
The Retrogaming Times

THE BIMONTHLY RETROGAMING HOBBYIST NEWSLETTER
TWENTY-SECOND ISSUE - SEPTEMBER 2019

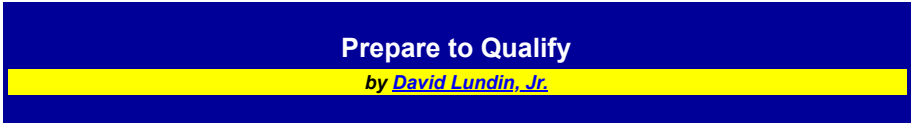
SAXOPHONE SERENADER ROAMS THE NIGHT!

The Retrogaming Times
- The Bimonthly Retrogaming Hobbyist Newsletter -

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Twenty-Second Issue - September 2019

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Our twenty-second issue is here featuring the mainstream, the obscure, and the classic. This issue's cover story kicks things off as Merman details the games of French developer Jawx in More C64! Donald Lee has some mixed musings concerning the current state of arcade venues and the games missing from them. Eugenio Angueira resumes his continuing column that takes a look at the various home conversions of Pac-Man and his kin, this time on Mattel Intellivision. The twenty-third annual California Extreme arcade and pinball show was held in Silicon Valley recently and our annual show report highlights some of the standout features this year had on offer. The Controller Chronicles takes a look at an early console and controller combination as Todd Friedman covers the often overlooked RCA Studio II. Sean Robinson returns to share more Video Game Haiku, in a continuing interactive feature. 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!"**



A Video Game Con (AVGC), September 7th - 8th 2019, Parsippany, New Jersey, USA

A Video Game Con (AVGC) is NJ's premiere convention dedicated to both retro and modern video games. We host an extensive free play collection of video games in their original format, various video game themed panels, a large vendor room containing multiple generations of video game items, and a host of other related content for attendees to take part in.

For more information and to purchase tickets, visit <http://www.avidgamecon.com/>

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Retropalooza, October 19th - 20th 2019, 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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Sac Gamers Expo, December 8th 2019, Sacramento, California, USA

A regional video game convention founded in 2015, created by gamers for gamers. Our show features special guests, game

vendors and artists, game developers, tournaments, free to play games, a console museum, VR Setups, live DJ and so much more! Sac Gamers Expo is a family oriented event for all levels of gamers. Free admission for children eight and under with a paid adult!

For more information and to purchase tickets, visit <http://www.sacgamersexpo.com/>

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Midwest Gaming Classic, April 3rd - 5th 2020, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA

The Midwest Gaming Classic is a trade show featuring 150,000+ square feet of retro and modern home video game consoles, pinball machines, arcade video games, table top RPGs, computers, table top board games, crane games, collectible card games, 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 25th - 28th 2020, Sturbridge, Boxborough, 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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KansasFest, July 21st - 26th 2020, 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 the event.

Will you be among the 2020 attendees? Mark your calendars for July 21-26, 2020.

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

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Classic Game Fest, July 25th - 26th 2020, Austin, Texas, USA

The biggest retro gaming event in Texas is back on July 25-26, 2020! Classic Game Fest returns to the Palmer Events Center in Austin, TX on July 25-26, 2020. The annual summer event will feature all the expected attractions including special guests, live music, free play games, a massive vendor hall and more. Vendor booth and ticket information will be available soon.

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! - Jawx Is My Jam

by Merman

This issue we take a look back at perhaps one of the strangest developers to grace the Commodore 64, with a string of unusual ideas that stood out. I am talking about the French developer Jawx, whose games made an impact on the British budget label Firebird.

AT THE BEGINNING

Jawx got its name from the famous movie (and book) Jaws, and its logo was a stylised shark that formed the word JAWX. Its offices in Paris were based in Cite Paradise, an area known for its jewelers. Jacques Fleurance and Frédéric Pinlet were two French businessmen who had little knowledge of the games industry and would come up with unusual ideas. It was then up to the other members of the team, or contract teams outside the group, to put them into action. American musician and composer Jim Cuomo provided music for some of the Jawx titles. And one man who joined the team was François Lionet, who had previously programmed games on the Oric computer. At Jawx he would start to learn the Commodore 64.



The bizarre cover of Cock'In, and the Jawx logo appears as Chickin Chase loads from tape.

PUBLISH AND BE DAMNED

Two games are held in the GameBase64 collection (www.gb64.com) with Jawx listed as the publisher, but this seems to be a mistake as it was a developer and not a publishing label. It's likely that another French company (possibly Prism or VIFI International) actually published the games with the Jawx logo on them - there are very few details online.

Aghamix by Daniel Delevoye actually spans two disks, but in my brief play for this article I found it very difficult to get past the first scene. The title screen is quite impressive with its starfield, and this effect is repeated in the game. The player controls a spaceship with asteroids / enemies moving out of the screen in 3D. Pressing fire in conjunction with up and down changes the spaceship's speed, but there does not seem to be any way to fire back in this first section.

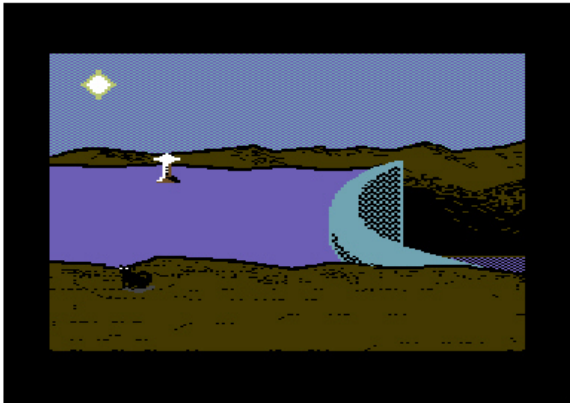
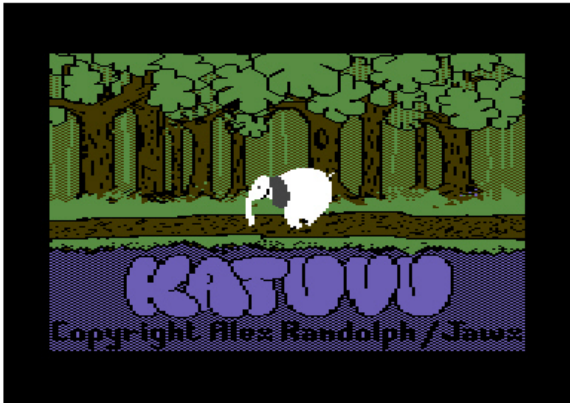
Bering was programmed on the C64 by Herve LeMarchand, but it is actually a conversion of an earlier Oric game by François Lionet. The player controls a white whale in the Oric version (in homage to Moby Dick, perhaps) but on the C64 the whale is pink. The name comes from the Bering Strait between Alaska and Russia, but the real one is hopefully not this dangerous. The whale must eat plankton to survive, surfacing to increase its oxygen levels, while avoiding the sonar from the boat, the depth charges and mines the boat drops and the chasing submarine. It is possible to change the level and parameters of the game (pressing o for Oui/Yes and n for Non/No as it's in French). The water level moves up and down, the speed of the boat and its sonar pulses can be changed and the number of mines and depth charges configured to make the game easier or harder. Even on the simplest settings this is a really tough game.



Dodging the asteroids in Aghamix, and the pink whale swims around in Bering.

AN ELEPHANT NEVER FORGETS

François' first C64 game was **Katuvu**. This unusual memory-based game was inspired by a board game from American designer Jack Randolph (and he is credited on the game's title screen.) François wanted a friendly creature to "talk" to the player, and since the game was all about memory he chose an elephant (which is white when animated on the title screen and then pink during gameplay). After choosing the number of players and the difficulty level, each player is shown a series of animated scenes. Then comes up to five questions on what the player has seen - how many birds were there, on which scene the boat appears, and so on. The player with the most correct answers wins. The animated scenes are quite sweet, but the game is all in French which can make playing it difficult if you don't know the language...



The animated elephant from the Katuvu title sequence, and one of the animated scenes from the game itself.

THE BALCONY SCENE

Serenade must go down as one of the most bizarre titles of all time. The main game screen shows a moonlit night and a balcony. From the left the silhouette of a young man appears, playing a musical instrument which can be changed by pressing the four function keys. From the balcony on the right appears a young lady's silhouette - if you play well enough, the man approaches the balcony, hoping to climb up for a kiss. It is possible to choose from a menu of seven different tunes, and the woman will react based on the combination of tune and instrument; if she doesn't like it she will pull out a newspaper to read, or even walk off. There is surprisingly little gameplay here and it is almost incomprehensible without the

instructions! François said years later he was "ashamed" of this game.



The Serenade title screen has falling tears, while the lady reacts badly to my saxophone playing.

MATADOR!

Olé (or **Raging Beast** in the UK, where it caused controversy for the similarity of its name to the Robert DeNiro film) is another fascinating game. It is based on the sport of bullfighting, popular in Spain and the southwest of France. But it is not a gory game - the bull cannot die, and the worst that can happen to the matador is being trampled into the dust (before being carried off on a stretcher). What is also interesting is that Jawx co-founder Frédéric Pinlet drew the arena background and the animated bull. The matador starts with the cape and must pull it away as the bull charges past to score points. Score enough and the crowd throws a rosette into the bullring, which must be picked up and placed on the bull's horns. Score enough and the matador takes a bow, before you move onto the next arena. At game over, a large poster shows the score and name of the best bullfighter. Other neat touches include the plane flying overhead (towing a banner with the score on, or I HEART JAWX) and the way the bull sits down as the player is stretched off. François recalls that the bull had an "aggression" variable, rating the bull from 0 to 255 for how angry it was.



Getting carried off on a stretcher having been trampled by the Raging Beast, and the rosette is thrown from the crowd.

CHICKEN TONIGHT

And so on to perhaps the most French of the Jawx games. It originally went by the name **Cock'In** but was changed to **Chickin Chase** when it appeared on the Firebird label. You control the cockerel, walking around the chicken coop. At the start of the game he will go into the hen house to "service" the hen. She then walks up the ladder to the row of nests and lays an egg. It's up to the rooster to protect the eggs from the vermin who try to steal them. These include hedgehogs, rats, squirrels and snakes. But if there are no eggs left, the hen will come out of her house to batter the cockerel over the head with her umbrella (costing the player a life). So the cockerel must go back in to the hen house periodically; the longer he stays in, the more eggs the hen will lay - but all the time the other eggs are at risk. The more energy the cockerel uses, the slower he gets - so he needs to peck at the corn on the floor, the corn bins left and right of the screen and the juicy worms that pop up every now and then to regain energy and move faster again.

François programmed the Oric, Amstrad and C64 versions. The C64 version uses expanded sprites - giving large pixels but a very distinctive look (especially for the black & white checkerboard pattern representing the hedgehog's spines). The difficulty curve works well, getting more difficult the longer you play. And another nice touch is the way the cockerel winks on the title screen. The original French game had a bizarre cover picture of two people dressed up as chickens, but there were two variations of the Firebird cover. The first follows other early Firebird games in having a screenshot on the front cover (which may seem strange now, but was quite common back then). The later re-release has a cartoon picture instead, with the cockerel running away from the angry hen.



The hen successfully lays another egg, but losing all the eggs sees the cockerel get battered.

THE END

The legacy of Jawx has lasted a long time. François worked with Jawx on two products - STOS and AMOS. STOS was

originally planned as a replacement for the GEM desktop of the Atari ST, but François coded a Basic-like language extension with lots of game-based functions (for plotting graphics, making sounds and detecting collisions). The resulting STOS was used to create commercial games. And, after his compulsory military service, François created the Amiga equivalent AMOS that helped many people into a career making games or working with computers. François would leave Jawx and started a lawsuit to prove he was the author of the games he created there, which lasted fifteen years. It prevented him creating a PC version of AMOS so he formed new company Clickteam. Its series of "game maker" utilities have been a huge hit and spawned many great games - including the horror series Five Nights At Freddy's and the fascinating puzzle game Baba Is You. François received many e-mails from people thanking him for AMOS in recent years, so he is now creating AMOS 2 (www.amos2.org) for modern machines, with the aim of having backwards compatibility to games created with the original AMOS.

Parts of this article are based on knowledge gained from my Retro Gamer (www.retrogamer.net) interview with François Lionet, to be published in issue 198.



The title of my article this month comes from an Asian American Jazz band called Hiroshima. They've been around for years and I remembered they had a song called Mix Plate. If you're interested in listening, here it is on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/64yyQuM8Bdw>

This issue, I'm going to talk about a couple of things that are unrelated.

The first topic is regarding a nice home-brew project going on for the Atari 2600 that I accidentally stumbled upon. The home-brew is a port of **Galaga** for the venerable 2600 / VCS system by none other than **Champ Games**.

Champ Games Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/champdotgames/>

Those who have read my columns through the years may remember I talked about Champ Games several times in the past. Thanks to the Internet, I know the original Champ Games got shut down due to copyright issues or something along those lines. Well, I guess the original guy who started Champ Games is back. I don't know why and when Champ Games restarted, but they are back and a lot of games are in the pipeline.

As I didn't grow up playing on the Atari 2600, Galaga for the 2600 isn't something I would look for. But after stumbling upon a video demoing the game, I have to say I am impressed. The Atari 2600 is 42 years old (released in 1977) and yet this version of Galaga plays much like the arcade game. I'll be interested in seeing the final product and maybe I'll have to get it and play on a 2600 emulator or something.

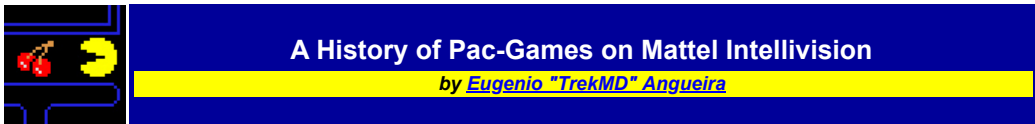
Now if someone would try to make an Apple II version of Galaga, that would be fantastic. Though a developer did make a game called Alien Downpour...



The second topic for this issue is the current generation of video games. My buddy and I got some promos and were able to play games for an extended period of time at Dave & Busters recently. Don't get me wrong, I had fun playing games with my buddy. But it was mostly first person shooting games and not much strategy involved besides blasting away. Luckily, we had unlimited play so we could keep playing until we finished the games.

But I admit I miss the days of playing the simple games like a Galaga or Pac-Man. I'm sure there may be those types of games out there, but they weren't at Dave & Busters! That's why I still have the Midway Arcade series on my Xbox One and wish it was on my Nintendo Switch.

Anyway, I'll get off my soap box now. See you all in a couple of months.



In my prior articles about Pac-Man games I reviewed a series of Pac-Man titles for various Atari consoles, from the 2600 to the Jaguar. In this article I'm shifting to another retro system. This time I'm taking a look at Pac-Man games for the Mattel Intellivision. Mattel always promoted their console as being superior to the Atari 2600 using comparisons of sports games on TV commercials. So, are the Pac-Man games better on this console? Let's have a look.

Commercial Releases

For better or worse, the Intellivision did not get many Pac-Man titles during its commercial run. In fact, the only title that was

ported for the console back then was the original Pac-Man. This was really unfortunate for fans of the console as the system was clearly capable of adaptations of the other Pac-Games. At least the one port the system got was worth playing and was likely the envy of 2600 owners.

Pac-Man

In what can only be described as irony, the port of Pac-Man for the Intellivision was released by none other than Atari under the AtariSoft brand. The programmers for this port must have been aware of the issues with the 2600 version because this version shows a much better effort at adapting the game to a home system. Had I seen the Intellivision version back then, I would have been quite jealous of my friends who owned the system. Though this port is not identical to the arcade, it brings home pretty much all the elements of the game. First, there is a title screen that welcomes you when you start the game. This screen is mostly a huge Atari logo with the game's name but it is something nice to have. The maze has been simplified but it looks remarkably close to the arcade's and retains that version's colors. Pac-Man himself looks as he should and does not have an eye like on the 2600 port. There is a waca-waca sound as Pac-Man eats the dots and the siren plays in the background. The maze is full of white dots and all the bonus items are present and accounted for. Each one of these bonus items is nicely rendered in two colors and grant you the correct score. The monsters, though looking similar to their 2600 cousins, are rendered in four colors and their behavior is like that of the arcade game. As one final touch, this port even includes the intermissions we all know and love.



Pac-Man (Atari)

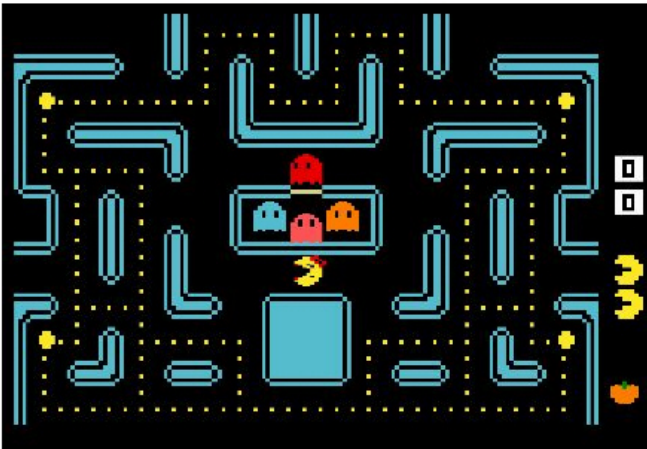
In short, this port of Pac-Man captures every element of the arcade game rather well. The only thing that could be better is the title screen. Yes, I did say it is nice to have the one it has but it would have been better to have something like the arcade with the monsters showing up and Pac-Man at the end before going into an attract mode. If you're wondering about controlling Pac-Man, I am happy to say there are no issues. The discs work well and Pac-Man moves about just as you want him to. The game also includes a two-player alternating mode so you can compete with a friend if you want. Any fan of Pac-Man should have this title if they own an Intellivision.

Homebrew Releases

Despite having done a pretty good job porting Pac-Man to the Intellivision, neither Atari nor any other company, ever ported any of the other Pac-Games to the system. Thankfully, the Intellivision has a pretty active homebrew community and these programmers have done a lot to further grow the system's game library. Thanks to the folks from IntelligentVision, the Intellivision now has two additional titles from the Pac-Man game family: Ms. Pac-Man and Jr. Pac-Man. Both of these titles are impressive and show off what the Intellivision can pull off. Let's have a look at both of these titles...

Ms. Pac-Man

Programmed by Carl Muller, Jr., Ms. Pac-Man for the Intellivision takes things up quite a few notches when compared to Atari's port of Pac-Man for the system. Not only is the game an adaptation of the arcade hit, but also one that expands upon it. When you turn on your Intellivision, you're welcomed to a beautifully rendered title screen within which you can just choose to start the game or you can check out an options menu. This is where things get interesting as now you choose who you want to play as: Ms. Pac-Man, Pac-Man or Jr. Pac-Man. You can select to play in either a Normal Mode or a Hard mode. You can select the number of lives you want to have to play the game, when you want to get a bonus life, the speed at which your Pac-Character moves, the speed of the ghosts, the game rules and even the mazes! You see, this game offers not just the original four mazes (or near enough adaptations of them), but it also offers four different maze themes to choose from: Extra, Wide, Strange, and Random. With all these themes, the game has more than 24 mazes for the player to enjoy!

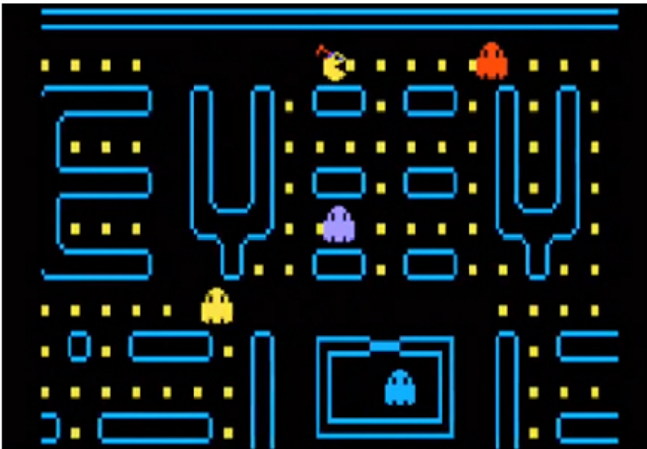


Ms. Pac-Man (Carl Muller, Jr.)

But, how is the gameplay? Well, it is everything you've come to expect from Ms. Pac-Man. The control works very well, the sound effects are excellent and the graphics themselves are superb. The mazes, though not an exact copy of the arcade mazes, are close enough approximations in appearance and color. The bonus items move around the maze as they should and they are rendered in two colors. The Pac-Characters themselves all look great and monsters are simplified but nicely done. They look better than the ones in Atari's Pac-Man, even they have holes for eyes. Of course, all the intermissions we are familiar with have also been included in this port. All in all, this is a remarkable title for the system that should not be missed by anyone who owns an Intellivision.

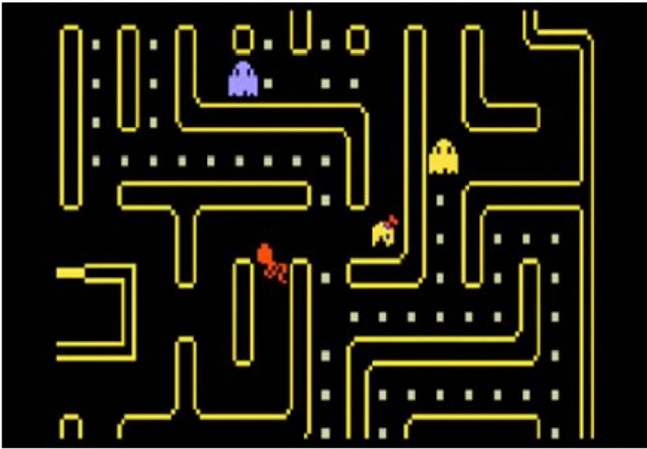
Jr. Pac-Man

In 1983, Bally Midway surprised us with a new Pac-Man game in the arcades that was based on the son of Pac-Man and the Ms. That game was Jr. Pac-Man! Interestingly enough, this game led to the end of the relationship between Namco and Bally Midway as it was developed without the former's agreement. Regardless, the game did fairly well and saw a home port for the Atari 2600. Though other ports were developed, they were not released as this was around the time Jack Tramiel bought Atari. Well, that meant that AtariSoft was not asked to port the game to any systems, which meant the Intellivision did not see a port of this game back then. Well, worry not because Intellivision Revolution fixed this by adapting the game for the system.



Jr. Pac-Man (Intellivision Revolution)

For those who may not have played Jr. Pac-Man in the arcade, in this game there are seven mazes that are so huge that they scroll horizontally and there are no escape tunnels for Jr to use. The action on this game is faster than the other Pac-Games, making this the toughest of the series to play. If you think this port does not capture the difficulty of the arcade, you're in for a surprise. As was the case with Ms. Pac-Man, this port takes the arcade version and expands upon it. When you turn on the system, you actually can have one of three title screens that you can choose from. The options menu lets you select one or two players, the start level, the number of lives, the score at which you get extra lives, and Jr's speed. The seven original mazes are here pretty well rendered with horizontal and vertical scrolling so they can be arcade accurate. Of course, that's not all as there are seven additional mazes that are exclusive to the Intellivision for those who want even more of a challenge. As if that weren't enough, all the mazes can be played as "snow levels" where Jr. Pac-Man now wears a Santa hat instead of his usual propeller beanie. In addition, all the intermissions have also been included.



Jr. Pac-Man (Intellivision Revolution)

Visually the game looks great! Jr. Pac-Man is well animated with his propeller beanie, the ghosts have been redesigned to look close to the arcade (though they still have hollow eyes), and all the bonus items are here (along with their explosive feature). This time the bonus items are rendered in one color but they look good. Sound effects are well done as well and the control works very well. Overall, this is one excellent port of the arcade game for the system and one that I highly recommend if you're a fan of this particular Pac-Man title.

Concluding Remarks

Despite the Intellivision only having one official release of a Pac-Man game during its commercial life, the homebrew community has made certain the console got additional Pac-Man titles for gamers to enjoy. Both Ms. Pac-Man and Jr. Pac-Man are excellent ports for the system that not only bring the fun of the arcade to the Intellivision, but also add their own unique features that make owning them even more desirable. I'm not sure if any other Pac-Man titles will ever be released for the system (it'd be interesting to see a version of Super Pac-Man adapted to the Intellivision) but surely the titles that are now available are a source of great fun. Only time will tell what else the homebrew community will bring to this venerable system.



Show Report - California Extreme 2019

by [David Lundin, Jr.](#)

Four twelve consecutive years I have attended California Extreme, an annual arcade and pinball show first began in 1997 when a group of arcade collectors and enthusiasts came together to share their games with each other and the public. For 2019 it was once again hosted at the Hyatt Regency, Santa Clara, located in the heart of Silicon Valley. No other large arcade show has remained as true to its roots as a celebration of the arcade era, arcade gaming, and arcade game collecting. A modest entry fee grants access to the show, which stretches over two days - Saturday 11am to 2am the next morning and Sunday 11am to 9pm. In addition to a show badge and lanyard, pre-registration also allows entry into the multiple convention ballrooms a full hour before general entry begins. All games at the show are free play, meaning the single entry fee is good for two full days of arcade gaming and pinball action.



As in recent years, Marco Specialties had a rather large area showcasing the latest pinball offerings and parts.

These days California Extreme essentially takes over the entire Hyatt Regency in addition to parts of the adjoining Santa Clara Convention center. The entire main ballroom of the Hyatt is configured as a single massive showroom that contains the bulk of the games as well as vendor tables throughout. A smaller ballroom just around the corner features more games and vendors, including the cocktail tables and smaller size cabaret machines. On the other side of the Hyatt lobby a conference room is used for speakers, panels, and screenings with a lineup that changes every year. Upstairs above the conference room is where the pinball tournament is held, in a separate room that frees up space in the main ballroom for more games. Across from the pinball tournament room there is yet another large ballroom that features console games, more vendors, and live music on Saturday night. Admission grants access to all of this, however some of the tournaments throughout the weekend do have entry fees that are used as prize pools.



A typical row at California Extreme will feature a wealth of arcade history and they're all there to be played.

It's impossible to showcase everything that California Extreme offers in text or pictures, it really must be experienced. There truly are hundreds upon hundreds of games to play, including prototypes, extreme rarities, and the occasional one-off. As I live within a few minutes of the show, my wife and I made the usual drive up on Saturday morning about a half hour before pre-registration show admission. Badge pick up was smoother than in recent years but I think it had more to do with my name range having nobody in line compared to every other name block. Show organizers stress on picking up your badge as early as possible to help alleviate the congestion but there's usually still a massive line to get up to where individual name brackets break off. Part of this is due to how narrow the hallway is outside of the main entrance and of course the massive attendance the show has grown to. I spent all of Saturday at the show, only leaving briefly to have lunch and dinner at nearby restaurants. Unlike in years previous, I did not attend any of the speaker panels or live music, instead remaining in the two larger ballrooms to play games. Sunday was very much the same, although I wasn't feeling well in the afternoon and headed home for awhile before returning for the last few hours of the show that evening. For this year's annual show report, I'll be focusing on a few things of interest I encountered on the show floor.



The very impressive Darius II project that Norcal Arcade Club brought to the show, running on a large projection screen (insert)

A standout game that was located in the smaller ballroom was an amazing implementation of **Darius II**. Released by Taito in 1989, the massive arcade cabinet originally utilized two monitors and a diagonal mirror to give the game a seamless

widescreen display. The setup at California Extreme used special FPGA (field-programmable gate array) hardware to allow single-monitor widescreen output from an original Darius II arcade board. This is all connected to a CRT projector from the same era as the game, allowing it to be played with no latency. Even the projector was specially modified to replicate the visual aspect ratio of the original display, allowing for a completely seamless, single screen, hardware based solution to run original Darius II hardware as it was intended. Additionally the game was modified to have a free play option, as the original did not include a setting for it. It was a privilege to play not only such a rare game but to be able to play it in a way that faithfully replicates how it was played originally. That said, I was reminded by my abysmal gameplay that I stink at every Darius game other than Gaiden and G-Darius. I did have a decent run with another show attendee but I admit that he was absolutely carrying me nearly the entire time.



Power Drift (left), Thunder Blade (center), Time Traveler (right)

Sega was very well represented this year with a couple games I hadn't played in quite a long time. There's usually an **Out Run** machine at the show, and this year was no different, but the steering wheel shaker motor on the one there this year was working - and I forgot how much it adds to the experience of playing the game. **Power Drift** is one I hadn't seen in awhile, although I've never cared much for the game but I couldn't remember why. That was until I played a few games and it all came back to me. While very impressive visually, I never got a handle on playing smoothly and quickly recalled that was the same problem I've always had with the game. The cabinet itself wasn't at fault, as the machine at the show was in very nice condition and playing correctly. I guess I'll keep my insane Sega super scaler driving game love relegated to the equally hard to find Radmobile. **Thunder Blade** on the other hand is a game I've always had a soft spot for, as forgotten as it seems to be in the Sega arcade catalog. The sense of scale and depth in Thunder Blade is honestly one of the most impressive of Sega's arcade games that used sprites to create a 3D perspective, only eclipsed by Galaxy Force in my opinion. The last time I played Thunder Blade on an arcade machine was at this lame indoor batting cages and mini golf place, right after I moved to the central valley over twenty-five years ago. Their arcade had like ten machines but one of them was the deluxe Thunder Blade cabinet on the skids with the full flight stick. There was also a **Time Traveler** this year, running on Sega's Hologram LaserDisc system. The game may be a strange novelty but I still love seeing one in action. Just the sound of the game brings back memories of first encountering a newly delivered cabinet at the massive Tilt that used to reside at the now dead Valco mall in Cupertino. Lastly there was an absolutely beautiful **Turbo** upright that was completely working and a joy to play.



Johnny Mnemonic (left), Indianapolis 500 (center), The Big Lebowski (right)

After returning to the show on Sunday evening after heading home for a couple hours, I heard an announcement that the pinball tournament events had been completed for the weekend and the tournament room was open for general free play. My wife and I headed up to the tournament room to find a few of my favorite tables and one I thought I would never encounter. The machines in the tournament room were in absolutely beautiful showcase condition. Two of my favorites, **Johnny Mnemonic** and **The Shadow**, are games that truly live or die based upon having everything working correctly on them. The examples here played like they were factory fresh. While the big-budget film revival of The Shadow was ultimately a flop, the pinball adaptation is a fast and challenging game with tons of depth. Most seem to hate the Keanu Reeves sci-fi film Johnny Mnemonic, which meant that it was a license that didn't draw people in once the pinball machine was released. This is a shame, as with The Shadow, Johnny Mnemonic is an outstanding table that perfectly integrates the license (for better or worse depending on opinion) into a deep and rewarding game. Personally I've always enjoyed the movie and it was a treat to be able to once again play a Johnny Mnemonic pinball in such beautiful condition. **Indianapolis 500** is another of my favorite tables and one that doesn't seem to get much attention although it perfectly integrates its theme. It's not the deepest or most challenging game but it's pure fun with spectacular flow and exemplification of what made Indy Car so exciting during its release era.

However if there is one pinball machine at California Extreme this year that truly brought in the crowd, it was **The Big Lebowski**. Standing atop its matching themed rug, the machine sat at the center of the room, the true showpiece of the

tournament area. If you've ever played Shenmue II and recall how the After Burner machine was in its own special area, that's the vibe I got from how The Big Lebowski was presented. Designed by the small independent team at Dutch Pinball, The Big Lebowski created a storm of interest from the day it was announced. One of those "why didn't anyone else think of doing a pin about that" licenses, collectors and players waited with bated breath for the day the games would actually ship. However a wash of behind-the-scenes production, manufacturing, and financing issues lead to less than fifty of the machines actually being built and delivered before massive legal infighting began between all parties involved. The future of the game remains up in the air to this day and it truly is a shame as the game is a ton of fun. The theming integration, the artwork, the playfield toys - it just feels good. It's fun in a way where a game can be pure fun for an adult audience. Although it doesn't look like it'll happen, I really would love to see the game get a full production and support path so more of them can get out to the public.

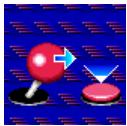


One final shoutout has to do with this bartop cabinet that has made an appearance every year of recent memory. It always has a rather non-mainstream game in it but its eclectic mix over the years has matched right up with games I personally enjoy. One year it housed Tiger-Heli, my favorite of Toaplan's shooters although admittedly far from a spectacular game. Another it featured Alcon (also known as Slap Fight), a very important Toaplan shooter that combined elements from Xevious and Gradius to essentially create the template for vertical shooters that would follow it. This year the cabinet was running **Son of Phoenix**, another of my favorite obscure shooters. Originally released by Sega as Repulse, Son of Phoenix is a regional bootleg released by Associated Overseas MFR, Inc that I first discovered when setting up my classic vertical MAME cabinet years ago. It plays a bit like the later Space Invaders games (Majestic Twelve for instance) with the player controlling a cannon that can be moved around the lower portion of the screen. One button fires and the other puts up a temporary force field for defense. What makes the game stand out are the variety of enemies and the speed in which they appear and attack. The sound effects are also pretty unique. Son of Phoenix is far from a classic but if you've never played it, I recommend giving it a try.

One criticism I have for this year was how the cocktail tables were laid out in the smaller room. Not only were they way too close to one another to allow space to have a chair on each side, they were in a doubled up configuration. This meant you had to climb over the chair on the adjacent machine to get access to the game on the side opposite the aisle. It also meant that if someone sat the at adjacent machine, you were now trapped and couldn't get up without asking them to get up from their game. Think of airline seats but arcade cocktail tables laid out like that. This made the games both hard to get to and difficult to enjoy. I was surprised by this, as there's usually plenty of room in the smaller ballroom. However there was a Virtual Reality demonstration set up next to the cocktail row, which appeared to reduce the amount of space for the tables. Adding a bit of insult to injury, the VR area operated in a specific time window, meaning its allocated space was often unoccupied, especially on Saturday evening. Sadly the cocktail tables seem to have become a bit of a backwater at the show. Years ago they were outside the main exhibit hall, which was great but people were constantly abusing the machines and leaving food and drink on them, which is simply asinine behavior. I agree that bringing the cocktail tables back inside where they have a reasonable amount of protection from morons was a great move, but they really need more space as many of us love to play them and they provide a moment of rest and relaxation while still playing games. Heck, the Galaxian cocktail table I used to own was purchased from the first California Extreme I attended back in 2008.

I can't think of many other events that I've attended for so long, with so much regularity, that I still look forward to every year. California Extreme is simply a great time for all ages. My annual show report is in no way an all-encompassing narrative of what CAX has to offer. There is so much to see and do beyond simply playing hundreds of arcade and pinball games. Panels, speakers, screenings, live music, tutorials, demonstrations, seminars, vendors, competitions, conversations - there really is a massive variety of things to see and do. I want to especially commend the show staff and volunteers working the doors for way fewer incidents of food and drink coming into the ballrooms and much stricter wristband verification - they were really on top of it this year. On the other hand, I don't commend the dude that I swear blew chunks in front of one of the VirtualOn machines on Sunday morning and then acted like nothing happened. That wasn't cool, man. As always, a tremendously huge thanks to the Extreme Team, exhibitors, volunteers and everyone else who comes together to host this show every year! I can't wait for 2020.

More information about California Extreme can be found at <http://www.caextreme.org>



The Controller Chronicles - RCA Studio II

by [Todd Friedman](#)

Not all video game home console systems were successful. In fact, back in the mid to late 1970's, most were new to the everyday gamer and a gamble to purchase based on its price and reputation. There were a handful of companies trying to make the next best thing, one of these examples is the RCA Studio II. This home console was released to the public in January of 1977. The graphics were basic black and white, and there were not a lot of games to choose from. When most console systems were trying to perfect the controller, RCA stuck with the button keypads to do the necessary movements to the game. There are two sides to the console, labeled A and B. Each side has ten buttons which are numbered as a telephone with the 0 at the bottom. A single button in the middle, "Clear" will handle the reset of the ongoing game. This console, like the Atari 5200 has only one cord that connects both the video and audio together. The experiment to have the games in black and white could have been the reason for the short life cycle of the RCA system, or the controller was one

that users did not seem to grasp and understand. The price itself was another reason, where back in 1977 was sold for \$149.95, which in today's money would be like spending over 600 dollars on a system. It was a very hefty price for what is was offering to the public. The RCA Studio II only had 16 games. Five games were built into the machine (Addition, Bowling, Doodle, Freeway and Patterns). I will focus on three games and how the controller was used to play these early console titles.



The first game that I feel people will recognize is Space War. This shooting game has been recreated many times for other platforms, but the RCA Studio II was one of the first to create a home version. The graphics could not be any more basic. There is really not any complex rules or instructions to play the game. It can be plugged in and turned on ready to play, however, the controller can be a bit confusing with all the button on each side of it. Here is really the breakdown of how to use it effectively.

Once you insert the cartridge and turn on the system, you will need to hit the "clear" button to launch the game and then button 1 to start. You begin the game with 20 rocket missiles, needing to shoot the enemy spaceships. To fire one of the rockets you will hit the number 2 button on the left-hand side of the controller. The tricky part and the most interactive, is that you can control the missiles while they are being shot. This task happens when you press button 4 or 6 on the right-hand side of the controller. 4 will move the missile "left" and 6 will move it "right." The game ends when you use all the rockets or all the enemy ships pass. The player with the highest score wins. Space War for the RCA mixed it up a little for a more competitive gameplay by making another version on the cartridge. This game is called "Vertical Intercept". The controls are a bit different than the normal gameplay. This game has both players on the same screen at once and one player uses the left numeric pad and the other uses the right pad. To fire the missiles uses button two on each side. Button 3 starts the game. The player with the highest score at the end of the round wins. Space War is a fun interactive game that can be played alone or with friends.

Driving games are always a huge hit for gamers. Whether it's an arcade, home console or PC. There have been so many driving games created in the gaming age, but it is fun to look back at some of the originals. One of these is a game that comes built in with the RCA Studio II system, Freeway. Freeway is your basic vertical driving game which involves dodging the oncoming cars. You have 2 minutes to complete the race. Accidents will lower your score and slow you down. The higher the score the better and you can compete with others. The controls depend on the number of players, 1 or 2. In a 1 player game you will hit button 4 on the left side to setup game, and then press 0 to start. You steer the car using the right-side control pad with button 4 moving the car left and button 6 moving the button right. To make the car move faster or slower you can hit the 2 button (faster) or 8 button (slower) on the left-hand keypad. It's almost like using a keyboard for PC users where you need both hands to interact the car with the keypad. If you decide to play with another, one player will use the left side and the other the right. Scoring will be displayed at the end of the game. Scoring will vary depending on 1 or 2 player games. The basic graphics and the beat the clock scoring make this racing game an exciting addition to the system. Even the most basic driving game can be fun and complete. Freeway is definitely one of those.



Space War (left), Freeway (center), Bowling (right)

Another game that is built into the system at launch is a sport I am personally passionate about, Bowling. I have been bowling since I was 8 years old, I have 13 perfect games and three 800 series rings. Bowling has been a huge part of my life and I try to play as many of the bowling games as I can. I enjoy playing live at the lanes as well as home on the consoles. Bowling for the RCA system is one pre-Atari 2600 where bowling really took off on the home consoles. However, this version is just as fun and complete to play. Bowling is one of the games that is only two players to play. If you are alone you can play as both, taking turns on each shot. The controls are similar to other RCA games as the 1st player uses the left side and the 2nd player uses the right side of the controller. The rules are just like real bowling as you get two shots to knock down (hit) all the pins. If you strike you only get one turn. When it's your turn the ball on the left side will move up and down. You have three options at this point. You can hit button 2 to hook the ball upwards, 5 to throw the ball straight or 8 to hook the ball downwards. This is key to the strategy of scoring high. It will take a lot of practice to master the timing of the shots. As in the game of bowling, there are 10 frames and a perfect score is 300. At the end of the game, the player with the highest score wins. Sometimes I feel as a golden age gamer, that the more basic the graphics and controls, the more fun the game is. This version of bowling is no exception. It's simple to play, but hard to master. This makes the game fun to play multiple times and with friends and family.

The RCA Studio II was a short-lived system, it really only made it a year. With the new systems like the Atari 2600 to follow and the huge price of the system, this made consumers shy away and not purchase it, which made sales really low and finally forced to shut down. Still, in its short reign, there were some fun games and great entertainment back in the late 1970's. The controller, as unusual as it is, did not really scare other manufacturers away, for example, the Intellivision system uses the numeric keypad as a controller as well and by some is considered one of the best early console systems made. Graphics aside and the use of black and white, these games are still worth a try. If you are one of the few to still have one, I recommend plugging it in and playing with friends and family one more time to relive the early days of gaming.



Final Effort

Strength is fading fast
Our hero falls down the cliff
The villain guffaws

Last Life

The final heart fades
Life disappears; screen goes black
One word: CONTINUE?

Massive Storage

Pocket dimensions
Hold very many items
A hero's best friend

Another Chance

Collect rings or coins
A milestone is achieved
One hundred gives life

Not All is Lost

A face full of shock
Hero is back from his fall
Revenge is soon nigh

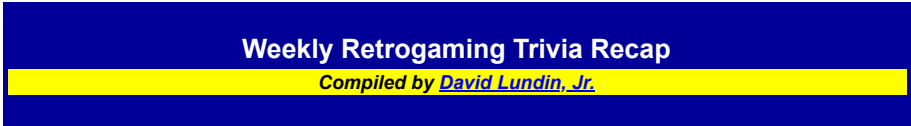
Ultimate Confrontation

Power-ups punish
The dastardly last villain
His defeat brings peace

A Good Game Over

Evil is vanquished
Triumphant sounds fill the air
GAME OVER well earned

Have a video game haiku of your own? [Send it our way!](#)



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:

06/28/2019 - WEEK 121

Question: The original Atari 7800 ProSystem release included what game as a pack-in?

07/05/2019 - WEEK 122

Question: What balloon popping Namco arcade game requires players to pedal for motion?

07/12/2019 - WEEK 123

Question: In Chrono Trigger, how many Silver Points are awarded for defeating Gato?

07/19/2019 - WEEK 124

Question: What three-player arcade game used three trackballs on a single cabinet for player input?

07/26/2019 - WEEK 125

Question: In an undefeated run of Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!, which three boxers must be challenged twice?

08/02/2019 - WEEK 126

Question: In Crystal Castles (1983), a Gem Eater can only be destroyed when it is doing what?

08/09/2019 - WEEK 127

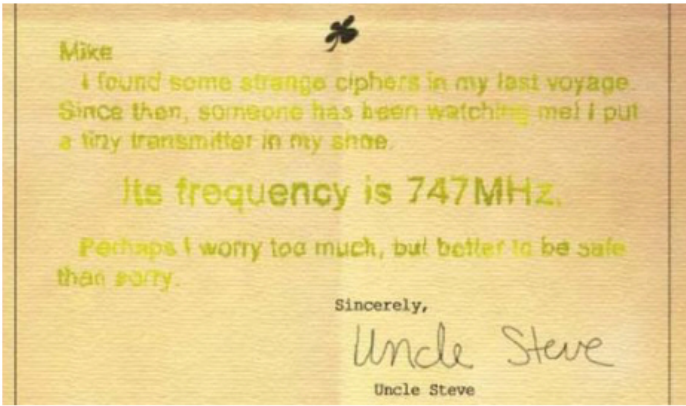
Question: Infamously revealed by dipping a piece of documentation in water, what frequency allows Sub-C to locate Dr. Jones in StarTropics (NES)?

08/16/2019 - WEEK 128

Question: What 1987 arcade game served as an updated remake of Atari's classic Asteroids?

08/23/2019 - WEEK 129

Question: What Exidy arcade game is named after a character with dual natures?



Gato serves as an introduction to the battle system in Chrono Trigger (left), StarTropics featured the lone NES "feely" required for game advancement (right)

Answers:

- Week 121 Answer: Pole Position II.
- Week 122 Answer: Prop Cycle (1996).
- Week 123 Answer: Fifteen.
- Week 124 Answer: Rampart (1990).
- Week 125 Answer: Piston Honda, Don Flamenco, and Bald Bull.
- Week 126 Answer: Eating a gem.
- Week 127 Answer: 747MHz.
- Week 128 Answer: Blasteroids.
- Week 129 Answer: Pepper II, the "two" in relation to the angel / devil duality of the player character, Pepper.



Confusingly titled, Exidy's Pepper II was a play on the dual nature of the game's protagonist

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 your question is selected to be featured, you will be entered in our year-end prize drawing!



In anticipation of the upcoming release of Shenmue III, I recently completed the HD remakes of Shenmue and Shenmue II on PlayStation 4. I had played through both these games countless times, on every format they had previously been released on. That includes playing a hacked version of Shenmue II on the Dreamcast that had the English dialogue from the Xbox version inserted into it, requiring the use of larger capacity CD-R media to get as close as possible to the size of a Dreamcast GD-Rom. The original Shenmue played on PS4 without a hitch on that I could detect and was as enjoyable as ever. Shenmue II on the other hand, had a number of timing and input issues related to the more advanced Quick Timer Events (QTE) the sequel featured. I could live with the timing being a little off but in many instances entirely incorrect button combinations would be displayed on screen, along with much tighter time requirements for input. The worst example of this was during the optional hidden fight with Izumi Takano, which allows the duck racing minigame to be accessed. When Izumi winds up her special attack, the only way to counter it is to input two commands consisting of the two horizontal face buttons (Square and Circle in this case), then the two vertical face buttons (Triangle and X), which must be done accurately and immediately when prompted. The problem arises from the HD remake of the game displaying improper and seemingly random QTE input requests, including prompting use of the directional pad in this instance. This means if you've never played the game previously or didn't look up the correct sequence online you would never be able to complete this part of the game. In essence it's a game breaking issue created by the HD conversion.

That got me to thinking about HD remakes of games from a couple generations back. For the most part people request them due to the change in television technology between now and when they were originally released. It doesn't seem to be so much a desire to have a game remade but instead have an older game reworked to be accurately playable on modern HD televisions via HDMI output. Effectively the desire is to future-proof these games, at least for another decade or so. In other words, the remake is more or less a replacement for the original from its release point forward. When the remake process introduces bugs that weren't present in the original game, to the point where they cripple part of the original experience, I believe it does more harm than if the game was never remade in the first place. Don't get me wrong, I'm glad that the previous two Shenmue games were remade for current display standards, but they're far from a replacement for the original releases due to these unaddressed technical issues. Have you encountered a similar issue with a remake of an older game? If so, drop me a line about it!

Thank you once again for reading The Retrogaming Times. We'll be back on November 1st with our next issue, the final for 2019. 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!

See You Next Game!



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