The Retrogaming Times

THE BIMONTHLY RETROGAMING HOBBYIST NEWSLETTER

NINETEENTH ISSUE - MARCH 2019

A CELEBRATION OF AMUSEMENT!

The Retrogaming Times
- The Bimonthly Retrogaming Hobbyist Newsletter -

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Nineteenth Issue - March 2019

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Prepare to Qualify

by David Lundin, Jr.

As we enter March I've finally joined the current generation of gaming with a PlayStation 4, right around when the hardware is hitting its development peak and beginning to head into the end of its lifecycle. I basically skipped the entire previous console generation - that wasn't my intention but it just ended up working out that way. I suppose talking about it and selling it every day for about eight years, in addition to keeping absolutely current on the industry to support those ends, filled in any personal ownership desire. Funny enough all the games I've purchased so far are HD remakes of earlier titles. Why start this late into a generation? The release of Ace Combat 7 was a good catalyst, in addition to the impending release of Shenmue III. I bought my original PlayStation in the summer of 1998, right around when that console hit its biggest stride, and that was arguably when it was approaching the end of its lifecycle. Even though the Dreamcast and PlayStation 2 were waiting just over the horizon, that was still the best time to be a PlayStation owner. If I'm going to come into a generation late, I'll do it when the library is vast and the hardware is refined.

Speaking of a vast library, this issue begins with Merman detailing the offerings of MUSE Software and their innovative and influential games in More C64! Donald Lee shares a couple Apple II stories that are making the rounds online, in addition to modern retro news in The Apple II Incider. Arcade Obscure looks at an unfortunately forgotten yet strangely ahead of its time shooter from Sega's early catalog. When Sony launched the original PlayStation they created a controller unlike anything that came before, as Todd Friedman reports in The Controller Chronicles. All that and more are ahead in this issue of The Retrogaming Times.

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! Follow @TRTInfoClub on Twitter for release notifications and immediate newsletter updates! 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!"**

Upcoming Events

Compiled by David Lundin, Jr.

Midwest Gaming Classic, April 12th - 14th 2019, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA

The Midwest Gaming Classic is a trade show featuring 100,000+ square feet of retro and modern home video game consoles, pinball machines, arcade video games, computers, table top gaming, crane games, collectible card games and air hockey, and that's just the start.

The Midwest Gaming Classic is about celebrating gaming, trying new things, learning about the gaming hobby, about meeting others who share the love of gaming, and having fun doing it! No matter if you have one console and a handful of games or thousands of games in every room of your house, you'll find something to celebrate with us!

For more information, visit http://www.midwestgamingclassic.com/

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Pintastic Pinball & Game Room Expo, June 27th - 30th 2019, Sturbridge, Massachusetts, USA

Flippin' Fun For Everyone! 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, friendly clowns & balloon animals. The adults can bring out their inner child with over 200 pinball machines set on free play, all while enjoying an ice-cold craft beer.

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

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Video Game Summit, July 13th 2019, 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.

The Video Game Summit, now in its 16th year, brings together classic and modern generation gamers from all over the country to swap stories and games. Best of all, admission to The 2019 Video Game Summit is only $10.00 per person (kids 12 and under with adult are free). We will have Early Admission ($15.00) this year again due to positive response from last year.

The Video Game Summit is being held on July 13th, 2019 from 10 am until 6 pm at The Odeum Expo Center, 1033 North Villa Ave., Villa Park, Illinois.

For information on the show visit us at: http://www.VideoGameSummit.net

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KansasFest, July 15th - 21st 2019, 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.

Registration will open at a later date.

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

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California Extreme 2019, July 27th - 28th 2019, 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 27-28, 2019 at the same fantastic location - the Hyatt Regency in Santa Clara, California. Please join us for our 23rd show with hundreds of your favorite arcade and pinball games, both past and present, all gathered together for another fun-filled weekend of arcade excitement for everyone!

The hotel block at the Hyatt Regency is open! Go to the Hotel Information page on the website to get all the details and to book your rooms! Rooms will also be opening at the Hilton and Marriott very soon - updates will be on the Hotel Information page. Ticket sales will open closer to the show - check the website to see when they will open.

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

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Classic Game Fest, July 27th - 28th 2019, Austin, Texas, USA

Classic Game Fest is "The Biggest Retro Gaming Event in Texas." The 12th annual Classic Game Fest will be on July 27 - 28, 2019. Enjoy 70,000 square feet of retro video games and fun at the Palmer Events Center in Austin, Texas. Overlooking Lady Bird Lake and the downtown Austin skyline, the Palmer Events Center is conveniently located only a short walk from many hotels, restaurants, bus stops, and bike rental stations.

For more information, visit https://classicgamefest.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! - Amusement From MUSE Software

by Merman

MUSE Software are perhaps best known for their Apple II games, including the original Castle Wolfenstein. But in the company's later years, they also released games on the Commodore 64. Merman looks back at those releases, and gives you some amusing trivia about the company along the way.

AN APPLE A DAY

In August 1978, Ed Zaron founded Micro Users Software Exchange, Inc. in Damascus, Maryland. The company would trade under the name MUSE Software, until bankruptcy was declared in October 1987.

Those early years were dominated by Apple games, created mainly by either Ed or Silas Warner. **ESCAPE** by Silas was an early first-person game, featuring a randomly-generated maze each time you played. Characters in Escape could either help or hinder the player, giving useful items or lying to them. This evolved into **MAZE GAME**, where the player could determine the size of the maze and decide whether they left footprints behind to help navigation. **TANK GAME** was similar to Atari's Combat, without walls but with tanks that regenerated over time if left alone. **SIDE SHOW** was a compilation of six mini-games, some played with the paddles. Alan Boyd's **GLOBAL WAR** was a reworking of classic board game RISK, while **THREE MILE ISLAND** offered the chance to run a nuclear power plant ("inspired" by the real-life accident at Three Mile Island, but players had to avoid a meltdown).

The **BEST OF MUSE** compilation disk brought together those early games on disk for the first time. **ABM** was a variation on Missile Command, with the main difference being some silos launched 1 or 5-kiloton warheads which had a different blast radius. Then would come the game that made Silas Warner famous.

Meeting a character in ESCAPE and preventing a meltdown in THREE MILE ISLAND (both on the Apple II).

AMUSING TRIVIA: Silas Warner also created **ROBOT WAR**, which allowed the player to program a robot with a BASIC-like language. These robots could be saved to disk and swapped with friends, with up to five robots battling in an arena (under the control of their programs). The magazine Computer Gaming World ran an annual contest (for several years running) to find the best robot from its readers.

CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN

Originally released on Apple II in 1981, the C64 conversion followed in 1983 and the DOS game in 1984. Silas Warner created the speech himself, attaching a microphone to a port on the Apple and sampling the volume levels. A lone solider escapes from his cell in a German castle, picks up a weapon and tries to escape. The layout of the castle changes for each new game and the soldier must not run into the walls. Guards will be alerted by noise, but will surrender if the player has their weapon drawn. Treasure chests (and surrendered guards) can be searched for useful items, including bullets, grenades and a bulletproof vest. A German uniform can be worn as a disguise, but will be seen through by high-ranking guards. Drinking alcohol found in a chest will distort the player's aim and make them hard to control. The C64 conversion adds very little to the original, but is a fairly competent version. From disk you have the option of creating a new castle/game or continuing with an old generated layout, which is a good idea.

AMUSING TRIVIA: The inspiration for Castle Wolfenstein came from the classic arcade game Berzerk (with its random mazes and speech), and World War II movie The Guns of Navarone (which featured a commando squad breaking into a German gun battery). It is considered one of the first "stealth" games.

The opening of C64 Castle Wolfenstein, and escaping from your cell.

RESCUE SQUAD

A lone ambulance driver must deal with a serious fire in his home city. First the ambulance must race to the fire, dodging traffic at busy intersections. (This first screen plays a lot like Frogger, but with traffic running in four directions). Once at the fire, there is no fire truck to help, so the ambulance technicians must catch people as they jump from the burning building. Once enough people have been saved, a ladder is extended to take the player into the building (ending the second screen). The third screen shows the floorplan of the building, with fires "roaming" the corridors. More people must be rescued, and asbestos suits (shown in blue) can be collected (like Pac-Man's power pill) to protect the ambulance man from the fires for a short time. Although it looks quite simple, this is still very playable. And you will spot how the MUSE games on the C64 adopted a similar look and feel to their menus (added by MUSE, along with a short tune composed by Silas Warner).

AMUSING TRIVIA: John Kutcher was just 17 in the summer when he created Rescue Squad. Living just a few miles from Baltimore, he looked in the local phone book to find a software publisher. He rang up and the operator said they did not publish games for the Commodore 64. He had nearly hung up when the operator said they would be interested in publishing his game.

Racing to the fire, and rescuing people inside the building, in C64 game Rescue Squad.

BEYOND CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN

The sequel was also created for Apple II before being ported in 1984 to C64, Atari 8-bit and early PCs. This time the mission is to infiltrate Nazi headquarters in Berlin, find the bomb planted there by agents and place it outside Hitler's bunker to assassinate him. As with the first game, the level layout is generated procedurally and can be changed from game to game - with the addition this time of difficulty levels. Guards this time are more intelligent, running to sound the alarm. The player can also take more than one hit, gradually succumbing to their wounds unless first aid is found. Passes and money can be used to bribe guards, but stealth is still the best course. While it does not look and sound much different to the original, there is more depth to this sequel.

AMUSING TRIVIA: The plot for the game was drawn from the real-life plot against Hitler, perhaps more familiar to some people from its portrayal in the Tom Cruise movie Valkyrie. ID Software would buy the rights to the name Castle Wolfenstein when they released their classic first-person game Wolfenstein 3D, and all the protagonists in modern Wolfenstein games are descended from the original MUSE games' lead character B.J. Blazkowicz. (Originally Wolfenstein 3D had many more features based on the earlier MUSE games but they were dropped during development to keep up the game's pace).

The C64 sequel's title screen, and a wounded soldier is cornered.

SPACE TAXI

"Hey, Taxi!" Perhaps the most memorable part of John Kutcher's second game for MUSE - a Commodore 64 exclusive - was the speech, with the illusion of different passengers hailing for a taxi and telling it where to go. Each of the 24 levels had a number of pads to deliver passengers to, and when the level quota was reached it was "Up, please" to the next screen. The box blurb calls it a 23rd-century city, with a former galactic pilot plying his trade as a taxi driver. And it is a strange city, filled with variable gravity, growing beanstalks, moving barriers and even a black hole. Up to four players can take turns, with five shift types - Morning, Evening and Night (8 levels or hours each), a full 24-hour shift (playing through all the levels in order) or a random 24-hour shift (changing the order the levels are played in). Completing the last level takes you to Museworld, a secret screen with sprites from other MUSE games. Here there is a poem that will point out how to reach the game's secret menu, where you can turn off collisions, choose the order to play levels in and read more about the author (who was studying at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore at the time).

Calling for the taxi on level 1, and the brain-bending Puzzler level.

There have been many great games involving gravity-based puzzles, but this was way ahead of its time. The levels are very colourful and filled with a variety of challenges, including magnets pulling you off-course and switches to open gates. The constantly dropping fuel is another factor, but fortunately some levels have fueling stations to fill up the tank. This is now a highly-sought after title, commanding high prices when it comes up for sale thanks to its limited availability (approximately 10,000 copies were sold by MUSE). If you have never played it, check it out in emulation.

AMUSING TRIVIA: John Kutcher built the hardware to create the speech himself, buying the parts from Radio Shack. From a technical point of view, an analogue-to-digital converter was connected to a microphone and the C64's expansion port. The signal from the microphone was converted into an 8-bit value, stored into the C64's memory. John then set the SID chip to play a base tone and varied the volume based on the sampled volume data. By changing the tone and speed of playback, the single sample could sound like different people.

Magnets pull you off-course, and Museworld's cryptic poem.

LEAPS AND BOUNDS

Sadly the C64 version of this educational game has not been preserved, meaning much of the detail we know about it comes from the Atari 8-bit version. There were four separate activities for the pupil - spelling, maths, art and music. Spelling painted the alphabet on the screen, and pressing a key would give animated sequences based on that letter. For example, pressing D reveals a DOG that then DIGs to find a bone for its DINNER. The maths section presents problems with similar animations. Art offered the chance to paint onscreen with some very basic tools. The Music section gave a very simplistic sequencer, the notes appearing in musical notation as the player pressed the keys. Not long after this game was released, MUSE filed for bankruptcy protection and closed its doors in October 1987.

AMUSING TRIVIA: John Kutcher attended the bankruptcy auction as MUSE's office was emptied. He recalls that people were paying over the odds for furniture and used computers. Some of the MUSE titles were then re-published by Main Street Publishing, a budget label. However, John retained the copyright of his games Rescue Squad and Space Taxi, and still holds them.

The menu and the music-making section of Leaps and Bounds on the Atari 8-bit.

I hope you have found this walk down memory lane interesting. It was prompted by my interviewing John Kutcher for Retro Gamer magazine, in an article looking at how Space Taxi was made. This will be in issue 192 of Retro Gamer, to be published in the UK in March 2019 (and on sale in the States a couple of months later).

Apple II Incider - More Miscellaneous Retro Themed Stuff

by Donald Lee

I'm on a tight timeline this month as I've been busy and not a ton of time for games besides playing NBA 2K19 on my Nintendo Switch.

However, in browsing online I stumbled on an Apple II related article (on CNN no less) and another one right now as I am writing this.

Man Discovers 30 Year Old Apple Computer Still in Working Order

https://www.cnn.com/2019/02/17/tech/30-year-old-apple-computer-work-trnd/index.html

Interesting article about someone finding an old Apple IIe that still works. I'm not surprised as many old pieces of equipment (not just computers) still work after many years. I'm sure my old Apple II would still boot up as well. The most interesting thing I took away from the article was that the person found some old letters from his father saved on disk. The fact that this person's kids found the Apple II funny is not surprising. Today's generation is used to realistic graphics and sound on their video games and computers. The Apple IIe's capabilities were far from that!

Engineer Turns His Old Apple IIe Into a Wheeled Robot

https://www.digitaltrends.com/cool-tech/apple-iie-robot/

I'm not sure what to say about this article except this guy definitely put some work into making an "Apple IIe robot." All I can say is "GOOD JOB DUDE." Glad to see that Apple IIe (and other older devices) are still used in modern times.

Lastly, I'll wrap with some gaming news. While looking around Gamestop a few months ago, I came across a Atari Flashback Classic game collection for the Nintendo Switch. What item caught my initially about this collection? There were ATARI 5200 games on this collection. WHOA that is cool.

But not just any games but two in particular, REALSPORTS BASEBALL and REALSPORTS BASKETBALL for the 5200. I had Realsports Football for the 5200 but never played the baseball or basketball games. Baseball may have been released late in the 5200's life and not easily found.

Upon further review, this collection includes 2600 versions of games as well as arcade versions too. This is very comprehensive. Be on the lookout for a review if I'm able to pick up the collection at some point.

Arcade Obscure - Astro Blaster

by David Lundin, Jr.

When one thinks of early golden age arcade shooters they probably recall Space Invaders (1978), Galaxian (1979), or Galaga (1981). All of those are outstanding and important games in the evolution of the shooter and remain compelling and loved to this day. However I believe there is an equally as entertaining and historically impressive shooter that also deserves a spot on that short list - Sega's Astro Blaster from 1981. Unfortunately Astro Blaster never found an audience in arcades and with the rapidly changing landscape of coin-op gaming in the early 1980's, it would soon be relegated to nothing more than a footnote in Sega history.

Astro Blaster is a fixed-screen vertical shooter where the player controls a starship that can move back and forth at the bottom of the screen. The ship only has one offensive weapon, a single laser shot similar to what is found in Galaxian except faster and more responsive. The difference in Astro Blaster is that each shot builds up heat in the cannon, displayed on screen as a temperature gauge. If the cannon overheats it becomes inoperable until it cools back down, adding a nice risk / reward incentive to shooting quickly yet accurately. In addition to monitoring weapon temperature, another gauge displays the constantly depleting fuel level. Effectively acting as a game timer, the fuel gauge features a unique quirk rarely employed in an arcade game - running out of fuel equals a Game Over, regardless if the player has any ships in reserve. While getting shot or colliding with an object will destroy the current ship and allow a reserve ship to be rotated in, an empty fuel tank ends the game immediately. No matter how many ships may be in reserve, they all pull from the same fuel tank, making the biggest challenge in the game to clear each sector as quickly as possible.

If all that set Astro Blaster apart from contemporary shooters of its day was the addition of gauges for laser temperature and fuel level to monitor, it wouldn't be much different than other early shooter. What makes Astro Blaster unique is how it piles extra features and deep bonus additions on top of a solid shooting mechanic. Instead of power-ups or secondary weapons, a "Warp" button is provided. Rather than increase the speed of the ship, it slows down the enemies for a fixed amount of time, allowing easier pinpoint shooting and projectile avoidance. The Warp may be used once per ship, per sector and knowing when to best deploy it is the key to success in Astro Blaster. Using Warp during a wave of small enemies may make them easier to pick off, but using it during the asteroid sequence found in each sector makes targeting fireballs much less dangerous. Shooting the small fireballs found in the asteroid belts are the only way to add fuel to the ship before the end of a sector and more often than not become the most tense areas of a play session. Keep in mind that while Warp will slow the enemies down, fuel continues to burn off at the normal rate, so make every shot count! At the end of each sector a mother ship awaits the player, docking with it completes the wave and fully refuels the player's ship. Similar to running out of fuel, crashing while docking with the mother ship ends the game immediately, regardless if there are ships in reserve.

While most shooters of this time had a few different enemy types that would be repeated stage after stage, Astro Blaster features a ridiculous variety of enemies to battle against, each with radically different designs and attack patterns. This not only keeps gameplay fresh, it works as a counterbalance to the relentless difficulty presented to the player. There's always a push to get just a bit further and see what the next enemy type will look like, something that wouldn't be the case if it used the same three enemies over and over again. Astro Blaster also features an insanely deep secret bonus system, with twenty-five different secret bonuses to be discovered throughout the game. These are awarded for everything from destroying an enemy wave in a specific order to not moving the ship left or right while approaching the mother ship for docking. Attempting to discover and master how to obtain the secret bonuses adds an extra layer of strategy atop what is already a very high-level fixed screen shooter. Enemies also award double points when destroyed while the ship's fuel gauge is in the red.

Even with all the gameplay quirks, enemy variety, and hidden bonuses, one more thing sets Astro Blaster apart from other shooters of this type - speech. Utilizing the Sega G80 arcade system architecture, Astro Blaster featured a dedicated sound board which mean the game was crammed full of spoken dialogue. The attract screen proclaims, "Fighter pilots needed in Sector Wars - play Astro Blaster!" like something out of The Last Starfighter (which wasn't released to theaters until 1984). In-game speech takes the form of the ship's computer, calling out everything from sector movement to ship status. While other games may have utilized the same speech hardware, Astro Blaster does a better job of tying it into the flow and action of the game than just about any classic arcade title I can think of. It provides a level of immersion virtually unheard of (literally) at the time and coupled with everything else Astro Blaster has on offer, creates a unique and hectic experience unlike anything else.

I suppose the big question is why wasn't Astro Blaster more successful? I've always felt Astro Blaster was a victim of being released at the absolute worst time for a high difficulty conventional shooter. In the wake of Pac-Man, shooters had to have instant and approachable "wow factor" to capture the imagination of the arcade gamer. The enemies may be complex and varied but a player won't see any of that if they can't come to grips with the extreme difficulty curve of the game. Contrast this with Galaga, which not only appears to be more colorful and faster moving at first glance, but also features a much gentler learning curve that allows virtually anyone to play a half dozen stages. Astro Blaster is also one of the last arcade shooters not to use a joystick, instead utilizing buttons for left and right movement, similar to earlier shooters such as Space Invaders, Moon Cresta, and Phoenix. Impressive as the technology in the game may have been, using buttons rather than a joystick for movement makes the game feel old fashioned in comparison to the aforementioned Galaga. I'd also venture a guess that Sega / Gremlin found more success in releasing Konami's Frogger at around the same time, which ran on less complex hardware and continues to be a celebrated game to this day.

For a game so tremendously ahead of its time, Astro Blaster would be quickly forgotten, becoming not only a true lost gem of arcade gaming - but possibly one of the earliest as well. Yet one year later in 1982, Activision released an Atari 2600 game by the name of Megamania. Widely considered to be one of Activision's greatest games, Megamania is essentially a simplified version of Astro Blaster. The diverse enemy designs, attack patterns, and energy gauge that constantly depletes as the stage plays out are all strikingly similar to Astro Blaster. It's unclear if Megamania designer Steve Cartwright was inspired by Astro Blaster but Megamania continues to be a much loved and celebrated game. At the end of the day that's how I recommend Astro Blaster to new players. If you've mastered Megamania and are looking for a more complex and difficult challenge, give Astro Blaster a try. Fighter pilots are always needed in Sector Wars!

The Controller Chronicles - PlayStation

by Todd Friedman

I can remember when I was in college and I had a roommate who purchased a new video game system in the mid 1990's. At the time I had my Sega Genesis which was very popular at that time. Nintendo and Sega were the leaders in home gaming entertainment. In late 1994, Sony decided to put themselves in the mix. My roommate turned on the system and I still remember that opening sound of the system unit turning on. I was interested and approached his TV. I saw a game called Destruction Derby and I was hooked. The game was a CD and not a cartridge. I knew this would be the future of gaming and Sony would start a revolution. This unit was the Sony PlayStation. It would be the first of many consoles from Sony to follow.

Then there was the controller. This grey, futuristic controller with buttons showing pictures of shapes is considered one of the most iconic controllers to date. There would be modifications to it years later, but the original was the start of something great in gaming.

If you remember the SNES controller, you will know it has two buttons on the top left and right. These are called shoulder buttons. Sony took that idea and literally doubled it. They put a second pair of shoulder buttons on the back of controller, which today we know as L1, L2 and R1, R2. The four buttons on the pad represented many tasks depending on the game you are playing. To change it up a little, instead of using A, B or C buttons, they would put shapes on them. The triangle, circle, square, and X button is one of the symbols of the PlayStation universe. When you see these shapes in a commercial, you know it's for PlayStation. Pre-analog, this controller had the typical plus shaped controller, similar to the NES. The always popular Select and Start button finish up this simple yet multi-buttoned gamepad. The controller in my opinion is one of the most comfortable controllers to hold. The size is not too big or small and the shape fits in the hand perfectly. They last a long time too as I still have my original controllers and they have no issues today. There are dozens of games that I could talk about with the PS1 controller, but I will limit this article to a few. Sony PlayStation had some award winning games along with ground breaking graphics and narratives. If you were to ask someone their favorite game on the original PlayStation, you would get a variety of answers.

The game that would be at the top of my gaming list would be the ever-popular Final Fantasy VII. This game was revolutionary for their storylines and cut scenes as well as the fighting battles. This is truly one of the best role-playing games of all time. This game uses all the possible controls and buttons to battle in this epic game. The game pad obviously will move the characters on the screen, as well as the menu options when pulled up. The circle button will open chests in the game to get items or potions to use in battle. The triangle button will open the menu to choose between characters items, weapons, magic, etc. The X button will close the menu but will also make you run faster if you hold it down. The square button toggles between the Equipment and the Materia items. When pressing the L2 and R2 buttons you can change the camera angle of the screen. This was something new for RPG gaming on the consoles. From the moment the game starts to the moment it ends, this game packs in everything you need to make a classic RPG title. The graphics for the time were extraordinary and the music still to this day is played in other games and continues to be popular. The characters of Final Fantasy VII are among some of the most popular characters of home console gaming. I still play it today on the original PlayStation system as well as the PlayStation Classic.

The other game top on my list is Crash Bandicoot. More specifically Crash Bandicoot: Warped. This game tests the true patience of timing and execution. It is as just as addicting as Sonic and Mario games, if not more. By February 1999, almost 3 million copies of Crash Bandicoot: Warped had been shipped to retailers worldwide. The game's story takes place immediately after the events of the second game. The levels of Crash Bandicoot Warped spread out the different ways of experiencing the adventure. These levels include the characters moving on air, land and water. Each themed level has five levels with the boss level being at the end. Beating the boss level is required to proceed to the next phase. There are special warp levels if you are good enough to find them. Even though he controls of the games are pretty basic, it still is very difficult to clear a stage perfectly. You may need to try a level 5 or 10, or for me, 20 in some cases to collect all the gems. Colored Gems are found in special levels and lead to hidden areas. The first five Relics the player receives unlock access to a level in the "Secret Warp Room." Every five Relics after that open up another level in the Secret Warp Room. The levels in the Secret Warp Room must be won before the game can be totally completed. To control Crash, you will use the direction pad. The difference in the buttons depend on the environment. If you are on land, X is to jump, and square is to spin. Spinning is the trait of Crash as Sonic is fast speed and Mario gets bigger with the mushroom. You can do a slide move with the circle button, fire your bazooka with the L1 shoulder button, and to get to some of the high boxes to break you can press X to jump and while in the air, hitting circle will perform a Body Slam. This gameplay is super hard, but when mastered can be very pleasing. I am surprised this game did not make the PlayStation Classic version.

Final Fantasy VII (left), Crash Bandicoot: Warped (center), Gran Turismo 2 (right)

In 1997, Sony released their first dual analog controller. This would be an upgrade to the standard controller and as you have the ability to move the character or vehicle more smoothly and accurately. The right analog would change camera angles on some games as well. This controller gave you the option of using the analog by pushing a button under the start button. When it is lit you are using analog. If not it works like the standard original PS1 controller. Some games took advantage of the analog controller, such as the next game on my list, Gran Turismo 2.

The final game I will discuss is one of the most realistic driving franchises in my opinion, Gran Turismo. Since 1997 there have been many game titles in the main series. There were secondary releases, but the one I got hooked on first was Gran Turismo 2. The graphics of this game for the time were one of the best in all driving games. The new hardware for the follow up titles also kept up with the times and made some of the most realistic driving experiences ever. This game truly tests the gamers ability to use the controller to the fullest. At the time of the release of this game, GT2 had the biggest and most popular cars ever assembled in a racing video game ever. Most if not all major car manufacturers were on board with this game as well as classics from the old days. To accelerate you would hit the X button, you can up and down shift with the L2 and R2 buttons. You have the option of steering with the digital control or if you happen to have the analog controller you can use the left stick

to steer. Emergency brake is Circle and reverse is the Triangle button. The L1 and R1 buttons will change your camera angle to make 3rd or 1st person point of view. Gran Turismo earned multiple awards and accolades and to me is the foundation of racing games that followed. This is a must have game for your classic collection.

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:

02/15/2019 - WEEK 104
Question: What two arcade games developed by Yu Suzuki can be played in the original Shenmue?

02/08/2019 - WEEK 103
Question: What are the names of the four flight instructors in the Super Nintendo game Pilotwings?

02/01/2019 - WEEK 102
Question: What NES game features the likeness of actor Peter Graves?

01/25/2019 - WEEK 101
Question: Originally released for the Famicom Disk System, what game had a Japanese cartridge re-release to coincide with introduction of the AV Famicom?

01/18/2019 - WEEK 100
Question: What early Atari VCS game was rumored to be developed in response to a lawsuit?

01/11/2019 - WEEK 99
Question: The PlayStation port of Ridge Racer features a Galaxian minigame. Ridge Racer Revolution features what game instead?

01/04/2019 - WEEK 98
Question: With its cheesy intro music, Road Avenger is a Sega CD fan-favorite. What was the original LaserDisc arcade version titled?

Peter Graves as Jim Phelps in the 1988 Mission: Impossible television series intro (left), recreated in Konami's NES game in 1990 (right)

Answers:
Week 98 Answer: Road Blaster (1985), not to be confused with Atari's RoadBlasters (1987).
Week 99 Answer: Galaga '88.
Week 100 Answer: Video Chess (1979), created in response to a lawsuit that the Atari VCS box had a chess piece pictured on it but there was no chess game available.
Week 101 Answer: Zelda no Densetsu: The Hyrule Fantasy (The Legend of Zelda), re-released as "Zelda no Densetsu: The Hyrule Fantasy 1" (1994).
Week 102 Answer: Mission: Impossible (1990), based on the 1988 continuation of the Mission: Impossible television series.
Week 103 Answer: Tony, Shirley, Lance, and Big Al.
Week 104 Answer: Hang-On and Space Harrier.

The four Flight Club instructors in Pilotwings (left), a simple illustration of a chess piece on the original VCS box may have lead to a lawsuit (right)

Don't be left out! Be sure to follow The Retrogaming Times on Facebook or The Retrogaming Times Info Club on Twitter 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! If you question is selected to be featured, you will be entered in our year-end prize drawing!

See You Next Game

by David Lundin, Jr.

A couple weeks ago I was clearing out a few duplicate early issues of Nintendo Power that have missing pages or are otherwise heavily incomplete. Due to their condition they've been used for various other projects over the years, generally craft or scan related, and have finally reached the end of any use. Among them was the March / April 1989 issue with Ninja Gaiden on the cover. Of all the issues of Nintendo Power ever published, that particular volume has always been the most important to

me, as it was the very first issue I received as a kid. Prior to that I had a couple issues of Game Player's Guide to Nintendo and my childhood best friend had begun his Nintendo Power subscription an issue earlier, however my start with that hugely important publication began with that fifth issue.

I only maintained a subscription until Volume 37 but Nintendo Power would remain the only gaming periodical I would keep as the years rolled on. Eventually I would pick up the remainder of the issues that stretched into the very end of the NES era through second-hand purchases. There is just something about those first few dozen issues of Nintendo Power, they are simply the most perfect snapshot of that period of gaming I can think of. It extends far beyond the thinly veiled advertising copy - the feel and smell of the paper, seeing entire games laid out in continuous maps, the occasionally low grade "official" illustrations and layouts, previews of games that were never localized or released, and of course the Player's Forum. Without a doubt the Mail Box and Video Spotlight sections in the Player's Forum are my favorite parts of the magazine, especially the earlier issues. As a kid I pretty much skipped over those sections (I'm sure a lot of us did) but for what ever reason once I was in high school I began to re-read my old issues of Nintendo Power cover to cover. That's when I discovered that Mail Box and Video Spotlight had unintentionally become the best time capsule of video game culture during the NES era.

That brings us back to Volume 5 or March / April 1989 as it was known then, the Ninja Gaiden issue. Twenty years ago I was flipping through the pages of that issue and read a letter published in Mail Box that made me laugh out loud. In fact every time I pick up a copy of that issue and see that letter I still crack up. The same was true a couple weeks ago before sending that particularly well-worn copy to be recycled. The letter is innocent enough, written by a fifteen-year-old, and on its surface it seems reasonably typical of a young gamer excited about the subject. He includes a picture of an admittedly cool Super Mario Bros. 2 clay diorama he created, as well as a picture of himself. The letter reads:

"I am a 15-year-old 9th grade student at St. Edward's Upper School. I have a 13-year-old brother who attends St. Ed's Middle School. We live about a mile from school. So, being under the legal age to drive, I take my custom made golf cart to school while my brother prefers to get a ride from Mom.

My brother and I are very different from each other. He is the athlete of the house and I am the artist. While he wants to swim and play basketball, football, and tennis, I would prefer to draw, sculpt, make home videos, and create.

One thing we do have in common is that we both love the NES! We spend hours playing games on it and eating popcorn in our spare time. It's a great way for us to spend time together as brothers.

As I said, I am the artist of the house. I enjoy working with modeling clay and animating my clay figures on video. The cover of the first Nintendo Power interested me very much. So, I tried to make my own Mario with clay. It was a success. I also made a Mouser, Cobrat, and Pokey. I thought you might like to take a look at them."

THE ART OF PLAYING

I am a 15-year-old 9th grade student at St. Edward's Upper School. I have a 13-year-old brother who attends St. Ed's Middle School. We live about a mile from school. So, being under the legal age to drive, I take my custom made golf cart to school while my brother prefers to get a ride from Mom.

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Trevor Moynihan
Vero Beach, FL

Terrific clay figures Trevor! We'd like to thank all of the artists that send us their interpretations of scenes and characters from NES games. There are a lot of talented Nintendo enthusiasts.

Nintendo Power, Volume 5, March / April 1989, Mail Box, courtesy collection of David Lundin, Jr.

Again, innocent enough and reasonably typical, but something about the way it is worded and the picture published of the author makes me bust up every time. The "custom made golf cart" line is where I practically lose it, then I totally lose it when I see the picture of him just below. The Nintendo Power editor must have felt the same way, as not many people got their picture published outside of being featured in a Power Player Profile in Video Spotlight. However the picture Trevor included of himself makes him look so damn smug that it appears to have been just too much for the editor to pass up. Even now while writing this closing column, I can't stop laughing about that letter - a letter published thirty years ago!

So here's to you, Trevor Moynihan. Where ever you are in the world these days I hope you're doing well - you smug son of a gun.

Thank you once again for reading The Retrogaming Times. We'll be back on May 1st with our next issue. Be sure to follow The Retrogaming Times on Facebook and join our community for the latest updates and information! Additionally The Retrogaming Times Info Club on Twitter features up-to-the-moment news and notifications for all things The Retrogaming Times! 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!

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