

THE BIMONTHLY RETROGAMING HOBBYIST NEWSLETTER
TWENTY-THIRD ISSUE - NOVEMBER 2019

CHEER AND MERRIMENT RETURN AGAIN!

The Retrogaming Times
- The Bimonthly Retrogaming Hobbyist Newsletter -

The Retrogaming Times

Twenty-Third Issue - November 2019

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Prepare to Qualify

by David Lundin, Jr.

Thank you for your patience as this issue goes live just over a week late! While a publication delay is never an intention, this one was unfortunately a requirement. At the end of September the opportunity was floated by my wife and I to relocate into a much bigger space in the apartment community where we reside. This was always a goal sooner rather than later but it was unexpectedly presented out of the blue and to that end had a very narrow turnaround window. The full-on relocation fell right around the end of October, during the time when I complete final editing and assembly of a newsletter issue. I communicated this both directly to our staff as well as through out social media channels to our readership, but the relocation was a larger undertaking than I had estimated. As I'm now beginning to settle into my new location, things are sorted enough to where this issue of The Retrogaming Times can finally be released.

We close out 2019 with new features and returning faces. Things begin with Merman's detailed showcase of Commodore 64 offerings courtesy of Parker Brothers, in the first of a multi-part More C64! feature. A new tradition is formed as a group of The Retrogaming Times staff come together to share their holiday gift picks in our first annual Holiday Gift Guide, this issue's cover story. Jason "WauloK" Oakley reports on fun times had at the Newcastle Pinball Association Pinfest, an Australian pinball show. In a modification tutorial, support for NES peripherals can added to the Japanese AV Famicom with a couple simple and quick connections. The Controller Chronicles gets about as retro as possible as Todd Friedman covers the origins of the first home video game controller. Video Game Haiku returns to round out the year with more from Sean Robinson in a column that you can contribute to. All that and more are ahead in this issue of The Retrogaming Times!



Upcoming Events

Compiled by David Lundin, Jr.

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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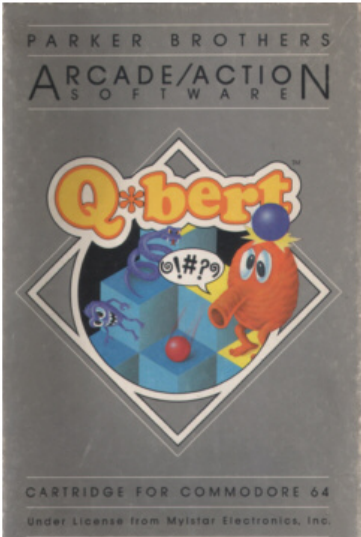
If there is a show or event you would like listed here, free of charge, please contact David directly at trt@classicplastic.net. Please include a short official blurb about your event along with any relevant links or contact information and it will be published in the next issue of The Retrogaming Times. 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!



Parker Brothers is of course most famous as a board game company, publishing the likes of Monopoly and Risk. But it underwent massive expansion in the 1970s and 1980s, moving into book publishing (with the Care Bears and Strawberry Shortcake), a record label and a range of electronic games. Initially its handheld releases were based on its own board games, but the launch of the Atari VCS console saw the company move into video games. A lucrative license to publish new games based on Star Wars was followed by a series of arcade conversions.

These then are the games published for the Commodore 64 by Parker Brothers. Several of these were only available on cartridge and are now highly collectible. These cartridges had a distinctive grey box and well made cover artwork, giving the range a distinct identity (perhaps inspired by Atari's own cartridge designs).

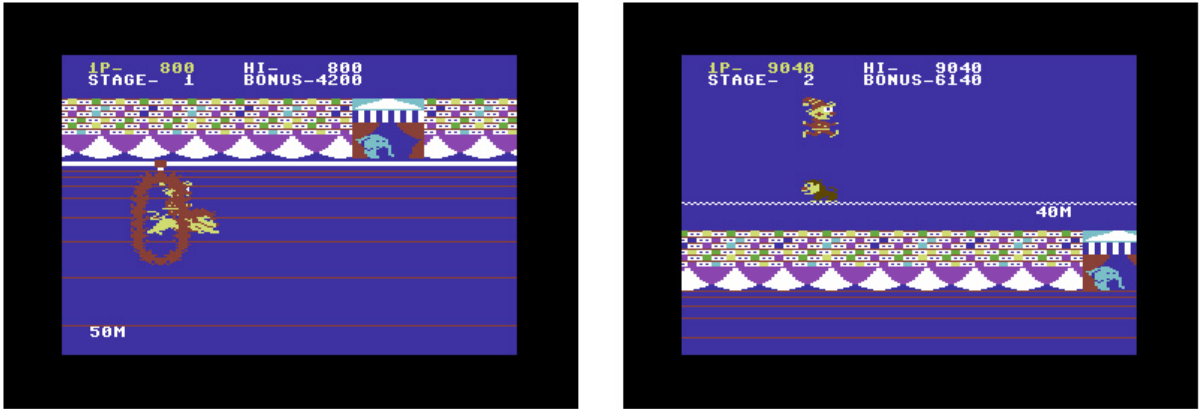


*The classic Parker Brothers logo, and the cover of the Q*Bert cartridge.*

Circus Charlie (1984)

This was licensed from the Konami coin-op, although it does omit the trampoline stage of the original. Charlie must perform five death-defying stunts to earn money and satisfy the crowd. Riding a lion through hoops of fire, walking the tightrope, rolling a ball, riding a horse and swinging from the trapeze, in each level there are other obstacles/animals to avoid and moneybags to collect. Completing all five stunts sends the game back to the start with higher difficulty. The graphics and music of the C64 version are quite good in comparison to the original, but gameplay is very tough - especially

as you are sent back to the start of a stunt every time you die.

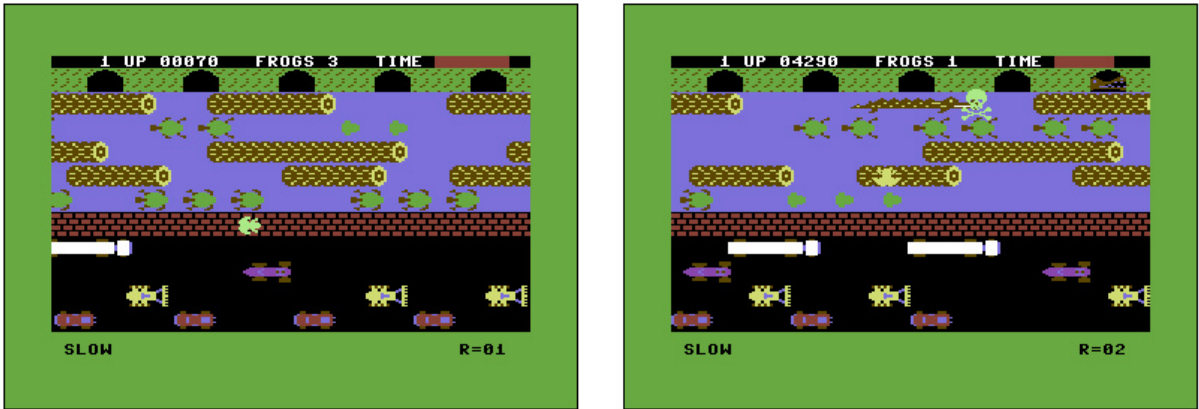


Riding the lion through a flaming hoop, and jumping over a monkey on the tightrope.

Frogger (1983)

This was a conversion of the arcade game, licensed direct from Sega (who distributed the game in the US). Parker Brothers apparently spent over \$10 million advertising their home versions, resulting in over three million sales across formats. Everyone knows the premise, with the frogs hopping across the busy road filled with cars and then the river filled with logs, turtles and alligators to reach their home. The C64 port was available on tape, disk and cartridge and is quite good; it features the classic music and most of the gameplay features. There is also a choice between slow and fast modes.

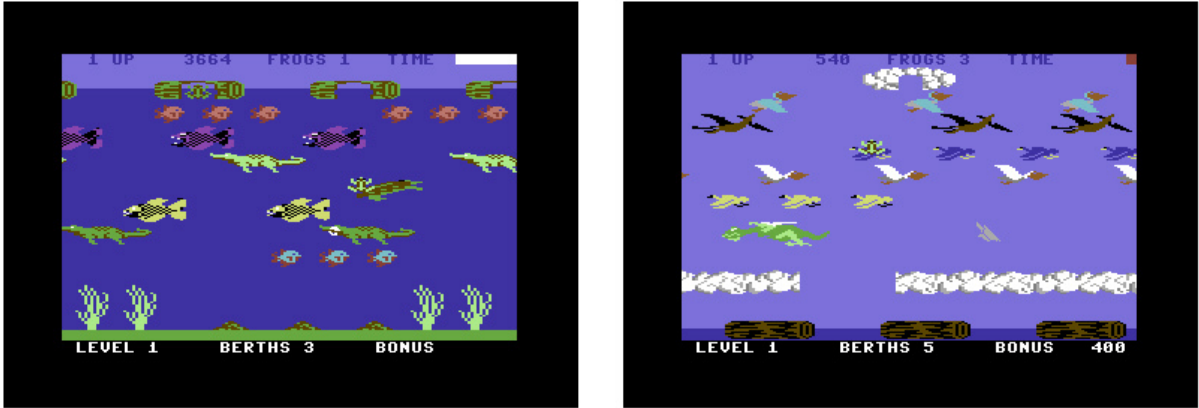
Fans of Frogger should check out the brilliant Frogger Arcade by Digital Monastery / Hokuto Force released at Christmas 2016 for the most accurate conversion on the C64.



Crossing the road, and being eaten by a crocodile.

Frogger II – ThreeDeep! (1984)

This was an original game marketed as a sequel. The three refers to the three screens the action takes place over, with the frogs trying to reach their "berths" at the top of the three screens. Starting in the pond, the frogs swim upwards then hop across the water's surface and finally climb on the back of birds up into the clouds. As the player completes levels, more hazards are added to each screen. A rapidly falling time limit makes this very difficult, and while the graphics are ok it is never as addictive as the original.



Hitching a ride with a turtle, and reaching the clouds on the third screen.

Gyruss (1984)

This was converted from the Konami coin-op. The player's ship must travel from the edge of the Solar System to Earth, destroying waves of fighters to warp closer. Bonus waves require you to shoot all the enemies for a big score boost. The 3D starfield was a clever effect, with the enemies scaling (getting larger and smaller) as they fly in and out of the middle of the screen. To achieve the number of enemies on screen, the C64 needed an early form of "multiplexer." This allowed more than eight sprites at once, by displaying them on alternate screen frames (once every 30th of a second on an NTSC screen). Although this does generate some flicker the effect is convincing. The C64 also has a brilliant tune, covering the arcade game's up-tempo version of Bach's Toccata and Fugue. Well worth playing.



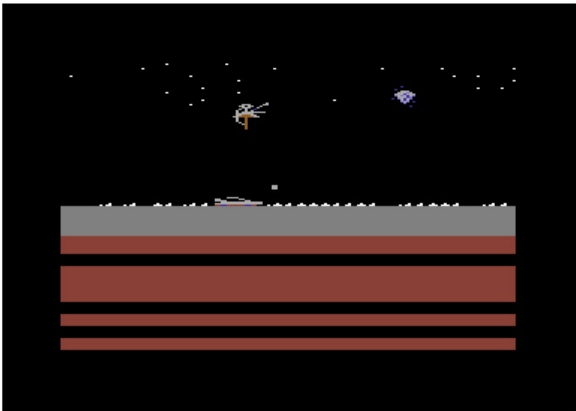
You cannot "see" half the enemy ships in this static screenshot, while the ship warps its way to Neptune.

James Bond 007 (1984)

Licensed from the famous film franchise, the game itself is heavily inspired by Moon Patrol and Scramble. Bond's vehicle can transform to be a car, submarine, spacecraft and plane, shooting enemies in front of or above it. Obstacles must be shot or jumped over. Scenes from four of the Bond films inspired the levels, with a short intro before each where the vehicle transforms:

- Diamonds Are Forever (1971): rescuing Tiffany Case from an oil rig.
- The Spy Who Loved Me (1977): destroying an underwater laboratory.
- Moonraker (1979): destroying satellites in space.
- For Your Eyes Only (1981): retrieving radio equipment from a sunken boat.

The average graphics are really off-putting, and the difficulty level is set way too high.

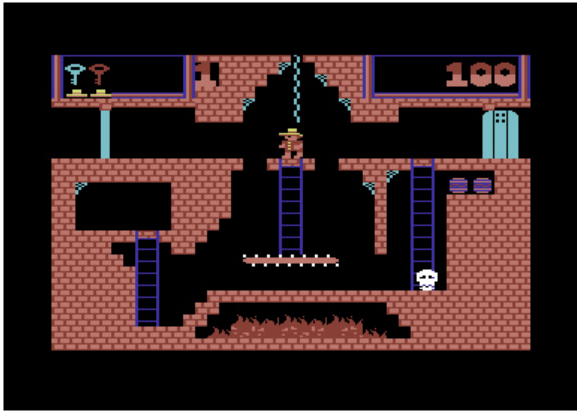


The intro to a level wishes you good luck, while Diamonds Are Forever has bonus diamonds to shoot.

Montezuma's Revenge (1984)

This challenging early platform game featured Panama Joe trying to steal jewels from the underground pyramid of Aztec emperor Montezuma II. Joe collects keys to open doors, torches to light dark rooms, swords to kill skulls and much more. The original game had been intended for the Atari 800 and filled 48K of memory, but Parker Brothers wanted to publish it on a 16K cartridge meaning many features were cut. The video game crash saw Parker cut costs further, finally releasing the Atari 800 and C64 versions on a "flippy" disk (one version on side A, the other on side B). With 99 rooms to explore before reaching the final treasure chamber, there is a big challenge here. The C64 version compares favourably with the Atari, particularly when it comes to the music (including snippets of Spanish Flea and La Cucaracha). Perhaps the most frustrating aspect is that Joe can die from falling too far, but at least you have infinite continues (allowing you to carry on a game from the last screen you reach).

And for those not familiar with the term, Montezuma's Revenge is also a colloquial expression for "traveler's diarrhea" contracted while visiting Mexico...

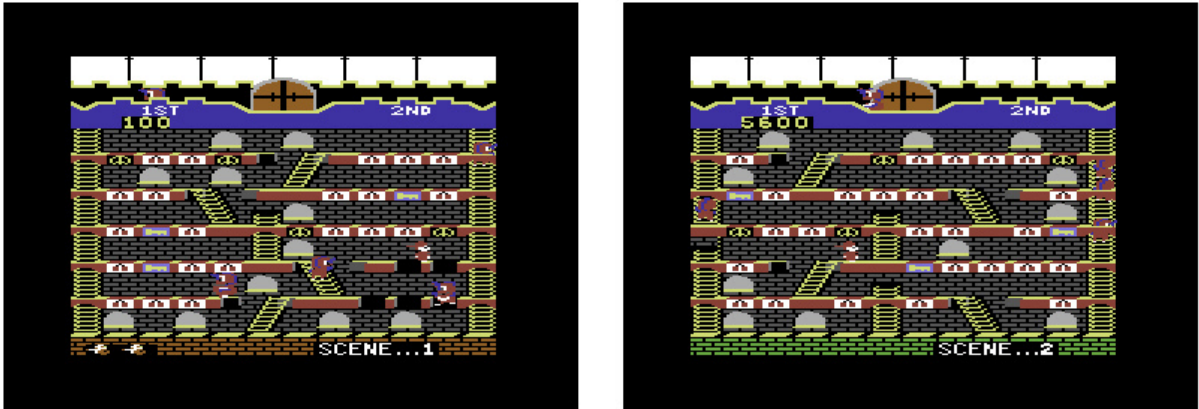


One door has already been opened on the first screen, while more keys can be found here.

Mr. Do's Castle (1984)

This was the sequel to the classic arcade game, but had originally started life as a prototype called Knights vs. Unicorns before the clown was added. Mr. Do has to collect all the cherries or defeat all the monsters to complete each castle level. He does this by knocking blocks out of the platforms with his hammer. Enemies are killed by dropping a block on them, but they will get stuck in a gap for a short time (filling it in when they struggle free). There are also "skull" platforms, where hitting the skulls at both ends will "zap" any enemy standing on that platform and knock out any enemy standing below it. Collecting three keys reveals the shield at the top of the battlements. By taking the shield, the enemies change form and become letters of the word EXTRA - and they can now be killed with the hammer. Completing EXTRA earns an extra life. The C64 conversion is very impressive, with great graphics and sound - but it is very tough, with fast-moving enemies and

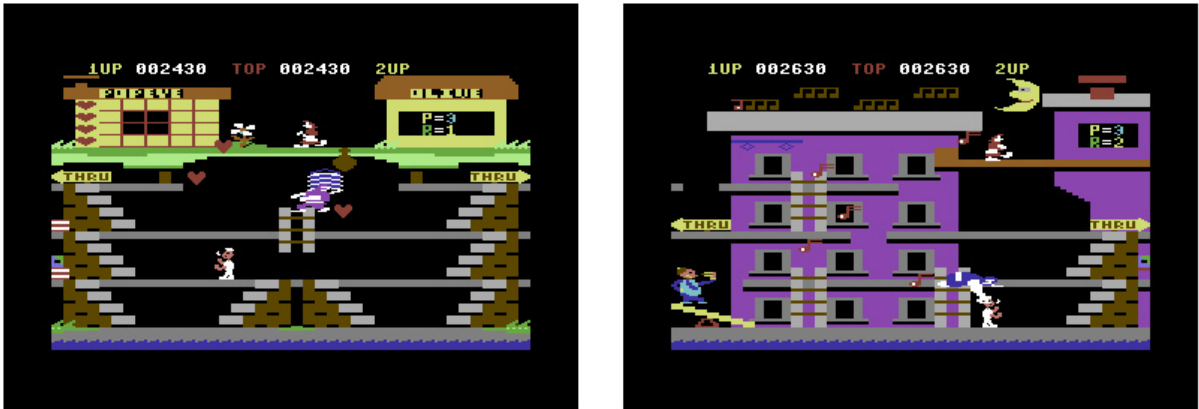
short time limits to kill the EXTRA letters. This is another game that is worth checking out if you haven't played it before.



The first two scenes have different layouts, with some diagonal ladders that can be "knocked" to move them.

Popeye (1983)

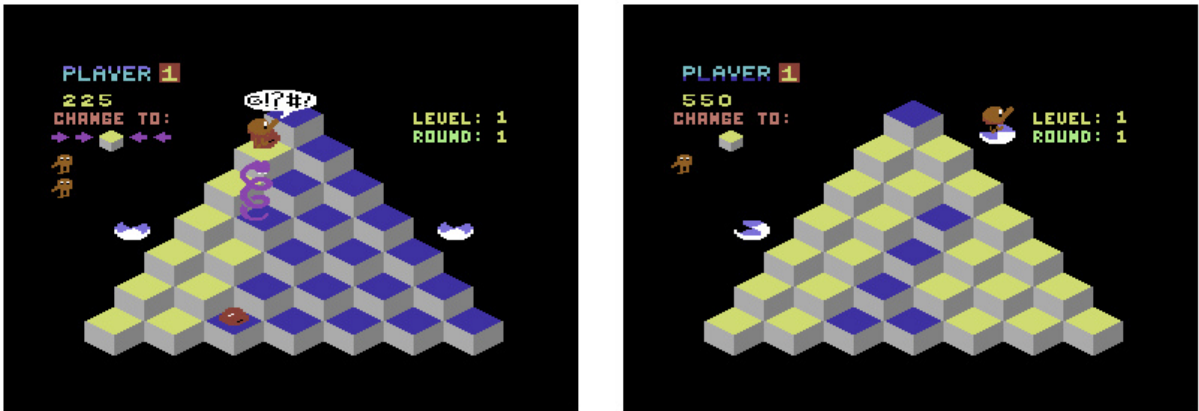
This is a conversion of the classic Nintendo arcade game, with Popeye having to rescue Olive Oyl over three different levels (as one is missing from this conversion). It was also a launch title for the Famicom in Japan. On the first level Olive sends out love hearts (later levels have music notes or the word HELP) that fall down the screen, and Popeye must collect them before they reach the water. Bluto (aka Brutus) patrols the platforms and takes a life on contact, but Popeye has two ways to fight back. The punch ball can be punched, causing the weight to fall - and if it hits Bluto he is knocked off the stage for a short while. Or Popeye can collect the Spinach can to power up, making Bluto run away; catch him and he is sent flying and disappears for a while. The Sea Hag also appears at the screen edges, throwing bottles at Popeye (who can punch them away if timed correctly). Wimpy appears on level 2 on a seesaw, acting as a counterweight that can send Popeye higher. This is quite difficult to play but looks and sounds very close to the arcade game.



Catching hearts on level 1, and music notes on level 2.

Q*Bert (1983)

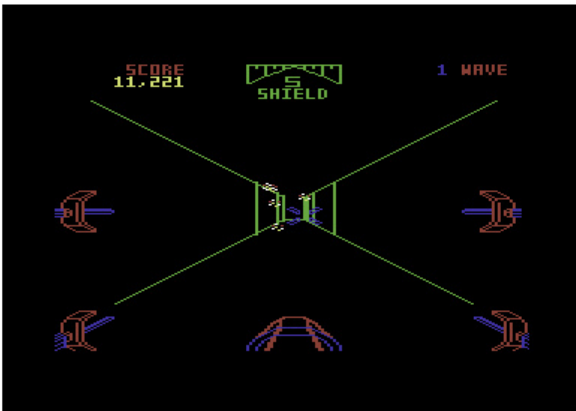
Originally called Snots and Boogers, Q*Bert became famous for the speech bubble and accompanying gibberish sounds that the arcade version made. The aim is to make all the cubes of the pyramid match the target colour, by Q*Bert hopping on them one or more times. Enemies follow him down the cubes or hatch from falling eggs. Fortunately there are two spinners that the orange hero can use; the enemy will follow him off the edge and fall to their doom, while Q*Bert rides the spinner back to the top of the pyramid.



Q*Bert "swears" in gibberish when he dies, and rides a spinner disc back to the top of level 1.

Star Wars - The Arcade Game (1984)

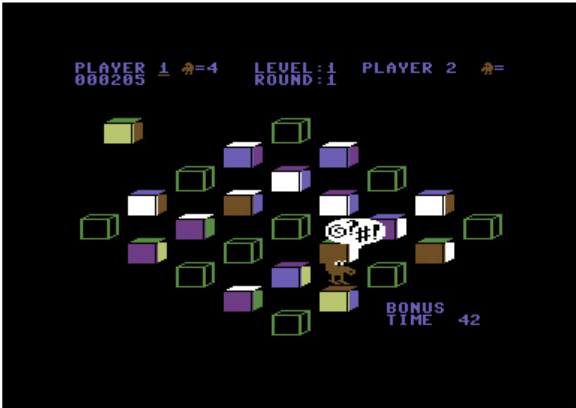
As mentioned earlier, Parker Brothers negotiated a license to make new games based on Star Wars. But this was actually a conversion of the Atari vector graphic arcade game. On the C64 it does not use vectors though; sprites are used instead. The end result is faster moving than Domark's 1987 conversion (which did draw everything with vectors) but is not as accurate. The end result is not quite convincing, with the fireballs not appearing to be very big when they "hit" you; it simply becomes a matter of timing rather than judging based on their size. It does copy the increasing difficulty of the arcade game. At first you only face the TIE fighters attacking, then the trench (without horizontal catwalks). At higher levels you also have to destroy the laser towers on the surface before entering the trench with catwalks to fly over or under. It is fun for a quick blast, but not worth paying a lot for the cartridge.



Fireballs need to be shot down, while the trench movement is limited.

Q*Bert's Qubes [Preview] (1985)

Although Parker Brothers published the Atari VCS and Coleco versions in 1985, the manual contained instructions for C64 and Atari computer versions that never reached the shop shelves. In 2017 the website Games That Weren't was able to find a preview version of the C64 game. The gameplay is slightly different, in that Q*Bert must match the cube colours in lines of five rather than simply making all of them match. Enemies hop around or hang off cubes to block his progress.



The preview contains a short tutorial before you start, and Q*Bert still swears when he dies.

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So, the Parker Brothers games on the C64 are a mixed bag. There are a couple of really fun titles but also some really disappointing ones. As a collector, the cartridges will hold their value and are worth tracking down if they are boxed. The Frogger II - ThreeDeep disk is also quite interesting, being a "flippy" with the Atari version on the other side.

In the second part of this feature we will look at the board game properties belonging to Parker Brothers (and related companies) that were converted into C64 games.



The Retrogaming Times 2019 Holiday Gift Guide

by Merman, [Jason "WauloK" Oakley](#), [David Lundin, Jr.](#),
[Donald Lee](#), [Eugenio "TrekMD" Angueira](#) - Introduction by David Lundin, Jr.

In my opinion there was no better time for video game periodicals than the 1990's into the very early 2000's. The format had become more professional in presentation, there were dozens of different publications that filled every video gaming niche, and you had smaller independent magazines right along side official manufacturer mouthpieces. I tried to read as many of them as I could throughout their runs but the one time of the year I made sure to read every print publication I could get my hands on was during the holiday season. The holiday gift guide / holiday buyer's guide issues were always my favorite seasonal inclusion in video game magazines and on game review shows. Sure they were trying in part to push products from their sponsors but it was also when you got to know more about the interests of the writers and personalities behind the productions. These issues were also always pure fun as the industry would be pulling out all the stops to entice potential consumers.

Since re-launching The Retrogaming Times in 2016, we haven't really established any traditions as previous incarnations of the newsletter had developed over time. That changes with this issue and the inclusion of our first Holiday Gift Guide. The intent is for this to become a regular feature every November and begin an annual tradition of our staff each selecting a holiday gift recommendation. For this year the call went out to anyone who had previously contributed to any "Retrogaming Times" newsletter over the past twenty years. That will hold true going into the future, so if you missed out this time and are Retrogaming Times alumni, [let me know](#) and expect an e-mail next September for your 2020 holiday pick! With that said we have a wonderfully diverse selection of gift recommendations this year!

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Merman:

You may know me from my regular More C64 columns here in The Retrogaming Times. One thing that makes my life easier for the C64 is the amazing 1541 Ultimate II, which allows me to load games from a MicroSD card or a USB stick. But when I was approached by Geek Line Publishing to be part of their amazing Super Nintendo Anthology book, I needed a way to play games on the real hardware as well as emulation.



That's where my recommendation, the **SD2SNES**, comes in. Developed by KRIKzz, the hardware resembles a standard SNES cartridge. (Mine is in the PAL form, but a US version is available.) A small slot in the top accepts the SD card, and anything over 8GB is large enough to store the whole SNES back catalogue - as well as homebrew and fan translations. The in-game "hooks" allow certain key combinations to reset the game, return to the menu or enable/disable cheats. Best of all the firmware continues to be updated, and the project website (<https://sd2snes.de>) has helpful lists of incompatibility problems. The SD2SNES now supports the SuperFX and SA-1 (accelerator chip) games. It really is a great way to experience many different games.

Official web store:

<https://krikzz.com/store/home/27-sd2snes.html>

List of licensed dealers overseas:

<https://krikzz.com/store/content/6-dealers>

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Jason "WauloK" Oakley:

If you're a real retro-geek and love all things about old computers, you can't go past **Old Skool Pixels**. Mike Berry creates designs based on retro computer games from Paradroid to Manic Miner, Pac-Man to Ghosts 'n Goblins and my favourite: Boulder Dash! You can buy a 3D generated photo for your wall, a calendar, coffee mugs and more!



I got the Boulder Dash coffee mug for my last birthday and love it! Mike takes great care to create designs true to the original game on Commodore 64, ZX Spectrum or Arcade machines. He illustrates and renders them in 3D and they really look amazing. There's so many to choose from, your biggest problem will be how many can you buy at once. I'm tempted by the glorious Wizball panorama print at 20" x 60" size.

Official site and store:

<http://www.oldskoolpixels.com>

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David Lundin, Jr:

My pick is a little out there but is the perfect stocking stuffer for a specific gamer looking to replace a specific piece of hardware. Released as a popular add-on for the Nintendo Famicom, the Famicom Disk System (FDS) allowed games to be distributed on magnetic floppy disks, a novel concept for a console. Not only did this allow games to be theoretically limitless in size, it made production far less costly and those savings were passed on to Japanese consumers. Unfortunately time has not been kind to the format, both due to the nature of low cost magnetic media and an overly complex disk drive design. This is a shame, as in addition to playing host to the origins of The Legend of Zelda, Kid Icarus, Metroid and many others, the Disk System adds unique audio hardware to the Famicom that the current generation of flashcarts cannot accurately replicate at this time. Loopy of the NESDev forums approached this problem from a different angle. Rather than attempting to emulate the entire Disk System component soup to nuts, he instead would replace the weak links: the disks and disk drive.



The result of Loopy's work is the **FDSStick**, a USB based hardware solution that completely replaces the FDS disk drive and acts as a flash memory device for FDS disks all in one tiny package. The advantage of the FDSStick over cartridge-based FDS emulation is that it uses actual Famicom Disk System hardware (either the FDS RAM Adapter or the built in RAM Adapter of the Twin Famicom) for the interface, meaning accurate sound production and timing. As far as the Famicom is concerned, it's just reading data off an FDS disk. Roughly the size of a USB thumb drive, the FDSStick connects via USB to a Windows PC using a free FDSStick loader program. Point the loader to where the disk images (in .FDS format) are located, tell it to apply them, and it will automatically flash the FDSStick with the selected disk images. The current version of the FDSStick contains 256Mbit internal flash memory, allowing it to hold up to 512 disk "sides" - more than enough space for the entire FDS library. Disconnect from the PC, plug the other side into the Famicom RAM Adapter, start up the Famicom and you'll be greeted with a slick menu of what is on the FDSStick, similar to what is seen with an EverDrive N8 or PowerPak. Pick a game and it will load as if you just inserted the disk! Changing disk sides once a game is loaded is super easy as well. Just press the button on the FDSStick when prompted: press twice to flip to Side B, once to flip back to Side A, and so on. This is one flash solution that has totally slipped under the radar, becoming very robust and stable over the past few years - and it's twenty bucks! So if you know someone who is dreading replacing the drive belt on their Disk System, surprise them with something they probably didn't even know existed!

Order directly from Loopy (yeah it looks a little sketch but it's the official page):
<https://3dscapture.com/fdsstick/>

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Donald Lee:

Our dear editor David Lundin Jr., wanted to start a tradition with The Retrogaming Times offering a holiday shopping guide like printed magazines of the past. I thought that was a great idea. The gift I suggest for Apple II fans is to get a subscription of the print magazine **Juiced.GS**. Why subscribe to a print magazine for a line of computers that is over 40 years old? For one, the magazine has been around since 1996 and will be in its 25th year of existence in 2020! For a line of computers that hasn't been made in many years, it is outstanding for a magazine to survive that long.



The Apple II has had its share of magazines dedicated to it in its lifetime: A+, Incider, Incider / A+, Nibble, Apple Orchard, II Alive, Shareware Solutions II and probably a few others I missed. I will admit that even though Juiced.GS has been around for a long time, I had not subscribed to it as I hadn't actively used an Apple II in quite some time. However, at the cost of a measly \$20 per year, I may put my money where my mouth is and support the guys who put the magazine together year after year. I do like to read and it would be great to see Juiced.GS last for many more years to come. Happy Holidays all!

Juiced.GS official site:
<https://juiced.gs/>

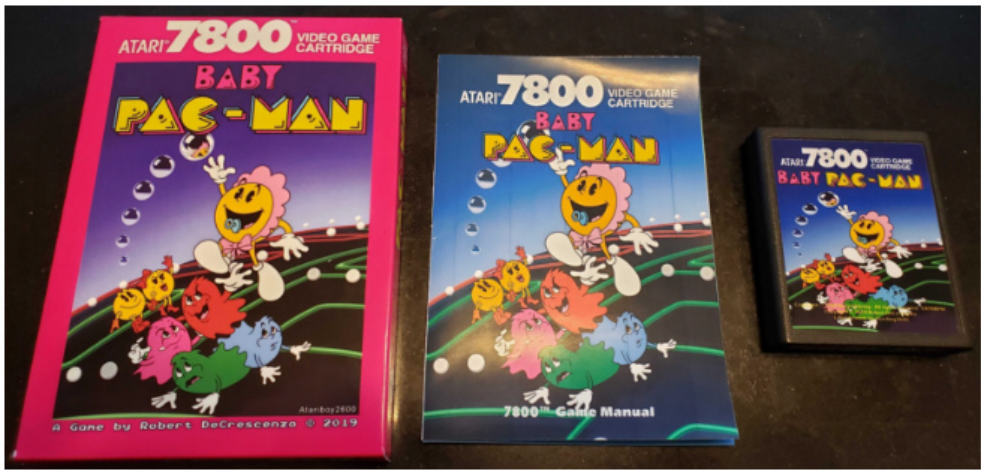
Juiced.GS subscription:
<https://juiced.gs/store/subscription/>

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Eugenio "TrekMD" Angueira:

Baby Pac-Man was an arcade game that combined a video game with a pinball machine, making it a rather unique machine for its time. The player controls Baby Pac-Man in a maze first as she is chased by some rather nasty ghosts. The maze has no bonus fruit or energizers, making things much harder than in other Pac-Man titles. Baby does have a

way to get these, though. She has to enter the escape tunnels at the bottom of the maze so energizers, tunnel speed ups, and bonus items can be earned in the pinball machine. Earning these, however, is easier said than done!



Given the unique nature of this game, no home ports were ever made for it. Well, enter Bob DeCrescenzo who has created the only port of the game for any home console, specifically the Atari 7800. The port recreates the maze and the pinball aspect of the game, making the latter a video pinball table that closely replicates the original table. This is a very unique title that any fan of the arcade original must have if they own an Atari 7800. Not only is this arcade accurate, it is also unique! Definitely a worthwhile gift!

The game will be available in the Atari Age Store in time for the Holidays:
<https://www.atariage.com/store/>

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Happy Holidays and high scores from the staff of The Retrogaming Times!



Show Report - Newcastle Pinball Association Pinfest
by Jason "WauloK" Oakley

The Pinfest from the Newcastle Pinball Association is held every year in Newcastle, New South Wales, Australia. For a few years I've wanted to attend and this time I finally made it. This year was the 8th Pinfest. They had 80 pinball machines on freeplay once you paid the \$30 entrance fee. The website is at: <http://pinfest.com.au/> and they have a Facebook page with photos and videos.

The Pinfest began in 2012 and has been supported by people who donate their machines for a few days for avid players to get their kicks on the old machines. These days it's held at Club Macquarie in Argenton, New South Wales, Australia. You can see their Hall of Fame awards for people who donated their machines at: http://pinfest.com.au/?page_id=158 These kinds of events would not be possible without the gracious support of dedicated fans.

One of my favourite machines is the Addams Family pinball. I love the way the electromagnets under the table can take control of the ball. There's tons of powerups and bonuses to try for and it's so much fun!



They had some older-style machines with a lower-plunger you had to hit which popped the ball into the top launch channel and then you pull a spring-plunger to launch -



There were plenty of movie tie-in machines -



And even really old-style machines with springs. There was also plenty of merchandise to buy from T-Shirts to mugs -



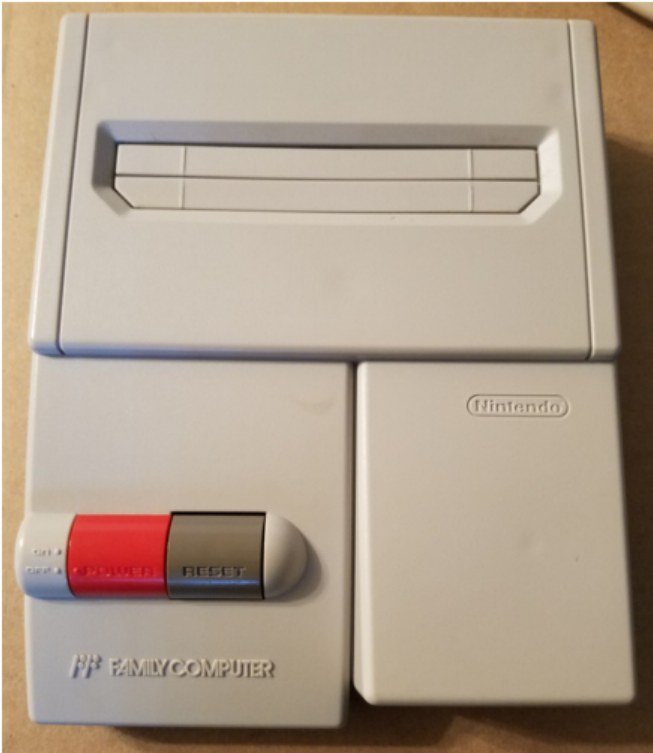
The place was packed out when we arrived, but it didn't take too long for us to get a go. I waited by the Addams Family pinball machine excitedly and watched two other guys finish their games, then my daughter and I got stuck into playing it. I wasn't the best player but I really enjoyed playing one of my favourite games again. After about half an hour or so there were less people on the machines so it was quite easy to get a turn and sometimes nobody else was lined up so you could have multiple games.

Check out their website and Facebook page to see many more photos and videos.



Adding NES Light Gun Support to an AV Famicom
by David Lundin, Jr.

Since first released in 1983 the Nintendo Family Computer, better known as the Famicom, has seen a myriad of official reworks and re-releases. Without a doubt the most famous of these is the 1985 redesign as the Nintendo Entertainment System, a watershed moment in the revitalization of the American home video game industry that continues to grow to this day. Another popular Famicom redesign is the Twin Famicom, manufactured by Sharp Corporation, which combines a Famicom and Famicom Disk System into a single modern looking console. In the West the model NES-101, better known as the Top Loader, generally comes to mind when thinking of an NES redesign. The Top Loader more closely followed conventional console design of its time, with a more standardized and reliable vertical cartridge slot over the custom mechanism the NES originally used. Unfortunately the Top Loader only featured RF video and audio output, removing the composite video and audio connections the NES offered as an option. At the time this wasn't much of a concern, as coaxial RF boxes were still standard way to connect video game systems to televisions. However for a modern retrogamer, the RF only output and poorly designed video circuitry of the Top Loader tend to negate any other design advantages.



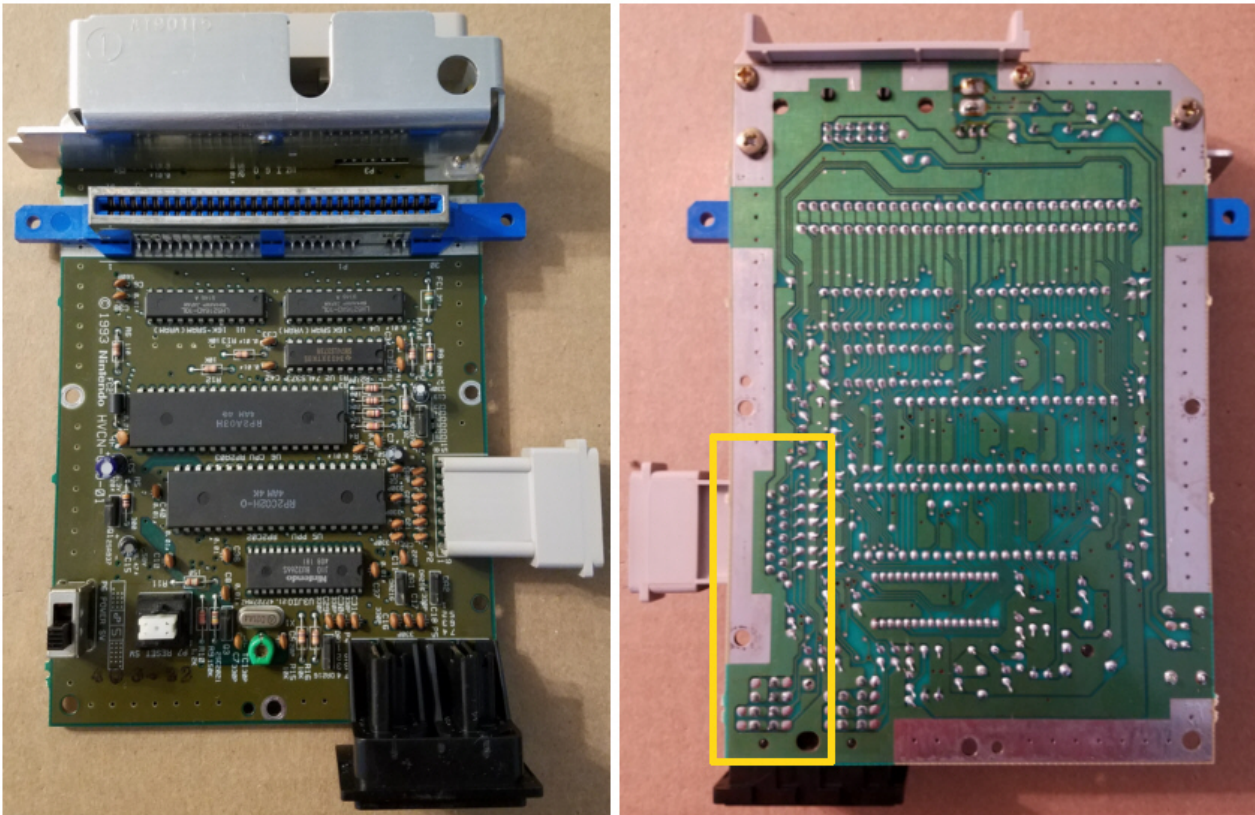
A standard AV Famicom

A couple months after the Top Loader was released in North America, a similar redesign hit Japan. Marketed as the AV Famicom, it replicated the design of Top Loader but added features that the original Famicom did not have, rather than removing them. A key difference is the addition of the same controller ports that had been used on the NES since 1985,

quite a change over the standard Famicom hardwired controllers. The AV Famicom still features the expansion port that all Famicom consoles had since the start, used for special controllers and other peripherals. As featured in the name, the AV Famicom also incorporates composite video and audio output, something the original Famicom design did not have. However the biggest advantage of the AV Famicom is that it features a much better video circuit that provides excellent video output without the so-called "jailbar" pattern that NES Top Loaders are notorious for. Yes, there were some very rare late-model NES Top Loaders that remedied the poor video quality but every AV Famicom features this improved video circuitry, regardless of manufacture date.

If you're using a flash memory cartridge, the AV Famicom seems like the ideal way to go. However due to differences in how specialty controllers connected to the original Famicom via its expansion port, accessories such as the Zapper and Power Pad will not work with a standard AV Famicom. Thankfully with a very small and simple modification, support for these accessories can be added to the second controller port. Primarily this is to allow use of the Zapper, as far more light gun games were released on the NES than the Famicom. With this mod an AV Famicom can function as an NES replacement when paired with a flash cartridge such as a Famicom EverDrive N8.

Thankfully getting inside an AV Famicom is rather simple if you have a standard set of security or "game bit" tools, as all the screws are easy to access and of standard size. Flip the console over and remove the security screws on the underside, then flip it back over and lift off the top shell. The PCB inside is secured with standard Phillips head screws, and lifts out of the bottom shell and RF shield with ease once all screws are removed.

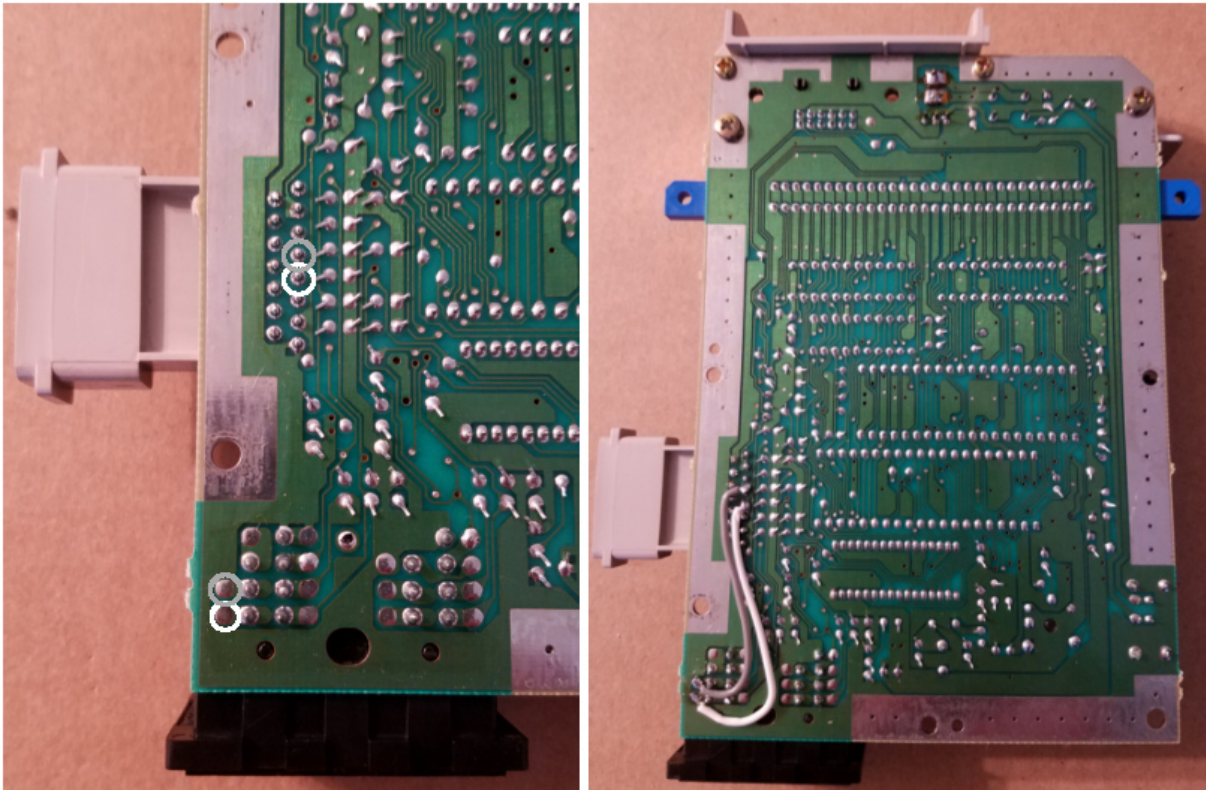


Top and bottom of an AV Famicom PCB, the area marked in yellow is where all modification will be performed

The goal is to link two connectors from the second controller port to their NES input counterparts on the Famicom expansion connector. No additional components need to be added, nothing needs to be removed, no traces need to be cut - we simply need to install two short wires.

Flip the PCB over so that it is bottom side up, with the controller ports facing toward you. All work will be done in the lower left corner of the board, just behind the second controller port and the Famicom expansion connector. As if this modification was always meant to be, the second controller port actually has secondary solder pads where the wires should be attached.

Follow the picture below and run a wire from one connection point marked in gray to the other connection point marked in gray. Then do the same with another wire, running it from the connection point marked in white to the other connection point marked in white. Be very careful not to bridge solder connections between the pads and pins. Additionally don't use too much solder on the expansion port pins as excess can flow through the via and bridge connectors on the other side of the PCB. Make sure the wires are routed over the green part of the PCB to allow clearance around the RF shield and plastic standoffs for reassembly.

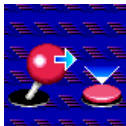


Connect the two points circled in gray to one another, they do the same with the two points circled in white

With those two wires installed, the mod is complete. Reattach the PCB to the lower half of the console shell, careful to ensure that the wires aren't being crushed by the RF shield or plastic standoffs. If the wires are fouling the case, reroute them so they aren't being pinched. Set the upper half of the console shell back on top, making sure the power switch cover is properly mating to the switch itself and that both halves of the shell match up evenly. Screw the shell back together from the bottom with the security screws and you're good to go.

Do note that even with this modification, Famicom games that use a special accessory will generally still require the Famicom version of that accessory to be used via the expansion port. That means the Power Pad cannot be used with the Famicom Family Trainer games for example. Additionally the Arkanoid controllers are not cross-compatible between regions, so you may want to pick up a cheap Famicom Arkanoid controller (which can also be used with Arkanoid II) and play the Japanese version instead. However this modification will allow use of NES Power Pad games with an NES Power Pad on an AV Famicom. While that may not seem like much of a bonus, when using a flash cartridge such as a Famicom EverDrive N8, it allows the most library support with the best designed Nintendo 8 bit hardware.

With the mod complete, plug a Zapper into controller port two, power on your EverDrive, load up Barker Bill's Trick Shooting, and enjoy using an NES light gun on an AV Famicom! Or plug in the Power Pad and give yourself a heart attack playing World Class Track Meet! I've owned many different iterations of the Famicom / NES hardware over the years. With this simple modification, the AV Famicom easily surpasses them all as the best way to play these games on original hardware.



The Controller Chronicles - Brown Box

by [Todd Friedman](#)

It is only fitting that the "Controller Chronicles" features the controller and console that started it all. The "Brown Box" created by Ralph Baer. Originally called "TV Game Unit #7," this was a system and controller that would be the starting point of home consoles as we know it. Ralph had a vision to be able to play games electronically on your TV. This "Brown Box" creation would be the start of something huge. It is hard to identify the controllers as a typical controller all gamers are used to, but it indeed fits the description as an item used to move objects on the screen. Ideally the Brown Box did not see the day of light for consumers but it paved the way for the next commercial success, the Magnavox Odyssey. The Brown Box system started as a design in the late 1960's. By the early 1970's Ralph approached Magnavox to show his creation. They were excited and wanted to go a bit further with his ideas and designs. This is what made the Odyssey come to life. The Brown Box that we know of today has only a handful of surviving prototypes.

Some people, like gaming historian and author Leonard Herman, are lucky enough to still have a prototype system that works and can be displayed for all gamers to see in person. There were some game programs laid out to demonstrate the concept of the machine. Some of those games include ping-pong and checkers. There were a variety of sports games as well as a golf game that had an extra attachment to use for putting. The idea of playing ping-pong against a friend on the TV sparked Ralph's creativity and devotion to the future of home console gaming. The Brown Box utilized switches and referenced program cards to know what switch combinations would need to be set to play a certain game.



One unique idea that Ralph created with the system was a clear overlay that goes over the TV to mimic players, goals, etc. This gave the interactive feel of the game without having to program it into the system memory. The controller was as basic as it gets. The idea of having two controllers was a new concept to the gaming world. This concept would carry on for generations. One controller for the left side and one for the right side. The label even said, "Left Hand Player" or "Right Hand Player," with literally a label from a label maker stuck on the controller. One knob labeled "HOR" and the other labeled "ENGLISH," plus an extra button labeled "SERVE."

What do these labels represent and what do they do on the controller?

- ENGLISH - Changes the trajectory of the "ball" in play.
- SERVE - Press this to put the ball in play.
- HOR - Moves the player's paddle horizontally.
- VER - Moves the player's paddle vertically.

On the side of the controller was a knob that controlled the action on the screen. For instance, in ping-pong the knob would move the players "stick" up and down to hit the ball image on the screen back to the second player. If you opened the box you would see the archaic setup of the computer board where you can switch options to make the colors different, change the setup of the game, and restart the game. You could also change out the game boards as well to play a different game.



The late Ralph Baer with a pair of his Brown Box prototype controllers

Ralph Baer, called by some as the "Father of Video Games," had a vision of a world where people of all ages can play electronic games alone and completely on a TV or monitor. Little did he know how his vision would turn into the most profitable entertainment medium in the world. Millions of gamers today play games on PC, console or portable device. Billions of dollars are spent on this platform and gamers today are making a living playing video games. Over 50 years later, I know Ralph would be smiling and happy to know that his creation started a revolution and paved the way to the future of gaming. To think, all this started with a little "Brown Box."



Video Game Haiku

by [Sean "Nz17" Robinson](#)

Only One TV

Level 8 at last
Mom says it has to wait though
It's time for the news

Unexpected Outage

Rental from the store
I've made so much progress too
Dad shuts off power

Final Form?

Have I won at last?
Is the last boss defeated?
Is there one more form?

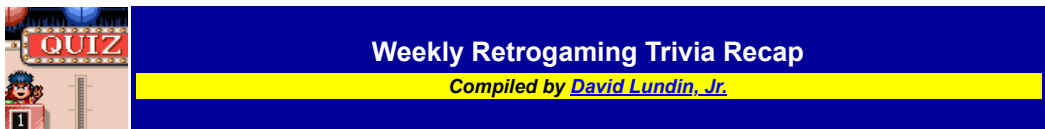
Infinite Lives, Infinite Continues

What's the point of lives?
Modern games are too easy
Old games need each one

A Little Advice

Nostalgia hits
From unexpected places
Always enjoy it

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:

08/30/2019 - WEEK 130

Question: The 1995 PC game Rise of the Triad stars a team of operatives known as HUNT. What does HUNT stand for?

09/06/2019 - WEEK 131

Question: What Famicom game is the successor to Jaleco's 1987 arcade game Psychic 5?

09/13/2019 - WEEK 132

Question: What is the name of the first town in the NES game Crystallis?

09/20/2019 - WEEK 133

Question: The NES Adventures of Lolo games are based on what earlier Japanese series of titles?

09/27/2019 - WEEK 134

Question: What was the very first Nintendo Game & Watch title released?

10/04/2019 - WEEK 135

Question: What Neo Geo game features a bonus stage in which the player controls a dog at a beach?

10/11/2019 - WEEK 136

Question: The classic puzzle game franchise Puyo Puyo uses characters from what earlier RPG?

10/18/2019 - WEEK 137

Question: What 1982 Japanese puzzle game about warehouse keeping became one of the most widely ported video games of all time?



Dog Distance is a bonus round in Windjammers (left), Ball is where Nintendo's portable gaming revolution began (right)

Answers:

- Week 130 Answer: High-risk United Nations Task-force.
- Week 131 Answer: Esper Bouken Tai (Esper Adventure Team), fan translated as Esper Corps in 2011.
- Week 132 Answer: Leaf.
- Week 133 Answer: Eggerland. Even the later Japanese "Adventures of Lolo" titles differ from the Western releases.
- Week 134 Answer: Ball (1980).
- Week 135 Answer: Windjammers (1994).
- Week 136 Answer: Madou Monogatari 1-2-3.
- Week 137 Answer: Sokoban.



RPG game Madou Monogatari 1-2-3 (left) is the character origin of globally popular puzzle game franchise Puyo Puyo (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 your question is selected to be featured, you will be entered in our year-end prize drawing!



See You Next Game

by [David Lundin, Jr.](#)

Just like that year four of The Retrogaming Times is in the proverbial can. This year has been filled with large changes and big shifts for me personally. In a few weeks I will be hitting my one-year anniversary since completely shifting gears professionally. This is the first year in awhile where I didn't take up any new hobbies and instead relaxed into deeper enjoyment of my current ones. Then of course the slight relocation that lead to the delay in publication of this issue. I say it a lot these days, perhaps it's a result of beginning to approach middle age, but this year felt like it screamed by at breakneck speed. This year has been a lot of fun though, and you know what they say about that.


Thank you, each and every one of our readers, for continuing to come back and read The Retrogaming Times. A massive and impossible to properly express amount of gratitude to our contributors, for this year and the over twenty years that came before. You truly are the lifeblood of this publication and it is an absolute privilege to continue to have the responsibility of publishing this newsletter. As always, Happy Holidays and may you all have a wonderful end of this year.

Thank you once again for reading The Retrogaming Times. We'll be back on January 7th 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!

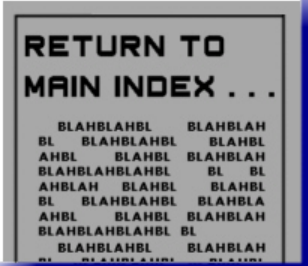
See You Next Game!



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