

The Retrogaming Times

THE BIMONTHLY RETROGAMING HOBBYIST NEWSLETTER
TWENTY-SEVENTH ISSUE - JULY 2020

REVIVED CAVEMAN ON THE LOOSE!

The Retrogaming Times
- The Bimonthly Retrogaming Hobbyist Newsletter -

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Twenty-Seventh Issue - July 2020

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Prepare to Qualify

by [David Lundin, Jr.](#)

In beginning our Twenty-Seventh Issue it is almost unbelievable to think the global status of the human condition could be even more surreal than it was just two months ago but that's exactly where we are. I will never politicize this newsletter. What I will ask is that everyone please do something today that positively impacts yourself, that positively impacts your family, and that positively impacts your community. Then do something again tomorrow. And something again the day after that. Also remember COVID-19 is still killing indiscriminately and silently every day, please be as safe as possible.

If you're looking for a brief pause, we have just the issue for that. Gaming and cultural icon Pac-Man celebrated his 40th anniversary recently and Merman starts things off with a journey through his Commodore 64 adventures, both official and otherwise. The Apple II Incider returns as Donald Lee takes a whack at rediscovering a game from his past. Sean Robinson recalls a time when 2D gaming was forced out the door at the insistence of Sony as part of their international PlayStation release policy. The TurboGrafx-16 Mini has finally shipped outside of Japan - but is it a second chance for video stardom outside its home country or a quick cash grab riding the wave of mini consoles? After much anticipation and additional delay due to the coronavirus pandemic, this issue's cover story answers that question and many others. If you're hungry for even more retrogaming fun in a small package, Todd Friedman reviews Retro-Bit's Super Retro-Cade and its varied assortment of games. Additionally Video Game Haiku returns with our continuing invitation to submit your own for future publication. 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 contact me directly at trt@classicplastic.net! Of course article 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!"**

If you're stir crazy at home and are a retrogamer, there has to be something on your mind - let us know by submitting an article!



Upcoming Events

Compiled by [David Lundin, Jr.](#)

NOTICE: Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, many shows and events have canceled, postponed, or modified their dates. For the latest on the events listed below, please visit their individual websites or contact their relevant customer support channels as the current situation continues to unfold. Thank you.

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Video Game Summit, July 11th 2020, Villa Park, Illinois, USA

The date for the 2020 Video Game Summit has been set! It will be held on July 11th at The Odeum Expo Center, 1033 North Villa Ave., Villa Park, Illinois. More information to follow shortly!

For more information, visit <http://www.videogamesummit.net/>

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KansasFest, July 21st - 26th 2020, Kansas City, Missouri, USA

KansasFest 2020, the 32nd annual Apple II convention, is scheduled for July 21 - 26 in Kansas City, Missouri. Robert Woodhead of Sir-Tech Software, well-known as the co-creator of the Wizardry series of computer role-playing games, will join us as the keynote speaker.

At an early age, Robert Woodhead, aka Trebor the Mad Overlord, was consumed by two passions; computer programming and not having to have a real job. He first achieved this by writing computer games for Sir-Tech Software, most notoriously co-authoring the first four Wizardry CRPGs, first for the Apple II, and later for other, lesser computers. In 1989, deciding that this wasn't nerdy enough, he founded the oldest surviving anime releasing company, AnimEigo. Other things he's done include: writing one of the first MMO bots, building a 2-time National Champion Combat Robot, serving 4 terms on the EVE Online Council of Stellar Management, and not being "liquidated" by his wife. Yet.

KansasFest is an annual convention offering Apple II users and retrocomputing enthusiasts the opportunity to engage in beginner and technical sessions, programming contests, exhibition halls, and camaraderie. KansasFest was originally hosted by Resource Central and has been brought to you by the KFest committee since 1995. Any and all Apple II users, fans, and friends are invited to attend this year's event. Registration details will be announced on the KansasFest Web site, and registration will open on March 31. For photos, videos, and presentations from past KansasFests, please visit the event's official website.

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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California Extreme 2020, July 25th - 26th 2020, Santa Clara, California, USA

We are saddened to announce that due to guidance by the State of California and County of Santa Clara health officials, California Extreme 2020 will not be able to be held in its usual form this year at the Hyatt Regency.

We will instead put on a virtual show on July 25th including speakers, demonstrations, streaming, remote play, vendor specials, and whatever we (including you) can come up with. This is new territory for us, so if you have something you'd like to contribute, please let us know at info@caextreme.org. We plan to offer t-shirts and badges to commemorate our 24th annual event, and we can still have a great weekend while practicing distant socializing.

Those who made hotel reservations in our block of rooms will have those automatically cancelled by the hotel in a few weeks (or feel free to cancel on your own).

For more information, visit <http://www.caextreme.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!



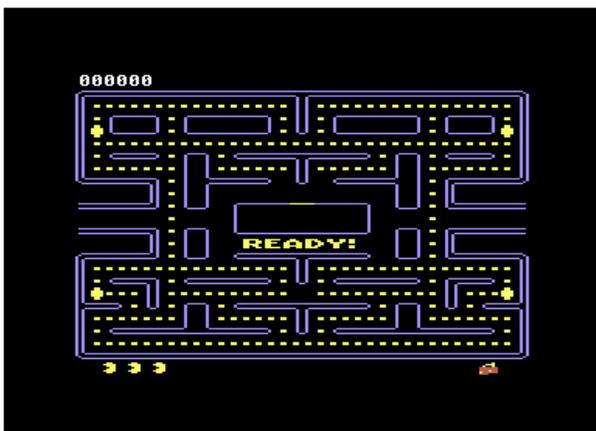
More C64! - Pac-Man At 40

by Merman

May 2020 marks the 40th anniversary of the original Pac-Man arcade game from Namco, or at least its original release into Japanese arcades with the title Puck-Man. How did the Commodore 64 fare when it came to official conversions of Pac's games, and what were some of the notable clones?

PAC-MAN (Atarisoft, 1983)

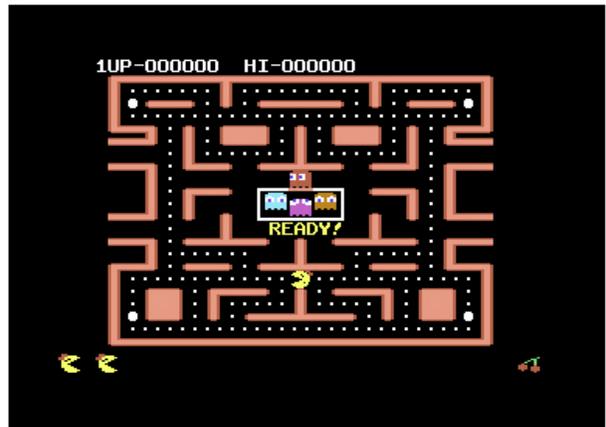
At the time of Pac-Man's release, Namco was distributing its arcade games in America through Atari. That had the knock-on effect of official conversions being published through Atarisoft. Unfortunately the C64 incarnation was not the most accurate conversion. The horizontal "stretch" of the C64's graphics sees the maze become wider than it is tall and the maze walls look too bright in the brighter of the C64's two shades of blue. The ghosts lack "eyes", being a single colour sprite. The AI is not particularly well programmed either. At least the sounds are pretty authentic even if Pac-Man's animation is pretty poor.



Pac-man is ready to rock, and the Power Pill turns the ghosts blue.

MS. PAC-MAN (Atarisoft, 1983)

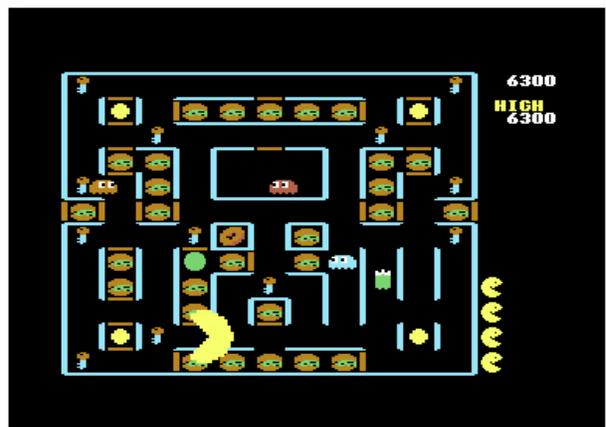
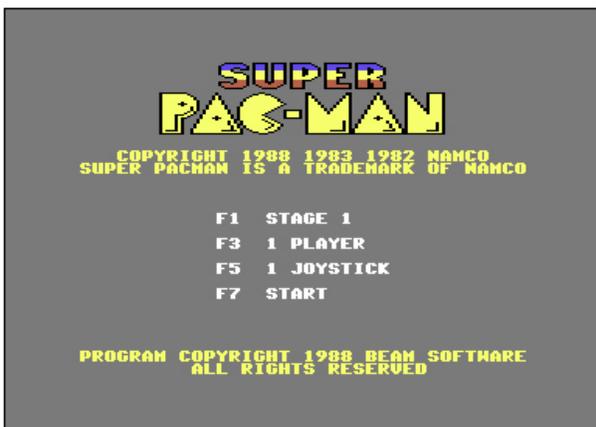
Atari commissioned the follow-up, based on the General Computer Corporation "mod kit" that turned Pac-Man into a new game called Crazy Otto. At least the C64 version now features ghosts with eyes, and Ms. Pac-Man herself has the red bow properly. The extra intermission sequences are also well done. The title screen also offers a choice of difficulty level, and one or two players. The gameplay and ghost AI is much better tuned than the original's Atarisoft conversion. Both Atarisoft games were available on cartridge at the time and are highly collectible in that format.



Ms. Pac-Man's title screen options, and getting ready for the first level.

SUPER PAC-MAN (Thunder Mountain, 1988)

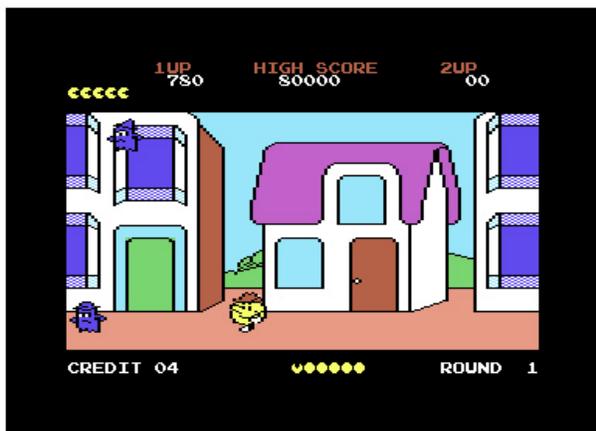
This is actually the official follow-up to Pac-Man from Namco itself, bringing several twists on the classic maze formula. Now Pac must eat food rather than pills, but many pieces of food are locked up behind doors. Pac must grab the keys that open doors, and is even free to wander into the "ghost box". The power pellets allow Pac to eat the ghosts, but the new Super Power Pills enlarge him so that he is "flying" above the ghosts and over the doors to gulp down the food objects. The C64 version has its score panel on the right of the screen, giving the maze a better aspect ratio than the Atarisoft conversions. And it plays really well, having been developed by the Australian company Beam Software. The Super effect is achieved using the C64's built-in sprite expansion registers; these can double a sprite's size horizontally or vertically (or both). The strangest part is the late release date, at a time when Namco was just starting to make use of its back catalogue. (C64 owners could also play a couple of earlier Namco titles - Gaplus, Motos and the "remake" Bosconian '88 - around this time thanks to UK budget label Mastertronic Added Dimension, and it seems Namco did a similar deal with US publishers Thunder Mountain for Super Pac-Man).



Super Pac-Man's title screen, and on level 3 our hero has eaten a Super Power Pill to become super large.

PAC-LAND (1988, Argus Press Software/Quicksilva)

The original Pac-Man and wave of merchandise that followed had included an animated cartoon introducing other members of the Pac family. It would serve as inspiration for this horizontally-scrolling platform game from Namco in the arcades, Pac gaining arms, legs and a jaunty hat. Under the hat he hides a fairy that must be taken back to Fairyland before making the long trip home again. The ghosts are back and attack our yellow hero in a variety of ways, but fortunately the Power Pills can be chomped down to retaliate. Hidden fruit can be eaten for bonus points. The C64 conversion by the Quicksilva team is very good, with well-made graphics and sound. Presentation is spot-on, right down to the classic Namco text font. The real bugbear is the springboards used to cross large jumps, requiring the player to "waggle" the joystick left and right rapidly to keep Pac in the air.



The blue ghosts flee a powered-up Pac-Man in the Village on level 1, while level 4 sees the first of the tricky springboard jumps over water.

PAC-MANIA (1988, Grandslam)

With Grandslam taking over Argus Press, the rights to the next game in the Pac franchise moved with them. The arcade game had been a big hit in 1987, taking the basic maze format into isometric 3D with original Pac-Man creator Toru Iwatani overseeing development. There are four different level types - Pac-Man's Park (resembling the classic neon maze), Block Town (with LEGO-like brick walls), Sandbox Land and the metallic Jungly Steps. The level select allows you to start at later levels when reached. Bonus fruit and power-ups appeared in the centre of the maze periodically. Another major addition to the gameplay was the Jump button that allowed Pac to jump over ghosts - but there are new ghosts that could jump as well. Short intermission sequences also added to the fun. The C64 conversion was very well made, getting all four levels into a single load, as well as recreating the Day and Night versions of each maze. The late Ben Daglish did a fantastic job with the music.

To confuse matters, there was an earlier C64 game called Pacmania - a clone of the original Pac-Man. For all these official games it is worth checking out the "jewel cracks" done by the cracking group Remember, as they add the original documents to read as well as handy cheats.



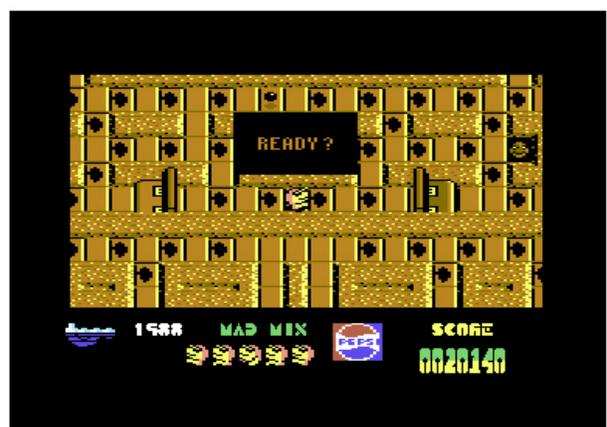
Let's go to the Pac-Man Theatre in an intermission, and the eyes of the ghosts still return to the centre of the maze once eaten.

PAC-A-LIKES

Here then are some of my favourite Pac-clones and Pac-Man inspired games.

MAD MIX PEPSI CHALLENGE GAME (1988, US Gold/TopoSoft)

Spanish developers TopoSoft came up with their variation of Pac-Man and called it Mad Mix. When US Gold picked it up for wider distribution in Europe, it acquired this longer name. It refers to a series of "high score" challenges held by Pepsi during major computer events that year, inspired by the "Pepsi Challenge" adverts. Mad Mix was one of the games players had to attain a high score at. The mazes in Mad Mix are much larger than a single screen, meaning the playing area scrolls. There are one-way doors that hinder or help you, arrow tiles that push you in a certain direction, and special "bullet lanes" where the player's sprite becomes a gun that can shoot enemies for a short time. The Power Pills turn the player red and "angry" to eat enemies, while they can also transform into a "Pepsipotamus" that can squash enemies but cannot pick up pills. It did not get great review scores but is worth a few minutes play.

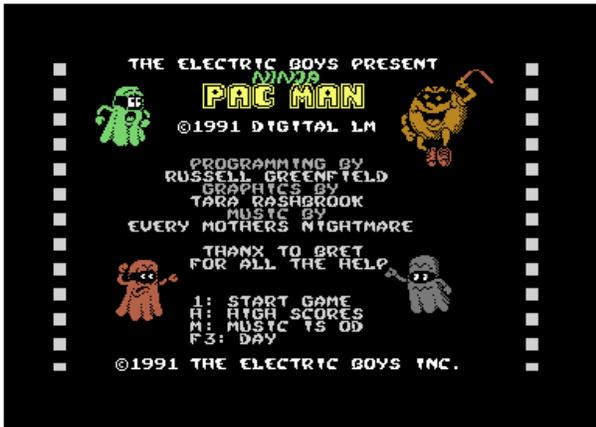


Using the "bullet lane" on level 2, and starting out between two doors on the bonus level.

NINJA PACMAN (1991, Electric Boys)

The "cracking" group Electric Boys did something a little different with this one. The graphics of the official Pac-Mania

conversion were edited to give Pac and the ghosts ninja-style masks, and the bonus objects that popped up in the centre of the maze were also altered to look like various ninja weapons and a scroll. Otherwise it plays and sounds exactly the same as the original Pac-Mania.



The Ninja Pac-Man title screen was edited, while the staff can be collected for bonus points.

RODMÄN (2018, Misfit)

The Finnish developer Mika Keränen has been prolific in recent years, developing titles for several 8-bit computers including the C64 and VIC-20. One particular title stands out. The original Rodmän can be played on no less than 7 different 8-bit machines, and was available on a limited edition tape from The Future Was 8-Bit. The basic gameplay is similar to Pac-Man with a couple of twists. The three levels are made up of three linked screens, with exits leading between them. The enemies will try to eat the dots before the hero can, but he can pick up and drop bombs to blow up the enemies. The C64 version is a lot of fun, and has been followed by Ms. Rodmän available on C64 cartridge (from The Future Was 8-Bit's new 999 range) and the forthcoming Baby Rodmän.



The ghosts have silly names in this game, and the explosion of a bomb shoots across the maze.

PAC-MAN ARCADE (2015) and PAC-IT! (2001)

Sadly these two titles only exist as previews at the moment. Pac-Man Arcade tried to be more faithful to the arcade original, restoring the more vertical ratio of the maze and adding a well-made "surround" based on the arcade game's side-art. However it was not actually playable. Pac-It has been in development by Protovision for many years now, with that first preview nearly twenty years old at the time of writing. With plans for more detailed maze graphics, switches that alter the wall layout, multiple players and lots of intermissions, this one has a lot of promise - if it is ever finished.



The polished surroundings of Pac Man Arcade, and the more complex maze of Pac-It - both in preview form.



Apple II Incider - HIYA and Be Water My Friend

by [Donald Lee](#)

2020 has been an unprecedented time for everyone. Looking back at the May issue, we were just catching up on COVID-19 that had taken over the world. Who would have thought that another issue would knock COVID-19 off the top of the news hours and dominate the headlines. While I am generally open to discussing the issues currently in the public eye, the current issues go well beyond the scope of what I can write in this article. I've made some

personal thoughts on a podcast I started a while back. If anyone's interested in listening to what I have to say, just reach out to me and I can direct you to my podcast. I'm not trying to monetize my podcast but I don't feel like using the magazine here as free advertising either.

Originally, I had planned to go over the Atari Flashback Collection that was on the Nintendo Switch. But due to the release of the 30 for 30 Bruce Lee documentary "Be Water" on ESPN on June 7th, I decided to revisit an old Apple II game. Oh and yes, this is probably the first time I've written about an Apple II game in a while. More on that at the end of the column.

The game is simply titled "**Bruce Lee**" and it was published by a company called Datasoft. My initial experience with this game (as with most of my Apple II reviews) was back in the 1980's when the game was initially released. What stood out to me about this game?

I had a monochrome monitor back in the old days with my Apple IIe. Given my experimental ways, I recall using some kind of connector (perhaps an RF connector?) to a color TV that was next to my IIe. I remember it was exciting that I got it working. Now most Apple II games were not all that colorful due to the limited graphic abilities of the Apple IIe. But I recalled that the Bruce Lee title screen seemed more colorful than most. To this day, though I'm not sure I can verify, I think that the Bruce Lee title screen used double high resolution graphics.



The second thing that caught my attention was the theme music that played after the title screen had finished displaying. The game credits noted the music used the "Electric Duet" player created by Paul Lutus (who wrote Apple Writer as well). The theme song was relatively short but I liked that the music has two voices (or tracks) playing at the same time. The Apple II graphic capabilities were pretty limited, but the music / sound capabilities were pretty slim pickings but that didn't stop creative programmers from doing things. Castle Wolfenstein / Beyond Castle Wolfenstein has voice synthesis. Bruce Lee had some nice theme music.

So you may ask "what about the game play?" To be honest, after replaying the game before I wrote this, there isn't much to write home about. In most games, I usually remember SOMETHING that stood out about the same. I couldn't remember anything about the game play when I was young. After playing it tonight, I thought the game was very limited and somewhat disappointing. Without reading the manuals or Google, I started playing the game with no idea of what I was trying to do. After a while, I realized I had to grab these lanterns (or something) on each screen before moving on. Now if you're used to most games, you may get a break when completing each screen right? Not in this game. As you grab all the items on the screen, another entrance opens and you move on to try and grab the items again. I finally did read up on the game and I saw that you had to go through some 20 screens before facing off against some big boss at the end.

I'm not sure if the game had unlimited lives, but I never died in the game. Any time I got killed, I would get dropped at the same spot and try again. So that let me keep trying to push as far as I could go. But after a while, I found things got repetitive and boring. Also, the game is named for Bruce Lee, so you expect the fighting to be good right? Not really. You have a couple of enemies chasing you around. Bruce can punch, jump kick and duck. I usually jump kicked and it takes a couple of hits to knock out the enemies. The sound isn't great and there's no Bruce Lee "HIYA" or anything like that. I even watched a YouTube video of someone playing the game on a PC Jr to see how they got past a screen and learned that if you just DUCK, the two enemies can never kill you. You just had to strategically duck at the right locations where other things can kill the enemies.

So all in all, if it weren't for the fact that the Bruce Lee documentary played, I wouldn't have even thought about this game. It was nice to revisit but I probably won't be going back to play the game again anytime soon.

Before I wrap for the issue, I will mention the positive aspect out of this month's writing. I plunked down some money for a local Apple II (8-bit) emulator called Virtual II. It did set me back \$44 to get the full version. A few reasons why I did it.

One, the standard online emulator site (www.virtualapple.org) doesn't seem to be functioning anymore. The site used old browser based technologies that modern browsers don't seem to support anymore. Heck I couldn't even get the Java versions of the game to run anymore.

Two, with the browser based emulation gone, I downloaded the trial version of Virtual II. It would have been fine except it stops every few minutes to push for the user to buy the full license. I was actually ok with it, but I noticed the full paid version supported a virtual printer that I could use to push files to PDF. As I learned, there were a few other things I could do with the emulator, so I decided to plunk the money down and I don't regret it at all.

So perhaps I will be back on a more regular basis with Apple II games moving forward. Stay safe during these crazy times and see you next issue!



Sony of America's 1990's Anti-2D Policy

by Sean "Nz17" Robinson

Remember Sony of America's harmful anti-2D stance that it had during the 1990's and early 2000's during the heyday of the PlayStation and PlayStation 2? Does anyone know who the executives were at Sony of America who created and maintained this terrible anti-2D policy that deprived all of us of many excellent games for PS1 and PS2 back in the day? I'd sure like to know their names! I've always hated their policy from back then and I will for the rest of my life!

Thanks to my personal preferences, I've always found 2D PS1 games (and 2D games in general) to be nearly always better than the 3D ones. That was my opinion about games both then and now, especially those from that 32-bit era with its early-ish 3D. It's not that I don't like 3D games - there are countless three-dimensional games that I find to be excellent - but if I could choose games to be developed one way or another, I'd pick 2D or even 2.5D most of the time as I like not just the appearance of 2D but also two-dimensional gameplay. It is just so much easier to "know where everything is" that way. Things were so much more demanding (and thus more fun for an action-orientated gamer) with the speed, accuracy, and precision that were required by the gameplay of 2D. There was also an elegant beauty to be found with high-quality, hand-animated 2D in both games and cinema, something that is almost totally gone today.

For 3D, a lot of hand-holding and nanny-ing was added to help players aim weapons or jump to platforms in 3D, some of which was required, some of which wasn't, and nearly none of which would be required for 2D gameplay and graphics. Today the baby hand-holding and aim-assists have gotten to such an extreme that some games almost play by themselves... and with certain games, they actually auto-play the game for you, e.g. idle clickers that really will automatically level-up your stats and Nintendo's "super helper" power-ups in some Wii, 3DS, Wii U, and Switch games that actually will complete the level for the player!

SOA's numbskull policy also saw very few 2D games released for the PS2. This means their practice affected an entire hemisphere for two console generations! Obviously "killing 2D" wasn't required for Sony to be successful with PS1 nor PS2 in any other territories such as Asia or Europe, so this bunk policy was not required at all and it was awful to totally refuse these games or to give companies ultimatums over them! Think of not just all of the gamers whose lives were less rich without these gems - think of all of the corporations and their employees who suffered thanks to this frivolous, arbitrary rule!

Among other reasons, this anti-2D policy was a large contributing factor to the demise of Working Designs, one of my favorite companies of yesteryear! Sony basically told them, "Sell \$200 worth of games as a \$50 bundle instead of selling each separately for \$50 or we will refuse your approval-to-publish." Without platform-holder approval it would have been impossible to profit from the sales of these games. Not only was Sony the platform-holder in this case, it was also the copyright-holder! Working Designs was trapped between a rock and a hard place when it wanted to publish Arc the Lad, Arc the Lad II, Arc the Lad III, and Arc Arena: Monster Tournament in North America. Ultimately it made the difficult decision to publish all four as the Arc the Lad Collection for PlayStation, taking a financial hit on each one sold. After all, it was going to be an unprofitable venture either way, but at least some revenue was better than nothing.

In a fairer universe, "foreign exclusives" such as Gunners Heaven (AKA Rapid Reload) would have been released here in America alongside countless other games we "lost" thanks to Sony of America! Sure, you can import them nowadays if you know how and have the hardware or choose to emulate them instead. However there is something special about playing games (or other media) during the time-frame when they are new... something of which we and countless other North and South Americans were denied with these "forgotten gems!"

2D forever!



The Higher Energy Mini - TurboGrafx-16 Mini Review

by [David Lundin, Jr.](#)

With retrogaming more popular than ever, mini consoles are all the rage right now. It makes perfect sense: they offer an instant curated collection of games, don't require any additional hardware, tuck away neatly pretty much anywhere, and they offer the notion of physically owning something over a simple download code. With offerings from all the big nostalgic companies it was only a matter of time until the TurboGrafx-16 (known as the PC Engine in Japan) would have a mini console of its own. After all, the PC Engine was hugely popular in Japan, carving out a massive slice of the video game market and settling in comfortably just behind Nintendo. Incredibly Sega's Mega Drive (later released as the Genesis) never took off in the region, the total opposite to how things played out in North America, where it was the TurboGrafx-16 that stalled out of the gate and never really found its footing. The question is, now decades later, can the quirky and rather ahead of its time TurboGrafx-16 finally make an impact outside of Japan?

Retro mini all-in-one throwback consoles really began in 2004 with the Atari Flashback. Roughly styled as a miniature Atari 7800, it featured a collection of classic Atari console games and scaled down controllers based upon the Atari 7800 design. As the hardware was based around a "Nintendo on a Chip" architecture (sometimes known as a Famiclone) its approximation of the included games left something to be desired but it lit a fire for small reproductions of classic consoles with built-in games. Revisions of the Atari Flashback would follow, as would similar offerings based upon other platforms, each with varying levels of success and performance accuracy. It wasn't until 2016 when Nintendo stepped into the ring with the NES Classic Edition / Famicom Mini that the concept of a throwback console finally matured beyond its plug-and-play roots. Both praised for its well-designed hardware and despised for its limited production, the NES Mini brought the concept of a mini retro console into the mainstream. This new era of mini consoles would lead to further offerings from Nintendo, Sega, SNK, Sony and more - with mixed results depending on how the licenses were handled.



While styled in the same manner as the original box, the packaging artwork has been revised on the Mini

Somewhat delayed by the worldwide coronavirus outbreak, the TurboGrafx-16 Mini finally launched in Japan at the beginning of 2020 and began shipping worldwide in May of the same year. The system is available in three different styles, each designed to represent a region of release: a classic white PC Engine with the original non-turbo controller for Japan, the larger black TurboGrafx-16 with the standard TurboPad controller for the USA, and a later PC Engine revision known as the PC Engine Core Grafx with turbo controller for Europe. Although back in the 1990's Europe received a limited TurboGrafx-16 release based upon the USA redesign, apparently the Core Grafx was a popular import among gamers across the pond - at least that's how Konami apparently sees it. Yes, Konami - that there is why the release of a mini TurboGrafx-16 surprises me, as the original hardware was co-developed by classic gaming powerhouse Hudson and the massive electronics giant NEC. Konami acquired Hudson years ago and outside of an occasional Bomberman game didn't seem interested in doing much with the included properties. I can only assume there was some amount of legal wrangling and licensing with NEC to bring this mini console to fruition. I can also only assume that licensing issues in part shaped the included game list, as while it is very diverse there are a few striking omissions, no matter what flavor of the console you're playing.

The game list is divided into a Japan-centric PC Engine side and an American-centric TurboGrafx-16 side. On the TurboGrafx-16 Mini and Core Grafx Mini there are 57 total games, although some are repeated with the difference being Japanese or English text. CD games and SuperGrafx games are also included in addition to titles originally released on TurboChip / HuCARD.



The menu system of the TurboGrafx-16 side displays TG-16 style icons, cover art, and end labels

Game List (in order of release date by platform):

TurboGrafx-16:

- Alien Crush
- Blazing Lazars
- Dungeon Explorer
- Moto Roder
- Power Golf
- R-Type
- Victory Run
- Chew-Man-Fu
- J.J. & Jeff
- Military Madness
- Neutopia
- Ninja Spirit
- Psychosis
- Space Harrier
- Splatterhouse
- Ys Book I & II (TurboGrafx CD)
- Bonk's Revenge
- Cadash
- Parasol Stars: The Story of Bubble Bobble III
- Air Zonk
- Neutopia II
- New Adventure Island
- Soldier Blade
- Bomberman '93

Lords of Thunder (Super CD)

PC Engine:

The Kung Fu (Japanese release of China Warrior)
Jaseiken Necromancer
Galaga '88 (Japanese release of Galaga '90)
Fantasy Zone
Dragon Spirit
Appare! Gateball
Nectaris (Japanese release of Military Madness)
Dungeon Explorer
Neutopia
PC Genjin (Japanese release of Bonk's Adventure)
Ys I & II (PC Engine CD, Japanese release of Ys Book I & II)
Super Darius (PC Engine CD)
The Genji and the Heike Clans
Super Star Soldier
Daimakaimura (Super Grafx)
The Legend of Valkyrie
Aldynes (Super Grafx)
Seirei Senshi Spriggan (PC Engine CD)
Neutopia II
Gradius
Salamander
Super Momotaro Dentetsu II
Ninja Ryukenden
Star Parodier (Super CD)
Spriggan Mark 2 (Super CD)
Snatcher (Super CD)
Gradius II - Gofer no Yabo (Super CD)
Cho Aniki (Super CD)
Akumajo Dracula X Chi no Rondo (Super CD)
Bomberman '94
Bomberman Panic Bomber (Super CD)
Ginga Fukei Densetsu Sapphire (Arcade CD)



On the other hand, the menu system of the PC Engine side uses PCE style icons, cover art, and end labels

Interestingly the PC Engine game Salamander is not included on the Japanese PC Engine Mini. Alternatively two games are included exclusively on the Japanese release of the console - Tengai Makyo II: Manji Maru and Tokimeki Memorial. Additionally the version of Splatterhouse on the PC Engine Mini is the uncensored PC Engine release rather than the slightly tamed TurboGrafx-16 release. Even on the USA and European versions of the console, PC Engine games that were originally in Japanese are still in Japanese. That means titles like Snatcher and Super Momotaro Dentetsu II will have a large language barrier for most English-speaking players. Some have expressed frustration with this but I think it adds to the charm and experience of the platform. That's just how it was when you were importing PC Engine games back in the day and no one ever seemed to mind that Dracula X wasn't in English.

As massively popular as Tokimeki Memorial and Tengai Makyo (also known as Far East of Eden) were in Japan, I think the USA / European release gets a great consolation prize with Salamander, as the PC Engine release was an outstanding conversion of the arcade original. Sure there are some missing titles, most notably The Legendary Axe and Devil's Crush, but I still consider the included game selection to be very solid and include a number of high profile games. Just the same, it would have been really nice to have Dungeon Explorer II included to complement the first game.

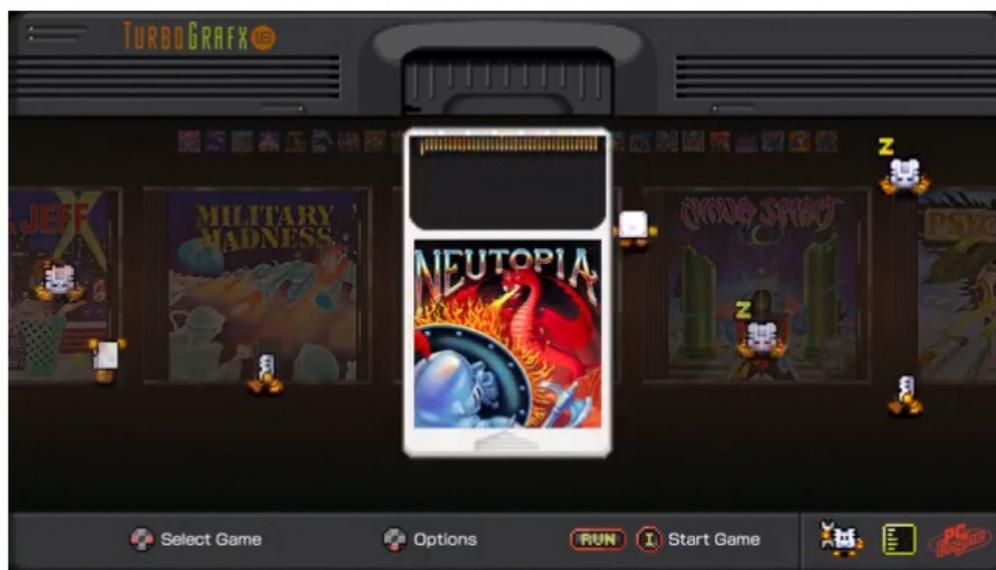


While smaller than the original hardware, the TG-16 Mini is still rather large and substantial

The hardware is rather interesting as the TurboGrafx-16 Mini is pretty big as these mini consoles go. In all honesty it's a little bigger than half the size of the original hardware. Part of this has to do with the PC Engine style minis and the TG-16 Mini using the same exact hardware inside, but the PC Engine was a fairly small console to begin with. Interestingly this mirrors design concessions of the original consoles as well, with the TurboGrafx-16 requiring a larger redesign to comply with FCC regulations. Essentially an original TG-16 is a PC Engine stretched out, and the TG-16 Mini is essentially a PC Engine Mini with extra plastic. Truth be told I really like that it's a larger mini console as it looks great on display and almost feels like you're using the original hardware - right down to the oversized rear expansion cover.

The single included controller feels great and is a wonderful reproduction of a TurboPad, which was the stock controller included with the TurboGrafx-16. It uses a USB plug for connectivity, following the standard set with the NES Mini and most mini consoles that followed. The turbo switches function just as they did on the original controller and have a nice tactile feel and satisfying click as they are moved through their three positions. In all, the controller feels perfect, from the plastics to the weight. A welcome change is in the length of the controller cord, to the point where it's almost too long, a polar opposite to the infamously short controller cords of the original hardware. Additionally there are now two controller ports built into the console as standard. Original hardware featured a unique system of only having a single controller port that could be expanded to accept up to five controllers via a TurboTap accessory. With a second controller plugged into the Mini, all games recognize its function without issue just as if it were plugged into the second port on a TurboTap. I have read some reports about third-party USB controllers not working with the system, possibly due to the turbo switch protocol. In my case I purchased an official PC Engine Mini extra controller, manufactured by Hori (who also is manufacturing the console), and have had no problems at all. A USB based TurboTap is also offered to allow up to five players on supported games but it along with an additional four controllers adds a lot of expense to the Mini, especially when I have a full setup for my original PC Engine.

Just briefly I want to address the seemingly across the board complaint about the original hardware only having one controller port. Yeah, that sucked having to buy not one but two accessories (a TurboTap and additional TurboPad) to allow a second player. However having previously worked in retail electronics for over fifteen years, I can say that the percentage of people who buy a second controller is tiny in the grand scheme of how many consoles are sold. In fact pushing for consumers to purchase a second controller (which always have a far higher margin of profit than the console itself) is a key part of remaining profitable when selling video games - and also one of the most difficult sales to make.

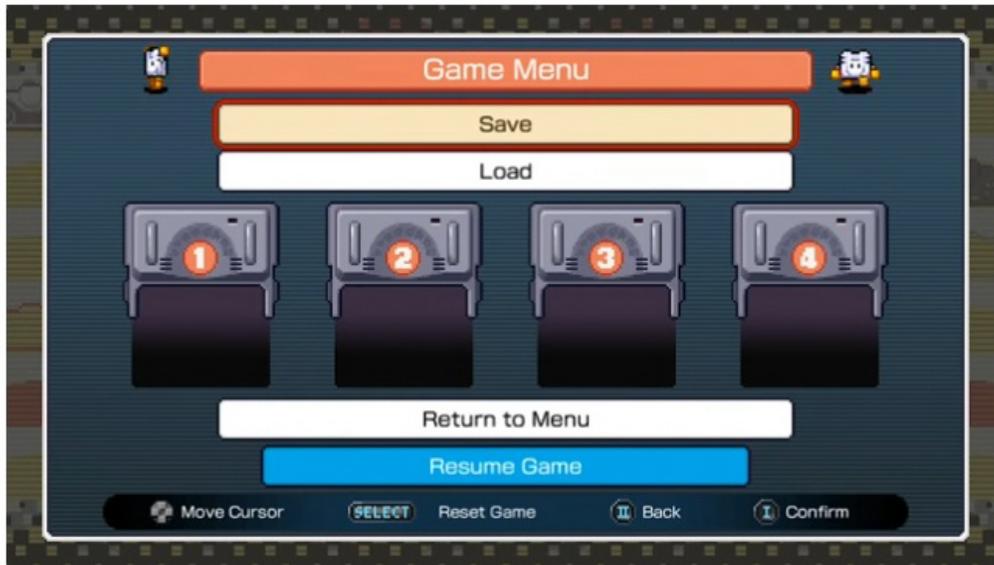


After being selected, the HuCARD for Neutopia appears and will slide up into the virtual TG-16 overhead before loading

The Mini's user interface is absolutely beautiful, presenting each game's original case cover in a horizontally scrolling menu. Depending on the hardware side selected (TurboGrafx-16 or PC Engine), the menu has a different color scheme. Upon selecting a TurboChip / HuCARD game the physical media will be shown as the menu falls away, then the virtual game card will slide up into a cartridge slot at the top of the screen with a satisfying click. For the included SuperGrafx games, the artwork on the HuCARD is upside down for authenticity, as the SuperGrafx actually loaded games from the top of the system rather than the bottom. When a CD game is selected, a virtual PC Engine or TurboGrafx-16 CD drive appears on screen, complete with the sound of the disc spinning up as it loads. CD System Card artwork and BIOS screens match both the region of the game as well as the required compatibility type, and appear briefly after a CD game is selected. Load times straddle the idea of "there should be a bit of a delay for authenticity" and "modern hardware can load these instantly" giving an authentic experience without ever feeling like you're waiting for a disc to load.

Each game features four save slots and can be accessed at any time by pressing Run and Select together. These are displayed as Tennenkoe 2 units, a very popular PC Engine save accessory that added battery memory backup for the games that supported it. This idea was later expanded upon with the TurboBooster Plus for the TurboGrafx-16.

A nice touch is that the little light on the Tennokoe 2 is shown illuminated on the icon for slots that have saves in them, although if I remember correctly an illuminated light on a Tennokoe 2 meant the batteries needed to be replaced. Additionally games that could originally make use of internal memory saves (Neutopia or any of the CD games for instance) can still make use of that function. This is also one little catch I've found with the system, as there is no way to get into a memory management screen to delete save data created in this manner. On original hardware Select could be pressed at the CD BIOS screen to gain access to a memory manager (or by using a CD System Card with a TurboBooster Plus) but such an option is not present on the Mini. Multiple system cards are actually included however, as holding down Select when loading a CD game will load an earlier version of the CD System Card (complete with accurate BIOS screen), which will return various error messages or special features as with the real hardware. That's a really nice touch and typical of M2, who handled the emulation programming.



Saving / loading game states is fast and hassle-free, with four slots per game

Holding down Select also unlocks some hidden games, as does pressing Select in sequence prior to loading Salamander. Three of the games are special "near arcade" conversions of shooters, while two of them were unlockable mini games in the original release of Tokimeki Memorial, and the last is a special competition version of Solder Blade.

Hidden / Alternate Games:

- Fantasy Zone (near arcade) - hold Select when loading Fantasy Zone.
- Gradius (near arcade) - hold Select when loading Gradius.
- Salamander (near arcade) - hold Select when loading Salamander.
- Force Gear - press Select twice before loading Salamander.
- TwinBee Returns - press Select three times before loading Salamander.
- Solder Blade Special Caravan Stage - hold Select when loading Solider Blade.

Of the three "near arcade" games, Gradius and Salamander are definite upgrades over the PC Engine releases, although both of the originals are still very good. Gradius even does the full bubble memory warm up sequence. Force Gear and TwinBee Returns are both nice additions and I was pleased to see them make it onto the TG-16 Mini as it was assumed they were directly tied to Tokimeki Memorial. Soldier Blade Special Caravan Stage is the competition HuCARD used in that year's Caravan tournament - a nice touch but I would have liked the same done with Blazing Lasers, as the Japanese release (Gunhed) had a very rare Caravan version as well.



Display settings are varied but unfortunately cannot be toggled while in-game

As far as configurable options go the TG-16 Mini features most of what is expected of a throwback console these days. One of five different aspect ratios can be selected: 4:3 windowed, 4:3 full screen, 1:1 pixel perfect, full widescreen, and TurboExpress simulation. TurboExpress is the odd one as it recreates the passive matrix LCD screen of the handheld TG-16 system. It's a nice novelty and honestly looks very accurate but I can't see anyone using it for more than a few minutes. I generally use 4:3 full screen as it's the closest approximation to the size of a standard CRT, although there is slight graphic shimmering due to the aspect ratio difference. Full widescreen is the only mode that is completely worthless, as it always looks terrible and I assume it's always included to satisfy that one person who will complain that it isn't in full screen. It should be said that neither the included documentation nor display menus explain what the different video modes are or why you may want to select them. There are also a few selectable backgrounds that will fill in the blank space around the selected video dimensions but I tend to select solid black for minimal distraction.

Emulation performance is very nice and I had no trouble dropping right into the library and enjoying the games immediately. I have seen some argue that there is extra lag induced with the Mini and it makes some games

unplayable but I noticed no such issues myself. Sure there is a tiny bit of input lag, but that's just modern HDMI televisions running CRT era games in any format. Since acquiring the Mini I've completed Cadash, Neutopia, Salamander, and 100% completion of Dracula X. No difficulties encountered in any of these games, or any others I've played on the Mini, stemmed from control lag or any other software or hardware issues. In my opinion these games all play as they should, although admittedly I still prefer them on a CRT.



Upon loading a CD game, the appropriate system card (in this case for Ys Book I & II) is automatically loaded and a virtual CD spins up

My only real complaint with the hardware is that it's a bit on the light side and prone to sliding around. Attaching some rubber feet to the bottom remedies the problem but it's something that shouldn't have to be added. CD audio levels also seem a bit unbalanced, with the CD audio playing noticeably quieter than any sound effects (or the system menu music and sounds for that matter). I know this was the case with some of the games originally but it would have been nice to have the option to adjust the mix of the CD audio levels.

I have also seen reports that raise some concern about the electronic durability of the system itself. Apparently the Mini is very picky about the power adapter used with it. While a USB power cord is included, the power adapter is not, a common occurrence with nearly every retro mini system. USB power adapters are a common item in modern society but it seems that the voltage regulator in the Mini is very sensitive to anything over 5v, even the smallest amount in some instances. Hori does offer a branded power adapter but it doesn't look like many of them were manufactured or ordered. For my system I bought a dedicated USB adapter from a local electronics store, and it seems to be working fine, but it's unsettling that one day soon the console simply may not power on. There are also warnings in the documentation about not plugging in or removing controllers while the system is powered on. Some reports of power issues causing the controller ports to become wonky suggest there may be some serious power sensitivity and narrow voltage tolerances in the design of the hardware. No official response has been given on these issues and while many systems are operating trouble-free, it seems a little more widespread than to be just a few bad boards from the production yield. Time will tell if this problem becomes more severe but at the moment it shouldn't deter someone from purchasing the system in my opinion.

This is the only retro mini system that I own, and the most recent I have purchased since the terrible Colecovision Flashback. While I am familiar with many of the others that were released between those two mini consoles, the TurboGrafx-16 Mini has been the only one to really resonate with me. I play a lot of TurboGrafx-16 and PC Engine games, mainly via a Turbo EverDrive on an AV modded PC Engine connected to a CRT. Yet, having a system to play these games on a modern television, with a nice curated games list, and brand new controllers was something I couldn't wait for. It also allowed me to spend some money with an actual IP holder for the games, as other than a very few late Turbo Zone Direct purchases (Exile Wicked Phenomenon and Cosmic Fantasy 2) all my TurboGrafx-16 stuff was purchased second hand.



The "near arcade" version of Salamander is an outstanding bonus for the TG-16 / Core Grafx version of the Mini

Sure the game list on the TurboGrafx-16 Mini is a little odd, with lots of games a regular retro gamer in North America may not be able to enjoy due to the language barrier, but that was part and parcel for being a hardcore TurboGrafx-16 fan during the heyday. I think the TurboGrafx-16 Mini provides the most authentic experience possible for the hardware and era of gaming it is attempting to replicate. I'm still a little bummed that my personal favorite TurboGrafx-16 game, Final Lap Twin, wasn't included but I'll live. I'm also surprised that Final Solider wasn't included on the Japanese side as the other games in the series (Blazing Lazers / Gunhed, Super Star Soldier, Soldier Blade) are all on board. There are still tons of great games included, my favorites being Neutopia, Ys, Cadash, Salamander, Dungeon Explorer, and Dracula X. If there is one failing of the TurboGrafx-16 Mini it's that it is currently an Amazon.com exclusive in all regions. While that's not a big deal, it means that it's a mini console that no one will stumble upon while out shopping or browsing another retailer online. It's niche enough outside of Japan but limiting it

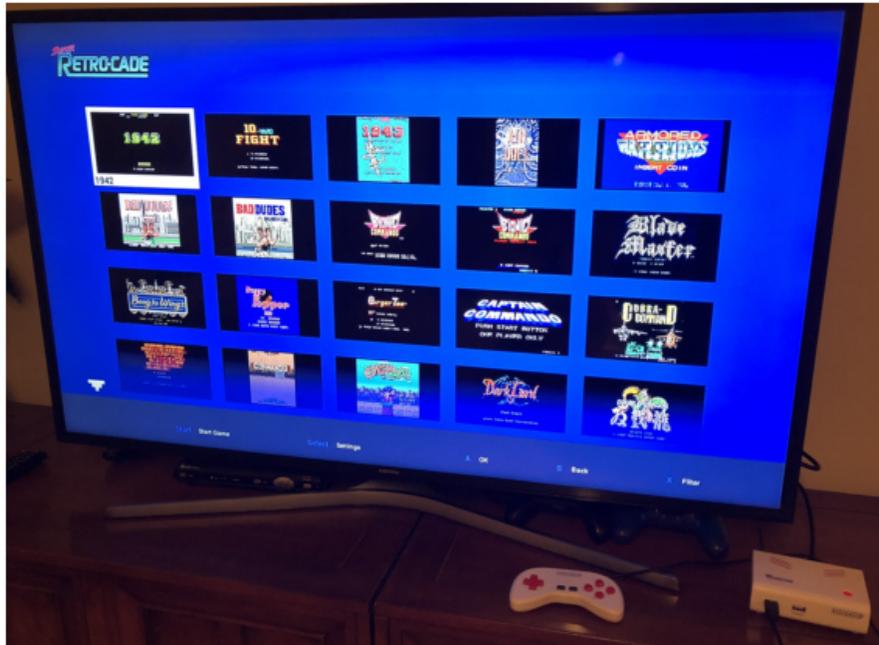
to one supplier channel will make it only more so. With all the above said, the TurboGrafx-16 Mini has my absolute highest recommendation. Take a step out of your comfort zone and try something different - there's good reason why the PC Engine was so popular in Japan.



Retro-Bit Super Retro-Cade Quick Look

by [Todd Friedman](#)

Super Retro-Cade by Retro-Bit advertises that it is "Packed with over 90 popular retro games from Capcom, Data East, Technos, and Irem. The stylish console re-introduces such gems as Mega Man 2, BurgerTime, Joe and Mac, Bad Dudes, Double Dragon, Strider, Super Dodge Ball, the Final Fight series and many more."



The two included gamepads have an angular, wing-like grip design and a SNES controller button layout. They're white controllers with red A/B/X/Y buttons and a direction pad on the face, along with black Start and Select buttons, and red L and R shoulder buttons on the top. The 10-foot cords attached are a huge perk for a system like this as most wired retro systems have a two to five foot cord. The one downfall, in my opinion is using the D-pad to move around the action. Most of the games in the arcade were designed with a joystick type controller to move your character. I found some arcade games rather difficult to move as well as getting a little cramp in my thumb when playing. The box mentions support for third-party controllers, so you could find a USB controller that has a joystick to make it easier if you like.

The Super Retro-Cade has both standard composite and HDMI. The HDMI cable included with the system makes the graphics a bit cleaner but not a high definition as one may expect. The interface is best described as functional. It shows games in rows of five, enabling you to scroll to whichever title you desire. You can sort titles by alphabetical order, by genre, or by which system they're on. If you want to play fighting games, select fighting. If you want to see Genesis games, select Genesis. Each title has a brief description, and you're able to load and save them as well. Again, the interface isn't flashy, but it gets the job done. One negative feature is the lack of a reset button. If you want to go back and play a different game or stop the game, you need to power of the unit and power it back on. A simple soft reset would have been an easy option to have built in.



If you're looking for robust graphical options, you're going to be disappointed. You can't adjust filters or change the resolution like you can with other emulator consoles. The only thing you can do is change the image from Full Screen to Normal Size. In terms of the SD Card, I found that my 32GB card worked just fine. When you plug it into the device and it's already on, it will prompt you to either search the SD Card or the Local Memory.

The Super Retro-Cade is a worthy home game system for the price and with 90 titles to choose from, there is plenty of gaming fun to have on this little system. It's nice to go back and play games of my childhood and share them with my children who can experience the fun that was gaming in the 80's and 90's.

Super Retro-Cade is available direct from Retro-Bit at <http://retro-bit.com/super-retrocade>.



Video Game Haiku

by [Sean "Nz17" Robinson](#)

Shadow Dancer

Shinobi falls dead
Where's my coins for next credit?
Shoot! I dropped them all!

The Challenger

A call for fighters
No hands are raised to answer
The lone arm rises

Swampy's Revenge

A frog dodges cars
Crosses the logs and turtles
But meets the croc's jaws

Tetris

Falling blocks align
But is it Tetris without
Korobeiniki?

Phantasy Turns into Reality

In Phantasy Star
Cloning was reality
Now cloning is real

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



Weekly Retrogaming Trivia Recap

Compiled by [David Lundin, Jr.](#)

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

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

05/01/2020 - WEEK 162

Question: Although sometimes titled Galaga 3, what is the original name of the third game in the Galaxian series?

05/08/2020 - WEEK 163

Question: In Illusion of Gaia, young Will can transform into what two beings in Dark Space?

05/15/2020 - WEEK 164

Question: "Avoid missing ball for high score" is the objective of what early arcade game?

05/29/2020 - WEEK 165

Question: Early PC Engine title The Kung Fu was released on the TurboGrafx-16 under what name?

06/05/2020 - WEEK 166

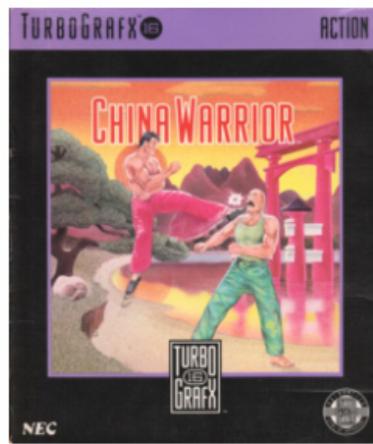
Question: In the influential PC classic Descent, the player is hired as a mercenary of the PTMC. What does PTMC stand for?

06/12/2020 - WEEK 167

Question: Richard Miller and Rachel MacPherson are characters in what arcade game?

06/19/2020 - WEEK 168

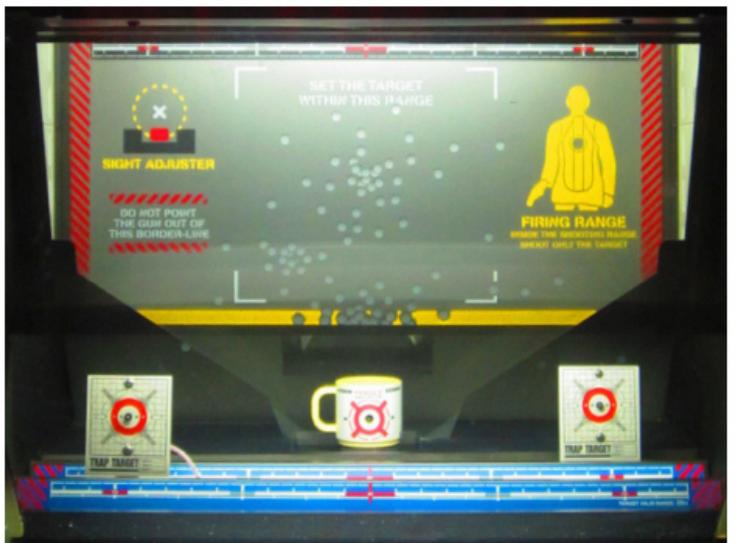
Question: What is the final target in Namco's shooting gallery game Quick & Crash?



The Kung Fu (left) and China Warrior (right), the same game in different regions - which looks more enticing to you?

Answers:

- Week 162 Answer: Gaplus (1984).
- Week 163 Answer: Freedan, the dark knight and Shadow, the ultimate warrior.
- Week 164 Answer: Pong (1972).
- Week 165 Answer: China Warrior.
- Week 166 Answer: Post Terran Mining Corporation.
- Week 167 Answer: Time Crisis.
- Week 168 Answer: A cup, which "shatters" upon being hit.



Quick & Crash was a modern take on the classic mechanical shooting gallery game, and one of this editor's all time favorite arcade games

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!

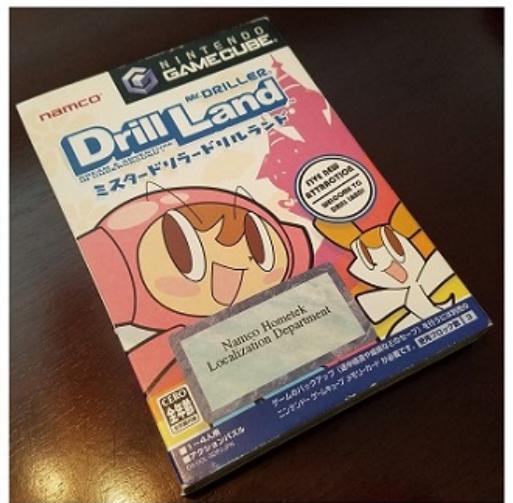


See You Next Game

by [David Lundin, Jr.](#)

It's no secret that I enjoy the Mr. Driller games, especially the notion that they take place in an expanded universe where Taizo Hori (of Dig Dug) and Masuyo Tobi (of Baraduke) had a family together before divorcing and going their separate ways. Heck, my wife and I have cosplayed as Namco X Capcom derived versions of Taizo and Masuyo since 2014. While a lot of the games in the series have been localized and released in English, the two most impressive games in the series (Mr. Driller G and Mr. Driller Drill Land) have sadly remained Japanese-only. That all changed on June 25th of this year when Mr. Driller Drill Land was finally released in English for Nintendo Switch as a digital release.

Originally released on the GameCube in Japan, Drill Land is often regarded as the greatest game in the series as it is packed with content. It's essentially five different takes on the Mr. Driller formula along with a ton of unlockable content, game modifiers, and a comedic story featuring the Mr. Driller cast - which was very large by the time of the original release. Drill Land looked amazing to begin with but has been given an HD polishing and a beginner-friendly extra mode for its modern outing. Additionally the game has been wonderfully translated into English, including all the story sequences. That might not sound like much of an undertaking for a puzzle game but the game is filled with text - from unlockable trading cards that detail the series plot, items to buy in shops, an attraction that is basically a puzzle RPG (a spoof of The Tower of Druaga none the less), and story scenes that play out like a feature length animated movie. The game perfectly balances accessible fun and addictive challenge.



Back in 2015 I was attending the FanimeCon anime convention in San Jose, California as I usually do and came across a copy of Drill Land at the swap meet. Swap meet at the convention is exactly what it sounds like, two nights where regular convention attendees can sell items in a rummage sale format. Finding import retrogames at swap meet isn't that uncommon - less common that it was years ago but still not unheard of. However what struck me about this particular copy was a small printed label on the outer slipcover that read "Namco Hometek Localization Department." Looking at the game it seemed like a regular Japanese retail release otherwise and I bought it for \$10 from the attendee selling it. Once trying the game out it was sure enough the regular Japanese retail release. I can only assume it was a copy used during a possible effort to localize the game for English release on the GameCube, which unfortunately never happened. If anyone reading this happened to work for Namco Hometek (now Namco Bandai Games America) in Santa Clara during this era, and can shed more light on any intentions to localize the GameCube version, please get in touch with me!

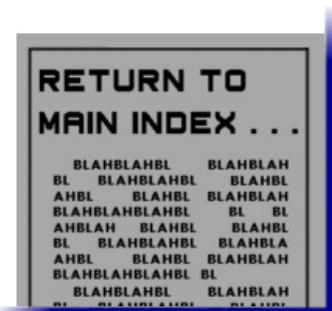
The PlayStation version of Mr. Driller G (which also really needs an English release) is still my favorite game in the series due to how it's structured like a kid's anime but Drill Land is absolutely the most content-rich game of the entire series. It's a wonderful place to start if you're new to the series and even more superb if you're familiar with the characters and concept. I wanted to also make special mention of this game as it is extremely positive in tone, something I think we need more of right now.

Thank you once again for reading The Retrogaming Times. We'll be back on September 1st with our next issue. Be sure to follow [The Retrogaming Times on Facebook](#) and join our community for the latest updates and information! Additionally [The Retrogaming Times Info Club on Twitter](#) features up-to-the-moment news and notifications for all things The Retrogaming Times! I sincerely hope you enjoyed this issue and that you will return to read the next issue and possibly submit an article yourself. **Remember, this newsletter can only exist with your help.** Simply send your articles directly to me at trt@classicplastic.net or check out the submission guidelines on the main page. Submit an article today and join a great retrogaming tradition!

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