog stick or the D-pad. The right analog stick would be used as looking around in

the first person. The green A Button would be used to jump, blue X would be to reload your gun. The red B Button would be the melee attack and the yellow Y Button would be to switch weapons. The new White button would be your flashlight on/off switch for the dark halls or caves. The Black button would be to switch grenades. The left trigger is to throw the grenades and the right trigger is to fire the weapon. This made for a unique way of doing first person shooting, but the gamers picked up on it and took off swinging. If the default layout is not good for you, you could always customize the controller to your liking, even making the first-person movement inverted.

First person shooting games were big at this time, however so were driving games. The Xbox did not disappoint in this category. The controls of most racing games were basic and easy. Xbox took it to the next level and made driving games more of a simulator than a hold down the accelerator and go. Games like Burnout Revenge and Project Gotham Racing were new to the driving gamer library but instantly took off and became hits. The Xbox also had a racing wheel to make the experience even more real. Racing simulation was about to go in a new direction and Xbox capitalized on it with the graphics and controller that would be perfect for racing fans. Games that followed would use the same control methods as the Xbox did when it first came out.

Of course, you can't think of Xbox without talking about sports games, and the one sport game that has always topped them all is Madden. When Xbox online community started playing Madden football it became a phenomenon and companies like Sony and Nintendo could not keep up at first. Eventually Sony caught up with the online community but Microsoft started a revolution. The controls of Madden football were pretty basic at first but with the new technology and graphics, Madden football became more realistic and specific to football fans. Based on the plays you could have each button and trigger assigned to a player and get the play as accurate as you chose it. This would confuse the defense and make them guess. You could also change the plays based on the controller setting and audible choices. Again, in the beginning the controller was just too big and drew people away and so Microsoft listened and before third party companies could come up with the idea, they made a smaller sleeker Xbox Controller S. Now, any game you played, first person shooter, sports or driving games the controller would now more comfortable in the hands of all gamers. Xbox would now be on top for years to come.

My overall assessment of the controller is average. It was ahead of its time with the idea but the size and shape were just par. The buttons may have been too confusing for the average gamer, but was a hit with the online and sports community. Eventually they made a smaller version and got it right, but it was the first time they went to the console world and I applaud their ideas and ability to think outside the box. I still today, when playing the original Xbox, use the bigger controller as it was designed to play the way the games were made.

Next issue we will discuss the system that was what people played before Xbox, before Sega, and even before Nintendo. It was the Magnavox Odyssey 2. A PC like console system that began the home gaming before the gaming world was ready.

A Retrogamer Looking At Modern Gaming - Why I Got Nintendo Switch and XBox One S

by Donald Lee

My first two systems when I was young were the Atari 5200 and the Apple IIe. During college I got into PC's with a Windows 95 Compaq computer. Somewhere along the lines, I followed my friends and picked up a PlayStation 2. But since then, I've been purely a computer person (going from PC's to Mac's at home). I never felt like I needed to get another game system.

Well, I guess things always change. I will now admit that I joined the next generation gaming world by purchasing not one but TWO game systems recently: The Nintendo Switch and the XBox One S.

Let me talk about why I got the systems. There have been some plans for a possible family vacation in May. The original idea was to be on a cruise for 8 to 10 days. I don't know about the rest of you but cruises aren't the most interesting for me. You're stuck on a boat and can't go anywhere. You have food, gym and some other things to entertain you but getting on the Internet isn't one of them unless you pay. I thought having the Nintendo Switch would

alleviate some of the boredom. Alas, the vacation plans never took off but I did manage to get my hands on the Switch and have been playing Mario Kart 8 but haven't opened Zelda or the Tetris game I bought.

Alas I found that the Switch game library was lacking. I have to wait until September for NBA 2K18 to come out and there weren't any other sports games of interest. The disappointing thing was that apparently NONE of the major First Person Shooters (FPS) were appearing on the Switch. I was commenting on that to a co-worker of mine. The co-worker then said he would sell me his barely used (opened once) XBox One S.

I thought about it and decided to take my co-worker up on the offer. The XBox had a better game selection and even if I only minimally played games on the machine, at least I had a Blu-ray player if I wanted to watch videos that Netflix didn't have. I also discovered the online XBox Gold membership and for the $42 or so I paid, it's been worth it. I can download some old games and play for free. I also picked up the Halo Master Chief Edition for $10. Not bad for a pretty good set of games in the Halo collection.

Do I regret getting the Switch? No. The system is good and I see the potential I hope the game library grows a bit in the next few months. I'll definitely take it with me on the go if I'm out of town for long stretches. The XBox has its place at home for the big games I can't get for the Switch.

One thing I hope the Switch gets is some classic arcade games. I think there is a Namco collection coming soon. I would love to play some old games on the Switch (yes, I paid big bucks for a Switch and I want old game??? ROFL)

Blip. - The Digital Game

by Todd Friedman

I wanted to write about a unique game I purchased from eBay this week. It is one I think is the beginning of handheld gaming that we know today. There are many things that jump started handheld gaming, but this device was something I may have missed or did not know about. It is called Blip. Blip first came out in 1977 and was sort of like a handheld version of Pong. Its claim to fame was they advertised the system as not needing a TV to play. At that time, it would be revolutionary to play a video game without a TV.

My first impression when seeing the eBay ad was something I had to have for my collection. It came with the original box and in pretty good condition. The concept felt easy yet addicting. To catch the bouncing light that was being "served" to the opponent. There are 3 sections the ball could go to and you need to catch the ball before it hits the number. If you miss the timing and the ball hits the number, the opponent gets the point. There is a timer that is turned which gives the game a stopping point and a winner when the timer stops. Of course, the Game Boy generation and iPhone apps gamers will think this device is boring and poorly built. But remember, in the 1970s gaming was not that popular except for the pinball world. This device was ahead of its time and is a great keepsake of history.

Internal mechanisms of Blip. - The Digital Game

The game itself is in a plastic case with a translucent screen. The timer is the key to start the game which in turn starts the springs of the light up ball which can be controlled by the three buttons on each side. Movement of the LED was ostensibly random but a player was capable of memorizing the movements of the LED and recognize patterns which would enable the player to better anticipate where the "ball" would land. Two "AA" batteries are required to power the unit. I admit the game did get boring after a while and become repetitive. But I get to show my kids what technology was like back when I was a little kid. This item was a good find and can be found on eBay or other auction sites.

Weekly Retrogaming Trivia Recap

Compiled by David Lundin, Jr.

Every Friday on The Retrogaming Times Facebook page (facebook.com/theretrogamingtimes), we present a Weekly Retrogaming Trivia question. This just-for-fun trivia challenge provided each week is an opportunity to test your arcane and oddball retrogaming knowledge. The answer to the question from the previous week is posted along with a new trivia question every Friday!

Below is the recap of all questions and answers posted between this issue and the previous issue:

05/05/2017 - WEEK 15
Question: What was the first PlayStation game to require the use of the DualShock analog controller?

05/12/2017 - WEEK 16
Question: What high-dollar Xbox game used the early slogan, "Challenge of Combat!"

05/19/2017 - WEEK 17
Question: What was the last officially released Sega Saturn game in the USA?

06/02/2017 - WEEK 18
Question: In the Weird Al Yankovic song "Wanna B Ur Lovr" background sound effects are sampled from what two Atari 2600 games?

06/09/2017 - WEEK 19
Question: What is the long rumored reason for the Sega Dreamcast launching with an orange-colored power light?

06/16/2017 - WEEK 20
Question: What compilation release contained the first English localization of the arcade title "Valkyrie no Densetsu" (The Legend of Valkyrie)?

Answers:
Week 15 Answer: Ape Escape.
Week 16 Answer: Steel Battalion.
Week 17 Answer: Magic Knight Rayearth.
Week 18 Answer: Pac-Man (eating a ghost) and Donkey Kong (Mario running and jumping over a barrel).
Week 19 Answer: Although never officially confirmed, orange was chosen as a color that signified good luck.
Week 20 Answer: Namco Museum Volume 5 for PlayStation (1996).

The tagline of an early Steel Battalion trailer (left), Namco Museum Volume 5 was the first time The Legend of Valkyrie was released in English (right)

Don't be left out! Be sure to follow The Retrogaming Times on Facebook for a new retrogaming trivia question every Friday!

We need your questions! If you have a trivia question you would like to submit for possible inclusion in the Weekly Retrogaming Trivia question pool, e-mail it to trt@classicplastic.net!

See You Next Game

by David Lundin, Jr.

Last year when I began to seriously kick around the idea of attempting a revival of Retrogaming Times / Retrogaming Times Monthly, there were a few goals I had in mind, should the project ever gain enough steam to be realized. Once that first issue in March of 2016 was published, it was time to get some of those goals in sight. The first was to publish a full year of newsletters, which we accomplished at the beginning of this year. The second goal is much more important and it has to do with the month of September. In September 1997, Tom Zjaba published the first issue of the original "Retrogaming Times" and a legend of retrogaming newsletters was born. It ran for many years before changing over to Retrogaming Times Monthly, where it continued to run for many more years, picking up a rather haphazard contributor named David Lundin, Jr. in 2004. Retrogaming Times Monthly itself drew to a close in 2014, eventually to be reborn as The Retrogaming Times in 2016, the publication you are reading now.

September 2017, our next issue, will be the 20th anniversary of Retrogaming Times, of the bloodline this newsletter was born from. I hope to make the next issue a celebration not only of retrogaming but of this wonderful hobbyist-created endeavor, as we look back on two decades of old games still being fun. I still feel so absolutely privileged and humbled to have contributed to the previous incarnation, Retrogaming Times Monthly, and even more so to serve as Chief Editor of its current continuation, The Retrogaming Times. If you ever contributed to any version of the newsletter in the past, please consider sending something in for our next issue. In the coming weeks I will continue to reach out to every previous contributor I can locate. I would also like to hear from our long-time readers, as I know there are many of you who have followed us over to the current format. In the meantime if you're going to be attending California Extreme at the end of July and see the guy in the Dig Dug suit, say hello - it's me!

Thank you once again for reading The Retrogaming Times. We'll be back on September 1st with our next issue. Be sure to follow The Retrogaming Times on Facebook and join our new community! I sincerely hope you enjoyed this issue and that you will return to read the next issue and possibly submit an article yourself. Remember, this newsletter can only exist with your help. Simply send your articles directly to me at trt@classicplastic.net or check out the submission guidelines on the main page. Submit an article today and join a great retrogaming tradition!

See You Next Game!

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